[Sleep]Walking After You

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Summary

Derek is a sleepwalker who keeps wandering into his downstairs neighbour's bedroom.

Stiles is pretty sure the hot guy from the park is going to kill him in his sleep. He knows he shouldn’t have been so obvious about objectifying the guy’s really fine ass.

Too bad it turns out Derek is easier to get along with when he's sleeping.

Notes

I will never apologize for my brain. YOU’RE ALL WELCOME.

See the end of the work for more notes
Stiles was more of a sprinter than a jogger. There was a distinction, just ask the Wikipedia entry he read on the subject. His problem was that he had a lot of energy to burn, but he didn’t like to take a lot of time doing it. He had better things to do, like die in a hail of bullets and fire while trying to rescue Scott from those douches from Arkansas who kept changing the name of their guild, confusing Scott into challenging them about twice a month.

So no, Stiles didn’t have much time for jogging. He actually had a full time job that had nothing to do with logging into an online MMORPG with buddies from high school. He had stupid adult responsibilities, and if it wasn’t for the fact that lopping his way through Central Park allowed him to keep his exercise pact with his dad, Stiles would have given it up the first time he rounded a corner and almost got clipped by a bike messenger, or the first time he got tripped up in a dog walker’s bajillion leashes, or the first time his sneakers skidded on loose gravel and he took a header down an embankment of geese.

Who was he kidding? He would have given it up the first time (full stop), but so long as Stiles ran twenty miles a week, his dad ran twenty miles a week, and when his dad kept healthy it helped loosen a bit of the worry that clawed at Stiles’ chest at inconvenient times, like in the middle of the night when he awoke from a dream of his father twirling his mother around the kitchen, the skirt of her nightgown swirling around her legs. He’d stare at the pattern lights of his ceiling, breath trapped in his throat at the sound of laughter, the ghostly rustle of material, and the scent of her perfume. Panic welled like a vise around his heart, clawed fingers through his chest, and tore into the organ as he thought about loss, loneliness and death, his mother dragging his father into the ground with her, and his father allowing it, a passive acknowledgement of the worth of his life without her. Those nights were almost worse now than they were when he was a child and the sensation had been new. At least back then he would wake to the sound of his dad’s snoring, or with the knowledge that he could browbeat him into eating healthy the next day until Stiles was satisfied that he was keeping death at bay the best he could.

Jogging and guilt were his greatest tools from 3,000 miles away.

Since Stiles didn’t really consider himself a runner, he never really bothered investing in aerodynamic running suits that looked like a cross between wetsuits and the most unflatteringly boring superhero costumes ever (and he had watched the Adam West version of Batman as a child). He was fine without the reflector jackets, the reflector leggings, and the fannypacks with attached water bottles around the circumference like goddamn jogging ballast, as if runner’s high
was literal and pandemic. No, Stiles considered himself a sane jogger in his hoodie and track pants (or t-shirt and shorts in the summer) with multiple pockets for a few dollar bills in case he needed to buy a bottle of water or a danish along his path (strategized for proximity to pastries, ice cream, and water) (in that order of priority).

Stiles was sitting on a bench in the park, winded and regretting wearing a hoodie despite the cooler temperatures of the autumn air when he first stepped out of his apartment that morning. Like every morning, he berated himself for stepping into the park and immediately wasting all his energy through the gate like he was in a race for his life.

No sprinting. Jogging. He was a jogger now.

He was still panting, breath harsh and with a slight metallic rawness as he tried to force air into his poor abused lungs, when Godly Jogger came into sight. Stiles had seen Godly Jogger a few times at a distance, and admired his stride, the smoothness of shifting muscles and strength at a speed Stiles himself could only maintain for about the first mile before collapsing into a bag of bones and sweat oozing out of a red hoodie sack. Godly Jogger was like... words could not describe his epic hotness. Stiles knew, because unfortunately Stiles had a bad habit of veering off his path so he could follow Godly Jogger over and under Central Park landmarks until it either became weird for one bro to be chasing another bro, or Stiles had to stop unless he really did die. Godly Jogger’s ass didn’t need a marble statue to commemorate it because his ass had already been chiselled in marble in the Parthenon or whatever.

Or maybe that was just Godly Jogger’s dedication to the golden ratio, because daaaaamn dat ass.

Stiles secretly thought Godly Jogger was Superman.

Buns of steel.

OF STEEL.

Stiles had never really gotten a good look at Godly Jogger’s face, but he had caught glimpses of strong eyebrows, and he was sure there was some kind of Sandy Cohen, Bert from Sesame Street level of eyebrow going on there. Fixable, of course, but Godly Jogger couldn’t possibly be as attractive as his ass denoted. Stiles was expecting some kind of butterface deformity to kill the perpetual boner Stiles had for Godly Jogger’s ass.
Hey, he could be as shallow as he wanted in his fantasies, ok? He should be able to objectify the hot runner in the park with minimum guilt – it wasn’t like he was asking the guy to go get coffee with him, in which case Stiles had a whole lot more criteria than the man being a prettier runner than Ridiculously Photogenic Guy.

... and he was being defensive in his own head. Stiles was the worst perv ever. It was almost as though he’d turned and watched Godly Jogger enough times that he wasn’t allowed to be objective, because the first five times were free but the sixth came with a heavy dosage of I-want-to-know-everything-about-you-what-movies-do-you-like-and-will-you-give-me-the-third-Reese’s-Pieces-in-the-3pack? crushing.

That morning he was sitting on a bench right in front of the gate he used to enter and exit the park, the quickest way to get back to his apartment, and Godly Jogger approached, all abs and thigh muscles and everything. Stiles looked away quickly, because he didn’t really want to see Godly Jogger’s face, because that would make him real, and it was bad enough having his heart speed up after sitting for three minutes trying to breathe, he didn’t need to actually confront the fact he liiiked Godly Jogger. Stiles spent his teenage years crushing someone stratospherically out of his league, he didn’t need to do the same in his early twenties.

As though the universe spent it’s time directly conspiring against him, Godly Jogger slowed the nearer he got to the entrance until he stopped at the bench next to Stiles, foot braced against the seat and calf muscles flexing in the periphery of Stiles’ gaze. He raised the hem of his black t-shirt, wiping his face with the already damp material, abs on display. Stiles had never seen anything as gorgeous, so mouth-watering, sink his teeth into and roll around in amazing as Godly Jogger’s abs, and last week he’d gotten up early enough to see the pastries from the bakery across the street come out of the oven, and the week before that he assisted with a Calvin Klein underwear ad shoot.

With Jamie Dornan.

Jamie Fucking Dornan, okay? He was comparing Godly Jogger to Jamie Dornan and Godly Jogger was coming out ahead.

Godly Jogger started to lower his shirt and Stiles’ eyes darted away. It was one thing to ogle, and yet another thing entirely to do something as intimate as looking at someone’s face.

Don’t look, he coached himself, but if Stiles was really bad at one thing it was convincing himself not to do something. He couldn’t stop himself from sprinting and he couldn’t stop himself from turning his head to stare at the Adonis next to him.
Worst coach ever.

He tried to do it all casual-like too, raising his bottle of water to his lips and turning his head at the same time.

And ohmygodwhat?

He’d been right, Godly Jogger’s face was truly unfortunate. Strong jaw, dark stubble that did nothing to detract from lush but downturned lips, cheekbones and a masculinely attractive nose, and dark, compelling eyes.

Stiles choked on his water, spraying it all down his front. It was mortifying considering how goddamn gorgeous his benchmate was, because Godly Jogger’s face was unfortunate only to Stiles and his hope that it would kill his attraction. He should have known better, really, but a guy could hope for a Voldemort nose or a thumb chin to quell budding love for a stranger’s form, couldn’t he?

“I’ve been, uh, working on my stamina... longevity, you know, less wham bam and more slow and steady wins the race.”

It took Stiles about two seconds to hear the innuendo, and his mortification was complete.

Godly Jogger turned to glare at him, and holy shit.

Dark compelling eyes.

Of Satan.

And nope, Stiles noted as Demonic Overlord Jogger left the park with a withering gaze, that did absolutely nothing to discourage Stiles. He was absolutely and terrifyingly turned on, wheezing on a bench and considering himself lucky he hadn’t gotten mugged by Buns of Steel.

Stiles to Scott: Dude I now know how you felt that time you had an asthma attack when Allison was giving you a striptease and her dad came in with his gun.
Scott to Stiles: ??? u promised never 2 bring that up after ur best man speech.
Technically, the park was the first time Stiles saw Derek Hale, but there was a huge difference between admiring someone’s *everything* while out jogging in Central Park and waking up to them looming over you in your sleep. For one thing, New York City was sketchy as hell. For another, Derek Hale had this very attractive eau du serial killer about him that didn’t translate well into any kind of healthy wet dream hallucination, let alone a comforting physical presence as he stood in shadows at the foot of Stiles’ bed.

Leaving Beacon Hills had netted him a lot of advice, mostly from people who watched too much *Law and Order*.

Like his dad:

“Don’t wander into any alleys at night, son. Don’t agree to enter any buildings to see wares someone is selling from their jacket, and if a guy pulls up next to you and offers to pay you for a date, say thanks but no thanks and do not approach the vehicle.”

“I dunno dad, I can’t think of an easier way to make money than being on my knees for ten minutes. I can’t help the rapture my nubile young ass causes.”

Like Scott:

“I’m just saying, always make sure to look up when you’re walking. You never know when someone is going to drop a piano out a window.”

“Do you hear what you’re saying right now?”

“Have you seen the Spiderman movies? Don’t you ever wonder what happens to the poor bystanders who get in the way of falling debris?”

“You realize Spiderman isn’t real, right?”

“Who are you?”
Or Allison:

“When Scott and I visit, we’re going to see at least two musicals. I vote *The Lion King* and *Wicked*. I recommend renting us a town car so we can give Scott the true New York experience.” The ‘if you know what’s good for you’ implied.

“Stop taking advice from Lydia! I’m not Chuck Bass or Mr. Big, and even if I was, Scott thinks the true New York experience is getting grabbed by a giant gorilla and carried to the top of the Empire State building.”

Even Melissa had sage advice:

“Take this bat.”

Accepting the job had been like all his dreams coming true. Accepting their advice had him a little frightened for his life in ways he hadn’t been before.

So when Stiles first moved into his apartment, his self-survival instincts kicked in and he noted that the latch on the window leading out to the fire escape in his bedroom was broken. He mentioned it to his landlord, made an official request for a replacement, and spent approximately fifteen minutes in the alley below making sure that it was an easy route of exit in case of fire, but not an easy mode of entrance to burglars and creepers. His dad was sheriff of a small town, and sure most New Yorkers would scoff and point out that a year worth of crime in Beacon Hills equated to about a New York Minute, but Stiles’ greatest asset was the he wasn’t a complete idiot.

Not completely.

So he moved a bookcase in front of the window, one that would deter entry but could be shuffled around easily enough in case of fire, and forgot about the latch.

He moved to New York City in March.

It literally took one night of tossing and turning in the stifling humidity the first hot day of spring for Stiles to say fuck it to every single bit of self-preservation he had, move the bookcase, and open
the goddamn window so he didn’t drown in his own sweat. That first night he was jarred awake a few times by sounds outside his window, but it didn’t take long for him to start sleeping through his downstairs neighbour sneaking a cigarette after sex or the undampened noise of the dumpsters being emptied and the bakery across the alley opening before normal humans even considered waking.

By half-way through summer he was using the fire escape as his own personal balcony, sitting out on it when he couldn’t sleep and simply listening to the sounds of the city, alive and vibrant around him. New York was like him, constantly moving, always with something to say and a ceaseless energy that made Stiles feel like he might actually belong somewhere.

Initially, he wondered how long he would last in the big city, but now he couldn’t imagine leaving.

x.x.x.x.

Stiles liked to diversify his interests. He spent the month of October regretting that soon the snow would fall and he wouldn’t be able to stalk Godly Jogger around the park, trying to get a glimpse of the man’s face to see if it was as demonic as he remembered it being. It always was. Now that Godly Jogger was out in pants and a thermal sweater, his face was the only visible piece of skin Stiles regularly beheld. Stiles seriously hated autumn for that one reason, since instead of dreams of resplendent abs, he was dreaming of Godly Jogger’s stupid mug. The worst one to date had been a dream in which Stiles had Godly Jogger’s stubby cheeks between his hands as he looked into his eyes.

Godly Jogger’s eyes were dazzlers – as in the weapons used by the US military to temporarily blind and disorient – only the damage caused by Godly Jogger’s eyes was permanent.

It was a nightmare.

Buying a gym membership was almost a comfort, mostly because he’d somehow joined the only gym in Manhattan that catered to pudgy retirees and truly frightening botoxed cougars that gave Godly Jogger a run for his money in instilling fear in Stiles’ life. In a room full of pudgy retirees, he was cougar bait. He almost missed Godly Jogger, since he was sure that in a room full of pudgy retirees, Godly Jogger and him, the cougars would all navigate towards Godly Jogger.

He told himself it was fine to miss Godly Jogger’s face. It was time to move on. Having such a deep-rooted fear for someone whose name he didn’t even know was a little pathetic, and Godly Jogger downright terrified Stiles.
Telling himself to move on never worked the way he wanted it to.

So it was a pleasant surprise when Mid-November he noticed Business Suit enter his apartment complex from a distance and his curiosity was piqued. It was possible that one of the day-traders or Broadway types that made up his building needed a competent lawyer, or was being served papers, or something, but the second time he saw Business Suit at a distance – in the elevator at 7:30 in the morning as Stiles locked his door behind him – the possibilities dwindled to him either living in the building or dating someone who did.

The best thing about his unexpected interest in Business Suit?

He wasn’t Godly Jogger.

Only, about thirty percent of Stiles’ life was based in the ironies of a CW drama.

So the second time Stiles saw Derek Hale close up was in the elevator. Stiles’ tie was half-way off his head and hopelessly caught in his over-the-ear headphones, non-slip cord tangled in blue silk that would cost his father two days of wages, would cost his boss like fifteen seconds pay, and cost Stiles somewhere between the two. This happened to Stiles about once a week, so it was no big deal. Usually he flailed a bit, cursed his impatience, and spent the elevator ride with the knot of his tie against his forehead like Quailman (but without the belt). He even started to get a little routine down where if the proper music came on, he would practice his hairography (because head-banging with a buzz-cut was boring).

This time, the arm of a very nicely tailored business suit jammed the elevator doors open just as the lobby disappeared from view, and Stiles felt his stomach drop with dread, because of course - fuck his life - he’d meet Business Suit with his tie trapped around his ears. Business Suit, from what Stiles could tell, could almost rival Godly Jogger in the ‘gorgeous dark hair’ and ‘really hot form’ categories of the kind of man Stiles was attracted to. Business Suit did not have eyes that would drag the Winchesters halfway across the country to slay him with extreme prejudice in order to save the world.

The arm through the elevator door caused the two sides to part automatically, but Business Suit’s fingers still curled around the one side as though he were opening the door through brute strength instead of the actual pressure sensors and safety engineering that actually went into elevator doors. The doors parted just enough for Stiles to see Business Suit’s face, heavy brow a shadow over scowling features.
Demon Jogger stared at him through the widening gap in the door.

That was the scariest shit Stiles had ever seen (and Stiles had once been in the police cruiser on a ride-along when Brian McAdams ignored the gun safety rules and accidentally shot a hole through his brother’s stomach on Main Street).

It was like Bates in the shower, Jack Nicholson in *The Shining* levels of frightening, and it was happening in his life.

Stiles made a strangled sound as Godly Jogger in a Business Suit stepped into the elevator with him and pressed the button for the floor above his. He only had to stay in the elevator for 4 floors, but they may as well be travelling down into the fiery pits of hell as far as Stiles was concerned, because as soon as the doors closed, the only thing he could think of was how much he wanted Godly Jogger to attack him. With his mouth.

He was so, so bent.

Most awkward elevator ride ever. Most awkward, sexually charged elevator ride ever.

Godly Jogger just kept glowering at him like he expected Stiles to say something stupid.

Not this time Godly Jogger!

Not this time!

Stiles pressed his lips together so he wouldn’t speak, because there were a lot of things he had to say to Godly Jogger, and not a single one of them would allow him to get through this horrendous experience unscathed. Possibly, he would demand that Godly stop glaring at him, but he was even more likely to break the silence by asking Godly Jogger if he wanted to come back to his place for really angry (by default of expression) sex.
Stiles would rather die than do either. Godly Jogger would murder him by way of flinging himself to his knees and working the belt out of Godly Jogger’s ridiculously well-tailored pants.

Miraculously the doors opened on the fourth floor before Stiles could murder himself. Seriously, every time Stiles saw Godly Jogger’s eyes it was like a jolt right to his solar plexus. Godly Jogger might as well follow through with a jab to his instep and a knee to the groin.

“It’s nice to see you in real clothes. I mean, adult clothes.” At this, Godly Jogger’s eyebrows actually quirked in what was quite possibly amusement. Stiles’ heart practically slammed into his rib cage at the prospect. “No, I mean without... yeah, ok bye!” Stiles finished as he darted through the doors and away from his eternal disgrace.

It wasn’t until he got through his front door that he realized his tie was still on his forehead, a Windsor knot of shame.

x.x.x.x.

After that, Stiles thought it would be impossible to avoid Godly Jogger, but despite living in the same building as the man, he didn’t see him again until some point after Christmas.

It wasn’t in the park, because after Christmas came and went the park turned from being a magical wonderland to being a gross snow-bog, whites turning dingy and fairytale magic souring into bitter sparks of New York hatred. Stiles had never quite gotten the hang of trudging through snow. It wasn’t that he had never seen snow, but in Beacon Hills it was enough of an aberration that even the most hardened Hillites appreciated every snowfall, and it rarely stayed on the ground. The first time Stiles experienced road slush he almost packed it in and went home.


The elevator was also blissfully Godly Jogger free, so much so that Stiles figured the man must have moved on from whomever he was dating in the building.

Stiles had to admit that he was a little disappointed. He was almost getting used to Godly Jogger’s face now and could fully appreciate that his mind was actively intrigued, and everyone in his life knew that dangerous things happened when Stiles was intrigued. He wanted to know things about Godly Jogger that went so far beyond trailing thirty paces behind him through the labyrinth of
Central Park trails.

Like... his name. Stiles would love to know Godly Jogger’s name.

Because, as those same people knew, Stiles could work magic with a name and some industrious Googling. If Godly Jogger no longer visited the building, then they only had Central Park and there was no way Stiles could work any of his limited charms in a ratty old sweatshirt, so he’d probably have to give up the dream of ever learning Godly’s name.

It was a night much like any other night when he learned that wasn’t the case. Stiles went through his normal pre-sleep ritual of brush, rinse, masturbate before sleep (teeth, face, dick, not... whatever other options there were that caused Scott to make a pained face) (Stiles thought that combination might be dick, dick, dick, and if Scott thought that then he was the dick).

He’d been living in New York City for almost a year now, and didn’t hear the sounds of the city around him. Back in Beacon Hills, that would translate roughly to sleeping through an 8-wheeler losing control on Main St, attempting to stop in a squeal of breaks, ploughing through the town monument (a really horribly planned statue of a redwood tree and two hunks of ore that at certain angles, and when the light hit it right, went from looking phallic to incredibly obscene) highlighting Beacon Hills’ turn of the century industry, and finally coming to a stop when it crashed through the storefront of Duff’s Home and Stuff.

In other words, there was a lot of ambient noise Stiles had learned to sleep through.

The sound of his bedroom window opening, wood creaking against ancient metal slats was not one of them.

A gust of cool air blew over the skin of Stiles’ bare arm, goosebumps forming more from his sudden awake-alert-terror than from the cold. His hands clenched into his comforter, ready to throw the sleep-warm material off himself at a moment’s notice as he slowly turned his head to look. His heart was beating incredibly fast, and he knew there was no way to explain away the sound, to close his eyes and cover his head in denial, chanting ‘it-was-just-the-wind’ or any number of excuses. The only explanation for the noise was that there was someone opening his bedroom window.

Windows could fall closed, but they couldn’t fall open without interference.
Which was a thought that WAS NOT HELPING.

Stiles considered all his options in that second of absolute stillness as he breathed in, thinking of the amount of steps it would take to get to his bedroom door and then to his front door. He thought about weapons, and mourned the loss of reassurance that came from knowing where his dad kept his spare gun.

He thought about all the advice his dad had given him through the years, including ‘always lock your door,’ ‘wear protection,’ ‘don’t listen to Scott,’ and a myriad of other wisdom Stiles had rolled his eyes at because of course he knew that dad.

One heavy footfall stepped into the room. Then a second.

But nothing else.

His dad would be so disappointed that this was how Stiles died.

Though, there were a lot of scenarios that would probably disappoint his dad more. Stiles would focus on the fact he didn’t choke to death that time he insisted on seeing how many marshmallows he could fit in his mouth at once. Getting murdered in his bed was actually a preferable scenario.

Though... what?

Getting murdered in his bed?

That sucked.

He couldn’t even see a damned thing. His heart was beating so incredibly fast, and part of him thought that maybe if there was light then at least he’d be able to see what was coming.

Light was actually a really good idea.

Stiles gathered himself and sprung forward, turning on his bedside lamp.
And, ok, worst idea ever. He had thought to blind the person breaking into his room, and instead most of the light glared into his eyes, blinding him momentarily and making him just as disoriented as it likely made his unwelcomed visitor. At least the guy didn’t jump him the moment he moved, using Stiles’ temporary sightlessness against him.

Stiles blinked quickly and violently, his hand reaching for a weapon he could use and he came up with *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which actually wasn’t too bad of a weapon, he decided, because once you got hit by *A Song of Ice and Fire* your life was never the same. It missed stranger-danger’s head entirely, which might be why his lacrosse career hardly moved forward, but was less cause for concern now that he was able to blink the white blobs of light-induced halo out of his eyes to see what was standing in front of him.

Which just happened to be a pair of the most ridiculously frightening eyes Stiles had ever seen.

Looking at him.

At him.

Looking.

Like a serial killer.

Stiles screamed, the shriek of terror eponymous with every horror movie victim ever.

Or at least he thought he did. His mouth was open like an Edvard Munch painting, or the kid from Home Alone, and his brain was fizzling hot white with terror, but he was pretty sure no sounds were emerging from his mouth except for a thin stream of noise no louder than Scott’s asthmatic wheeze.

Great. He always thought that his first defense if he ever got attacked would be screaming loud enough to rival Umbrella Corps for waking the dead. Then, while his attacker was clutching his ears like he had just faced down Banshee, Stiles would use the self-defense skills his dad had taught him. If he made it through this alive, he would have to reassess all of that.
“Jesus Fucking Shit,” The words burst out of his mouth as he rolled out of bed, landing with a painful jar to his shoulder and searched under his bed for the baseball bat Mrs. McCall had given him when he announced he was headed for the Big Apple.

As he groped beneath his bed, hand locating a bottle of lube and a sock (this was not that kind of nocturnal visit) (he was 85% sure) Stiles attempted to use his wits: “Is this about what I said in the elevator? Or the way I watch your ass in the park? It’s not worth killing me. I didn’t mean anything by it, I never would have acted on... Oh my god, this is a terrible reason to die.”

If this was what happened when he objectified someone, he was never looking twice at another human being again. His fingers curled around the wood and he scrambled to his feet as quickly as possible, expecting to be attacked from behind at any moment. The debilitating terror flooding his system had cooled down enough that he was able to function, to think in more than just blind reactions.

So instead of slicing forward with his bat, he noticed how strange it was that Creepy Jogger hadn’t moved at all from the time Stiles turned the lamp on right through to his aborted attack.

“Are you... a zombie?” Stiles asked, because yeah, that was his life, and he had made the Umbrella Corps reference in jest. He was going to be one of the first people in Manhattan to have his flesh gnawed on by the undead, because there was no way he was getting away from Godly Jogger and his powerful thigh muscles. And oh god, what if he was the fast kind of zombie? He’d seen Godly Jogger run and the dude was scary enough without being a zombie.

His only consolation? At least Godly Jogger died first. Only Godly Jogger probably died defending an orphanage of small children, and Stiles couldn’t even defend himself against Godly Jogger.

Zombies.

Perfect reasoning.

Only, well Godly Jogger was just looming there. Wouldn’t a zombie have made a haltering movement towards Stiles by now? Stiles ate relatively healthily, and there were just enough curly fries in his system to make him taste of saturated fats, salt and spice. He was downright delicious (he imagined).
“Dude, I’m offended. Are you sleeping through this?” As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he understood what was happening.

Creepy shit, Stiles decided. Creepy, creepy sleepwalking shit.

Less frightening than most of the alternatives, though, he realized, waving his hand in front of Godly Jogger’s eyes. This close, he could see that the other man’s face was lax, eyes expressionless and hooded, definitely not the intense angry stare he had encountered on both their previous meetings.

Also, Godly Jogger was barefoot, clumps of snow clinging to the hem of his pajama bottoms and little pools of water gathering below pink, damp skin.

He couldn’t be frightened of someone who looked so hopeless.

Stiles made a sound in the back of his throat that was far too empathetic for this situation, and grabbed his slippers from the foot of his bed.

“Alright,” he said to Godly Jogger, glad that the man was at least wearing a shirt so he didn’t have to deal with those abs in his face right now. A running commentary would help his nerves, at least, so he didn’t feel so incredibly weird about this. “Just shuffle your feet into these slippers. You’re lucky they have open backs because size doesn’t really matter. For slippers, I mean, because who am I kidding, size totally matters. Uh, no it doesn’t, pretend I didn’t say that.Anyway, I just don’t want you to get frostbite from walking around in all that snow outside and lose some toes, because watching you jog around the park was the highlight of my summer last year, and let’s make it happen again, ok? Now don’t be weirded out,” he said with a snort, because honestly? Godly Jogger couldn’t even hear him. He was reacting to the subtle pressure of Stiles’ fingers directing his feet into the slippers with all the attentiveness of someone sleeping. If anything, Godly Jogger was lucky Stiles was such a stand-up guy. Because this? There were any number of ways Stiles could take advantage of this. “I’m just going to brush the snow off your pant legs, ok? I’m not copping a feel of your ankles, though they’re very nice, I’m sure.”

Stiles stood and observed the guy in his room. Other than put his feet into the slippers, he hadn’t moved at all. Stiles figured he must have come from outside, and though Stiles was familiar with what his downstairs neighbour looked like, and he definitely wasn’t resist-urge-to-worship-feet attractive, and the few times Stiles had seen Godly Jogger he was coming from the floor above, Stiles still stuck his head out the window to make sure.

There were definitely footprints in the snow coming from the fifth floor. Stiles was grateful that
the building didn’t have more than five floors, because waking people up at three in the morning to find out if they were missing an Adonis from their bed was not Stiles’ idea of fun.

“You know, I had a dream like this last August,” Stiles told Godly Jogger as directed the man through the front door at an awkward shuffle that made Stiles reassess the zombies thing. He made a mental note not to get too close to Godly Jogger’s teeth, just in case. “Not this part. The part where I woke up to you standing over me in my sleep, only less absolutely, piss-myself terrifying and more getting-sexy-times. What can I say? Reality usually sucks the fun right out of fantasy, like that time I wanted to taste Danny’s hair gel because it smelled so good. Let me tell you, hair gel is gross.”

Stiles wrinkled his nose. “I hope you don’t remember any of this. I mean, talk about embarrassing. For you. I embarrass myself all the time. Oh, apartment 504, I think this is you.”

It wasn’t until Stiles pounded his fist against the door and winced at the noise that he realized he was operating under the assumption that waking a sleepwalker was a bad idea. Was that even a thing? He wondered stupidly. Or was it an old wives tale where, like sneezing, the spirit was at risk of leaving the body permanently? Geez, he’d have to look that up in case something like this happened again.

Only, maybe not with Zombie Jogger. With someone who did cute, not terrifying, things like eat jam out of the jar with their fingers or juggled knives.

Finally, the door was thrown open by a beautiful woman who appeared to be struggling against the urge to rip his throat out. Her hair was in disarray and there was an orange dribble down the front of her Hello Kitty sleep shirt. For one giddy second Stiles realized that this was the behind-the-curtain of the New York woman, the type he’d never been able to summon the courage to speak to, and he was infinitely glad she wasn’t wear luxurious silky nightclothes because he wouldn’t have been able to say “Is this yours?” in entirely unimpressed tones if faced with lace.

And oh god of course Godly Jogger had an equally as beautiful girlfriend and/or wife. That was just Stiles’ luck. He couldn’t compete with someone that beautiful, especially considering Stiles didn’t have the right genitals to fit Godly Jogger’s perceived tastes.

“Derek?” the beautiful woman turned, her attention honing in on the man standing a little off to the side, facing the wall of the apartment complex as though the layers of paint held the mysteries of the universe.

“So he is yours?” Stiles asked, completely relieved he didn’t have to go knocking on doors. “Oh
good, I’ll just leave him with you then. Dude’s super creepy, so maybe if you could ask him not to climb in through my bedroom window in the middle of the night once he wakes up? I’d appreciate it.”

Her gaze seemed to be on the slippers on Derek’s feet, a smile hovering on the corner of her lips like she wanted to laugh more than she thought Stiles’ conversation was important. Stiles wasn’t insulted, he just took that to mean Derek wasn’t the type to go around in ratty old bunny slippers willingly.

And now he knew Godly Jogger’s name, so the night wasn’t exactly a total bust.

“He climbed... what?” Her attention snapped back to Stiles. “Why is he still asleep?”

“Uh, because you’re not supposed to wake sleepwalkers,” Stiles trailed off, the ‘duh’ implied.

“That’s a myth,” she responded in equally as unimpressed tones.

“Yeah, sure, I’ll keep that in mind, but considering this is never going to happen again,” Stiles said meaningfully as he backed away from the door, “it’s pretty inconsequential.”

x.x.x.

It happened again.

x.x.x.
Stiles will probably never get an apology for anything in his entire life

Stiles deserved every drop of the ridiculously sugary and creamy coffee and the two danishes he splurged on. He survived a B&E from the devil. If he didn’t have a heart attack last night, his heart was probably in healthy enough shape that he wouldn’t have to worry for the next few years at least.

“Holy god,” Stiles exclaimed, emphasis on the first word as the seat across from him pulled out and his line of sight was monopolized by visions of leather and form-fitted jeans. He clutched at the center of his chest, reassessing the physical condition of his heart, because suddenly it was beating sharply beneath his breastbone.

Derek.

Derek in leather.

Derek in leather and sinfully tight jeans.

Thank god he didn’t jog like that, or Stiles would already be dead, he was sure. Probably from running right off one of the Central Park bridges.

Not that jogging in sinfully tight jeans was ever a good idea, because chafing.

But holy god.

Only, Derek didn’t look as happy to see Stiles as Stiles was to see him, which – rude! Derek was the one intruding on Stiles’ high caloric breakfast, not the other way around.

“Have you made it your purpose in life to scare me into an early grave?”

“When I woke up this morning my sister took great pleasure filling me in on what happened while I slept. She’s under the impression that I owe you my gratitude.”
Stiles ignored the thrilled little buzz tingling through his awareness at the fact that the woman from the night before was now identified as Derek’s sister. “So what you’re saying is that you don’t remember anything?” he asked. When Derek didn’t respond with anything but a cold stare, Stiles tried another tactic. “Sisters have an annoying habit of being right. Are you under a different impression, dude?”

Derek didn’t look like he owed Stiles anything. In fact, Stiles was under the impression that if he was on fire, Derek wouldn’t spare the time of day to run over to the side wall behind the cash and grab the fire extinguisher so he could put Stiles out.

Stiles didn’t entirely blame him because that sounded like a lot of work, but he certainly didn’t want to get peed on, Jesus Fucking Christ. He had some kinks, but a golden shower wasn’t one of them.

“You should keep your window locked.” Derek shrugged, like it was Stiles’ fault that Derek was able to gain entry in the first place.

“Dude, that’s... dude, victim blaming?”

“I have a name,” Derek growled in a way that was far too bad tempered for an apology conversation. He was like a five year old who was forced by his mother to say he was sorry for talking back to his elders. In other words, not sorry at all and still bratty beneath all that contrition.

“That’s excellent, man,” Stiles answered, digging in with the last word. “I assumed you did, names being a social identifier and all, but if you want me to use yours, you’re going to have to tell me what it is.”

“Derek.”

“Well, Derek. I’d say it’s about time, wouldn’t you? Considering you tried to crawl into bed with me last night.”

Maybe Stiles was the bratty one. He’d need to get an outside opinion.

“I didn’t do that.”
“Refresher course on what I like to call Night of Terror – Derek edition. Fact one,” Stiles counted off his pinky. “I was sleeping when some creeper – you, B.T.W. – climbed through my window. Fact two: I woke up and attempted to defend myself against you, but quickly noticed your vacant expression. It was kind of obvious, given that your normal expression is focused fury. Actually, if you think about it, my observation skills saved your life. I might have had a gun, you never know. Fact three: you tracked snow into my room and I felt sorry for your bare feet so I loaned you my bunny slippers, which I expect back, and brought you back to your apartment. So no, maybe it’s not fair of me to claim you tried to crawl into my bed, but I think I deserve civility considering the fact that you’re sitting across from me right now, entirely unharmed, and scowling your way through what looks like the world’s most bitter coffee.”

“We’re done here,” Derek said, actually wincing as he took a gulp of his coffee in what probably was supposed to be his dramatic last stand.

That did not sound anything like an apology to Stiles. In fact, Stiles was still waiting for that to go down. He had let some other man get into his bunny slippers. That deserved some kind of medal.

“Ok, rewind,” Stiles said, gesturing with his coffee cup. “I want you to think back on what you just said. If you’d like a recount, I can probably give it to you word for word. It’s not that I have a good memory, it’s just that you’ve said like ten words to me and not a single one of them were ‘sorry’ or ’apologize’ or anything even resembling the kind of groveling you should be doing right now.”

“I was sleeping,” Derek gritted out. “Somnambulism is a sleep disorder. I will not be held accountable for my actions while temporarily... incapacitated. I am sorry that I wandered into your bedroom, not for your sake but for mine, since now, on top of lapsing back into a problem that hasn’t plagued me since childhood, I have to put up with your childish logic.”

Wow, that was a really unimpressed stare.

“So what happened recently that has you sleepwalking again?” Stiles asked, almost thoughtlessly as he absorbed Derek’s fury. When Derek looked at him sharply, likely judging Stiles for not getting the message behind his anger, Stiles put his hands in front of him to ward off Derek’s ire. “Sorry, I know it’s none of my business, I just asked because I used to get panic attacks when I was younger and I haven’t had one in a while, so I know that if you’re sleepwalking again, chances are there is a reason for it. I know you don’t exactly like me right now, and I suspect that’s partially caused by embarrassment, but if you need an impartial ear to talk to, you know where I live.”

“I don’t need anything from you,” Derek snarled, finishing his coffee in one gulp like it was
antidote to some poison. The poison of Stiles’ presence, maybe? He pushed away from the table, narrowed his eyes in an implied threat – though, heh, once you saw a guy in bunny slippers and his pajamas, it was difficult to be frightened of his evil eye – and turned away.

“My name is Stiles, by the way!” Stiles called out after him.

All in all, Stiles decided, that could have gone far, far worse. At least he hadn’t spilled danish filling down his front, and he was more or less in charge of his faculties this time.

x.x.x.x.

Derek’s last name was Hale. Stiles lurked in front of the mailboxes in the lobby of their apartment building until he located the right one. He may have rifled through some mail. Nothing illegal.

Nothing too illegal, anyway.

Google told him Derek’s sister’s name was Laura. She was a junior associate with a law firm downtown. Google, at first glance, didn’t have much to say about Derek except for the original article Stiles found detailing the fiery car crash that killed Derek’s parents and younger sister.

His joke about Derek not helping him if he was on fire? Suddenly so much less funny.

Stiles was an expert Googler, but usually articles from seven years ago were a bit more difficult to dig up and validate. At first he skimmed the article quickly, noting the fact it originated from a town about a hundred miles from where he grew up.

_Last night a fiery car crash took the lives of three people.... survived by their children Laura Hale and Derek Hale... funeral arrangements have been made. Alcohol is not thought to be a factor at this time._

Small town papers were the worst, reading more like a gossip column than a professional article.

_Last night, Stiles mused, hating the way online articles almost always said ‘last week’ or ‘last night’ or ‘on Tuesday’ and never mentioned specifics in any way that denoted they were available..._
worldwide for the rest of time (or at least until an EMP wiped out the internet). There was an article in the Beacon Hill’s archive detailing a fundraiser his mom had chaired ‘last weekend.’ He read it sometimes and pretended that it was current.

So no, the Hale car crash didn’t happen ‘Last night,’ Stiles fumed.

Then Stiles saw the date and almost gasped out loud, because it actually did happen last night.

What the hell?

And then he saw the year.

Last night, seven years ago.

Stiles had been amused by the whole situation of sleepwalking Derek right up to the point where he wasn’t. Nothing quite put a damper on his amusement like finding out he was the asshole in the scenario.

Part of him wanted to run upstairs and apologize to Derek for trying to force him to apologize for sleepwalking on the night his family died. Part of him realized if he did that, Derek would probably appreciate it even less than he did the conversation in the cafe. For Stiles, an angry cafe confrontation would feel better than awkward hand-patting on the anniversary of his mother’s death.

Maybe he should buy Derek and Laura half a dozen danishes? Or, tickets to one of the much-hyped off-Broadway musicals people were paying attention to this month? Or...

Maybe he should ask Scott. Scott gave the best advice on how to undouche oneself, as Scott was an actual good person with real feelings that he didn’t try to hide so far behind oozing layers of sarcasm that he wondered if he had feelings at all. Unlike Stiles, Scott’s answers to a problem weren’t to throw money at it and hope it was thoughtful enough.

Scott’s answers to a problem usually solved the problem, so long as the problem reacted to things like a cartoon from the 90s.
Scott was goddamn Captain Planet sometimes.

_The moral of today’s lesson, boys and girls, is that everyone has a story, and you never know if the creepy guy who breaks into your bedroom in the middle of the night and won’t apologize for it is actually reeling from the tragic death of almost everyone he loves._

Actually, in this instance, Scott would probably give Stiles a lecture about locking his bedroom window (and tell him to stop obsessing over Godly Jogger. Stiles was never telling Scott). It wasn’t like Stiles hadn’t heard that advice before.

From Derek.

Stiles was a terrible, terrible person.

Sometimes it even bothered him.

x.x.x.x.

Things Stiles hadn’t known about Greenberg back in high school:

1. He wanted to be a professional dancer.
2. His first name was Ben.

Things Stiles could deal without knowing about Greenberg now:

1. How gross his feet looked from years of dancing.
2. His favourite food.
3. That he was the kind of person who, if you mentioned you weren’t feeling well, would show up at your door with tissues and cough drops and would wash a week’s worth of accumulated dishes while not allowing you to strain your eyes watching tv or playing video games. Stiles was never texting Greenburg while sick again, even if he caught the swine flu or the bubonic plague.
4. He lived in a one bedroom apartment with 5 other dancers, and still had trouble making rent.
5. He might not eat this week if Stiles didn’t show up to their standing luncheon date.

So of course he got waylaid when he was in a hurry.
“Hi Laura,” Stiles mumbled, surprised by the disappointment he felt when he realized he was face to face with the wrong sibling. Stiles had been under the impression he was avoiding Derek and it had been successful thus far because he hadn’t run into him yet, but he was also avoiding Derek’s sister by extension, and yet there she was. In front of him. Bearing down on him. In a way that looked deliberate.

“Stiles,” Laura returned.

Seemingly both of them were ignoring the fact that they knew one another’s names when neither of them should. Stiles was a champion at ignoring things. “Derek’s ok?” Stiles asked and then winced, because way to telegraph his obvious interest in her brother’s wellbeing.

“I thought he talked with you,” Laura responded with a frankly disturbingly direct glance. Siblings. Stiles could see it now. Just like he could see that Laura was definitely the kind of put-together business woman Stiles suspected, and if she wasn’t Derek’s sister, Stiles would probably comment on how complimentary her red lipstick was to her green eyes. Instead, he was horrified when he wondered how Derek would look with reddened lips, not from lipstick, but from the pressure of his mouth or his cock against Derek’s mouth.

Stiles’ brain fizzled with want.

And holy shit, he just thought that in front of Laura, and from the way she was side-eying him, it was like she knew. The Hales were terrifying. Stiles shifted his eyes away and then returned her direct gaze with an enquiring one, trying to remember what, exactly, they were talking about. Oh, right. “Talked, oh sure,” Stiles hedged. “I think it could be loosely translated as talking.”

“He threatened you,” Laura answered in the unimpressed way people had when their family does something completely expected but at the same time disappointing.

“Actually, no,” Stiles responded in surprise. “While our conversation was definitely confrontational in nature, I wouldn’t say threats were made. Is that something he does?”

Laura actually looked confused. “Huh,” she said, walking away deep in thought.

The meeting in the lobby of their apartment building put Stiles a few minutes late for his lunch date, but he was pretty sure Greenberg wouldn’t care. Greenberg would just be happy Stiles
showed up at all and picked up the cheque.

“Stiles!” Greenberg exclaimed eagerly as he walked into the restaurant.

It was nice to have someone excited to see him every once and a while.

Too bad it had to be Greenberg.

“Hey Greenberg.”

Stiles thought it was unfortunate that Greenberg was the only person in New York City he knew from Beacon Hills. Greenberg would forever go down as being the clingiest not-friend on the face of the planet, but Stiles didn’t have it in his heart to say no whenever Greenberg made hinting overtures towards another meeting.

Mostly, Stiles was concerned that Greenberg would starve if he didn’t mooch a meal off him once a month or so. Stiles was under that impression because the first time they awkwardly met for lunch, Greenberg ordered the cheapest thing on the menu and then gave Stiles puppy eyes and claimed he forgot his wallet.

Stiles was best friends with Scott and Greenberg's puppy eyes had nothing on that. Greenberg had once asked Scott how to effectively use puppy eyes, which had been a horrible experience for all of them because Scott, as it turned out, had about eighteen tips on how to effectively appear innocent and needy. Stiles had been under the impression for years that Scott had no idea what a manipulative little shit he was. Years. Years in which Scott could have been teaching him the tricks of the trade like Mr. Miyagi to The Karate Kid, Obi-Wan to his Anakin, Uncle Iroh to Zuko.

Scott was the devil.

“I go by Ben here,” Greenberg reminded him.

Sure he did. Poor Greenberg. Delusions of having an actual first name. Stiles had gotten over that one pretty quickly.
Thanks mom and dad.

First names reminded Stiles of Derek, and the conversation they had in the cafe. He didn’t feel guilty, per se, but he did feel marginally bad, and Stiles so very rarely felt bad about anything.

“So the choreographer was so impressed with my pirouette à la seconde that he bumped me up to the chorus line.”

“That’s great,” Stiles said, poking at the melted cheese in front of him. He really did feel terrible about Derek. It was throwing off his entire week. He couldn’t even enjoy the food in front of him, and it was Mexican by way of American deep fryers.

That was his jam. His jelly filled from Dunkin’ Donuts jam.

“I brought tickets to my first official show.”

“I love the musical,” Stiles assured him, not even sure which musical Greenberg was talking about. There was someone outside standing in front the window, someone who Stiles was a hundred percent sure was staring at him.

Someone in a leather jacket.

Someone staring at him like he was about to be murdered by Michael Myers.

“Actually, I was hoping you could give them to your boss. You know, the big guy.”

Really, it could only be Derek. Stiles didn’t know anybody else with a creepy lack of understanding about how to not come off as a possessed serial killer. Subtly, he looked around to make sure there was no one else attracting the attention of the guy in the window.

Who was he fooling? He couldn’t see where the guy was staring, but it was probably at him. That was just what Derek did.
"I know it seems like a huge favour--"

“Dude, personal boundaries,” Stiles said with a scowl at the window. “Can’t you see I’m eating here?” He gestured almost violently to his food so Derek would get the hint, even if he couldn’t hear him.

Someone really needed to send Derek the link to the WikiHow entry on how to meet new people without being creepy. Stiles waved, because someone in this relationship needed to be polite.

“Oh, sorry,” Greenberg said.

“Huh?” Stiles asked, no clue what Greenberg was talking about. Something about the musical he was in? Musicals, he could work with that topic. Maybe. He’d seen season one of Glee once upon a time. “Yeah, so I met Lea Michele last week. Her humour is biting, I think I’m in love.”

The guy moved away from the window, and Stiles realized it wasn’t Derek after all.

He was definitely going insane. What kind of person actually wanted to be stared at creepily through a window at an anonymous Manhattan restaurant twenty blocks from his apartment by someone who shouldn’t even recognise him in a crowd?

What kind of sane person?

“Hey,” Stiles exclaimed as an idea hit him, refocusing on Greenberg. “Why don’t you give me tickets to your big opening night and I’ll pass them on to my boss? I might actually be able to get a celebrity there.”

“Good idea,” Greenberg said weakly, looking far too bothered by Stiles’ suggestion than he should. He was giving Stiles a complex. It wasn’t like he was openly mean to Greenberg, even back in high school.

It wasn’t weird that Stiles was being nice.

Right?
“Four for you, Greenberg. Four for you.” Stiles toasted with a grin.

Stiles left Greenberg with his leftovers and a gift card to Starbucks he claimed he got for free and wouldn’t use but really picked up that morning while buying a double espresso for himself. No one was starving on his watch, not even Greenberg! Greenberg had looked suspicious, trying to claim that Stiles loved coffee, but Stiles brushed him off by pretending not to know what he was talking about.

It wasn’t like Stiles could just give Greenberg a gift certificate to a grocery store. Then Greenberg would know Stiles was considering him a charity without the tax write-off. Stiles was hardcore like that.

The walk home was freezing, and by ‘walk home’ he meant the four blocks he needed to walk to get to the subway station. Immediately he noticed the guy in the leather jacket step out behind him.

Ok, it wasn’t amusing or sexy anymore. Derek was a Grade A creeper.

Stiles was going to have to move. He liked his apartment, with its one comfortable chair and the old world charm and what was possibly lead painted walls.

But fuck it, he wasn’t dealing with this shit anymore.

“This isn’t charming!” Stiles yelled, spinning on his heel. “God Der---“

Not Derek.

Not Derek.

With a knife.
NOT DEREK.

NOT DEREK.

HOLY SHIT NOT DEREK.

Stiles bolted like his life depended on it.

He sprinted. He was a sprinter now.

Stiles was never jogging again because he was seriously channeling the power of Usain Bolt, and he had his own laziness to thank for saving his life. If he hadn’t spent months trying to get his jogging over with as quickly as possible, he probably wouldn’t be nearly as fast.

How many people could say laziness was healthy for them?

Laziness, and maybe chasing Godly Jogger.

Irony.

Damn his nubile young ass and the rapture it causes.

Stiles was half way up the block by the time his mind caught up with the fact that not!Derek had a knife. Police lights were actually converging on the guy as Stiles ran away, but he didn’t pause to watch.

As he stood panting in the subway car, he reassessed the scariest moments in his life, and decided that sleepwalking Derek was preferable – a veritable kitty cat compared to an actual psycho with a knife.

Somehow this was also Derek’s fault.
But oh no, Stiles would never get an apology for this one either.

Later that night, once he was safely locked in his apartment, Stiles received an email from Greenberg detailing a number of treatments for bipolarism. “Overshare again, Greenberg,” Stiles muttered, not particularly concerned with what medication Greenberg was on, though it did explain his earlier behaviour. Maybe this was some form of apology? What was it with people he knew unable to say the actual words ‘I’m sorry’?
If Slenderman had abs like that, his ability to frighten would be greatly diminished

“Eugh,” Stiles groaned, rolling over in bed. He awoke from a particularly vivid dream of Derek climbing back into his room. It was not nearly as exciting as it should be. He’d been having them approximately every second night for the last three weeks. Some were nightmares. Some were not.

Most were not, if he was being honest with himself. His favourites were the ones where Derek was awake and willing, pulling the comforter off his sleeping form with a swift jerk and then crawling up his body, the weight of his knees braced on the bed on either side of Stiles’ thighs rocking him into wakefulness. In the dark Derek’s eyes were sleep-softened and gentle, hands a heated brand as they trailed heavily up his sides, coaxing Stiles into a seated position. When their mouths met, a bit of the darkness he had seen in Derek’s gaze presented itself with bruising lips and nipping teeth.

This dream wasn’t like either of the usual scenarios. This dream just had the sound of the window opening and closing, and then nothing.

Stiles blinked away sleep, his lip curling in derision as he noted the time.

3:54 AM

Fucking Derek Hale and his gorgeous face and churlish persona.

Stiles couldn’t even have sex dreams about him right.

And there should be no wrong way to have a sex dream!

Punching his pillow, Stiles turned to try to get back to sleep. It was usually a fruitless endeavor, but hope springs eternal, or whatever. He’d never really gotten that phrase. Hope springs eternal what?

He hoped it was Skittles.
His eyes focused on the strange shadow on his bedroom wall, trying to figure out what piece of furniture it was from. He didn’t own anything that was long and vaguely humanoid in shape.

A coat tree?

What? He definitely didn’t own a coat tree. He didn’t even know anyone who did.

“SLENDERMAN!” Stiles screamed, diving out of bed and pressing his back against the wall. Jesus, what did the Slenderman mythos say again? Something about it stalking his victim? That it couldn’t move to eat you if you were looking directly at it? Was he confusing Doctor Who mythology with real life again? He should have paid more attention!

And why the hell did he just categorize Slenderman as ‘real life’? Holy god he was going to die at the hands of a passive aggressive fear-eating tentacle man monster.

His heart was still pounding heavily when he recognised Derek.

He knew Derek was real because this was the least sexy dream ever.

“What is wrong with you?” Stiles mused in a tone that definitely couldn’t be labelled a shriek. He was actually kind of proud of how steady his voice was. Of course, the question was phrased rhetorically, because Derek was sleeping and it would be stupid for Stiles to expect an answer. Stiles imagined that even if Derek was awake, he wouldn’t answer.

But there was definitely something wrong with him.

Stiles understood the whole sleepwalking thing. He’d done his research and he would never blame Derek for walking in his sleep – he wasn’t referring to the fact Derek’s eyes opened and his body wandered during delta sleep (most commonly for sleepwalkers), he was referring to why Derek was doing it in Stiles’ bedroom. Everything he read indicated that sleepwalkers tended to do things familiar to them, such as making a midnight snack and eating it.

Stiles was pretty sure Derek wasn’t there to eat him.
He was also pretty sure Derek had never climbed into his bedroom window. He’d remember that.

Oh, would he remember that.

Unless... maybe the person who lived in the apartment before Stiles meant something to Derek. That would make a lot of sense. Part of Stiles didn’t enjoy the idea that Derek had been having sex in this bedroom without him, with someone who definitely wasn’t him, but he couldn’t ignore how much sense it made for Derek to come here if that was the case. It just made this whole situation a little more tragic.

Stiles emphatically did not want to feel more empathy towards Derek than he already did. He was already on the shaky path towards cooing.

It was time to wake Derek up. Stiles had less urge with the conflicting desires to mother-hen Derek and get all up in that when Derek was awake.

Mostly because Derek would probably chop him to tiny bits and feed him to the rats living in secret places (that Derek knew about because he was obviously a Ninja Turtle, or, more likely, Shredder) if Stiles tried either of those things while he was awake.

“Derek, wake up,” Stiles said in a normal voice, not surprised that it didn’t work. He had kept up a spoken commentary to Derek the last time this happened and Derek hadn’t shown signs of waking up then either.

“Derek,” Stiles said a little louder, placing his hand on Derek’s shoulder and giving a small shake. “Wake up.”

Still nothing. Derek was the deepest sleepwalker ever.

“DEREK WAKE UP.” Stiles yelled, punctuating his words with a bone-rattling jolt against Derek’s shoulder.

The fist came out of nowhere.
Well, really it came from Derek’s clenched right hand, but just because he could identify the origin didn’t mean Stiles saw it coming.

Stiles stumbled back a few feet as his face exploded in pain.

“Jesus Christ,” Stiles wailed, clutching at his nose.

Derek blinked in confusion, looking so, so lost as he took in the room around him. Normally, that was the kind of expression that tugged on Stiles’ heartstrings (years and years of conditioning from being Scott’s BFF), but getting punched in the face tended to make him cranky.

“Wake him up, she said,” Stiles moaned in Derek’s general vicinity. “I thought: what’s the worst that could happen? It’s not like he’s a Wraith from Pegasus Galaxy.”

Derek turned on his heel and climbed back out the bedroom window. Somehow, if Stiles wasn’t writhing in pain, he would think it funny that Derek had to open the window first and then close it behind him.

Stiles crossed the room and wrenched the window back open an inch.

“What are you, Batman?” Stiles yelled behind Derek to the slight scraping sound of him climbing into his own room a floor above. Wow, insensitive Stiles, way to bring up Derek’s dead parents. “You can’t just punch me in my own bedroom and leave in the shroud of darkness!”

Derek apparently lived by the tenet ‘I do what I want’.

Jerk.

Just for fun, Stiles popped open his computer and read up on Slenderman.

He is shown to behave in a very passive aggressive manner, stalking targets for years at a time, torturing his target mentally for various unknown reasons. [ . . . ] The most
important factor about Slenderman is the mystery. He lives unlike any human being despite having a similar appearance to one. It is uncertain if he is social, or even understands human languages or behaviors, nor why it is humans appear to be his main target.

Nope. No.

Just no.

At least, he consoled himself, Derek wasn’t passive aggressive, he was just aggressive.

The human behaviours thing was up for negotiation.

Stiles called in sick the next day, mostly because he hadn’t managed to get back to sleep with a bag of frozen peas over his nose. The damage itself was minimal, and there was hardly any swelling, but he still felt like he deserved a goddamn mental day.

It had nothing to do with the fact it was angry-snowing outside and cold as balls.

In actuality, he was more upset by the five seconds he thought Slenderman had come to eat him than he was the entire thing with Derek.

He was lying on his back on his couch, a bag of broccoli on his face this time, when someone knocked on the door.

Stiles literally knew no one in the neighbourhood who knew where he lived and knew he was out sick today. The circles in that venn diagram of ‘people he knew from work’ and ‘people he knew from the general Hell’s Kitchen area’ were two separate circles.

Oh Jesus, Greenberg didn’t somehow find out he was home from work, did he?

In about an hour Stiles had plans. Plans called ‘Halo tournament with the best Halo partner ever’. Greenberg would take one look at the slight bruising beneath his eye and warn Stiles about blunt force trauma while simultaneously removing every piece of entertainment Stiles had in the
apartment. His gaming center, his iPhone, his computer, all the books, the crossword he tore out of People’s Magazine while in the waiting room of People’s Magazine, all gone.

But maybe the blunt force trauma had gone to his head. Maybe Stiles had order Chinese Food and couldn’t remember.

Maybe Greenberg brought him Chinese Food, in which case Stiles had a bottle of concealer in his bathroom and he potentially knew how to use it more than he wanted to admit.

Have you ever tried looking out a peep hole with a busted nose?

Not the easiest thing in the world.

It wasn’t Chinese Food.

It was so much more mouth watering.

Derek looked incredibly uncomfortable standing in his doorstep in his leather jacket. Stiles didn’t blame him, it was like five degrees outside, Stiles would be uncomfortable in his overly large down jacket and he could tell Derek had just come in from the cold. There were clues that didn’t have anything to do with the icy flush to Derek’s cheeks.

“Here,” Derek grunted, shoving a coffee and a pastry bag in his hands. Because Stiles was Stiles, and because saying he was surprised was an understatement, he almost ended up wearing the coffee. The only thing that saved him was Derek wrapping his warm hand back around the cup, fingers covering Stiles’.

“Is this an apology, Derek?” Stiles asked after he stared at Derek for a long minute, expecting him to either say something explaining his presence or leave.

“No.” Derek shoved his empty hands into the pockets of his leather jacket in a move that should look casu-cool but instead made him look uncertain.

“Oh wow, ok,” Stiles said, moving aside so Derek could step in. It actually surprised him when
Derek took him up on the inferred offer and moved past Stiles.

Stiles was decently proud of his living room. The only piece of furniture he actually bought was the big screen television. The rest was an eclectic collection of “roadkill” he had dragged home from various alleyways and street corners. He had excellent taste when it came to dumpster diving, not a single body part among them.

His favourite piece was a leather chair he had spotted in the alleyway outside his window one morning in April right after he moved into the city. Up to that point his sole furnishings had been a bed, his salary going towards paying off the credit cards he had maxed out moving and purchasing wardrobe staples that didn’t make him look like he was wearing cheap polyester blend.

Because when you work for one of the best PR firms in the city? You had to look good. All the time. He was incredibly lucky Lydia browbeat him into a borrowed Armani for the initial interview, or he likely never would have even gotten the job.

If he hadn’t gotten the job, he wouldn’t have moved to New York City.

If he hadn’t moved to New York City he never would have met Jamie Dornan.

...or Derek Hale, though the jury was still out on that one.

If he hadn’t moved to New York City he wouldn’t have fallen in love.

With the pizza here. Which was AWEsome.

“How did you know I was home?” Stiles asked, genuinely interested in a vaguely uncomfortable way.

“You spent the last hour screaming along to Linkin Park circa 2003.”

“My music tastes aren’t up for discussion.” Stiles took a sip of his coffee. It didn’t occur to him until after he tasted the frothy sweetness of the steamed milk and the whipped cream that Derek had some indication of what he liked in his coffee, which loosely translated into a sugar coma, and
2. Accepting coffee from someone indicated inherent trust on Stiles’ part. Despite having one real conversation with the man, one that couldn’t be labelled as anything other than antagonistic, his ingrained suspicions didn’t rear their head even once.

No matter what people thought of Stiles, he did know how to take care of himself. He knew not to accept candy from strangers. When he grew up he knew not to accept free drinks from strangers (unless handed it directly by the bartender).

He also knew to apply the same cautions to people who weren’t strangers. Stiles was naturally mistrustful, partially due to lectures he received as a child and partially due to his world-wary genes.

“This is really superior coffee,” Stiles told Derek, squinting at him in distrust. Oh, now he was suspicious, when it came down to Derek’s motivations after Stiles took a drink. There was something very wrong with him. “Are you sure this isn’t an apology conversation? You know, you almost broke my nose, I wouldn’t blame you if you felt a bit of contrition. I wouldn’t even call you a hypocrite because technically you were awake when it happened and so it doesn’t quite fall under things you did while performing the somnambulist samba.” At Derek’s withering stare, Stiles amended, “which we won’t talk about, ole” and gave a little shimmy of his hips just to mess with Derek’s mind.

“There’s nothing wrong with your nose.” Derek appeared to be using all his limited patience focusing on the part of what Stiles said that was the least annoying. Or possibly he was trying not to eye the way Stiles’ pyjamas slid down his hips with the impromptu dance move, which was stupid and impossible, but hope springs eternal Skittles and all that.

Taste the rainbow, Derek.

“There could be. You didn’t even pause to check. What if you shoved my nasal bones into my brain and I was leaking brain fluid and died in my sleep?”

“I would have had to stay longer than an extra five seconds to figure that out,” Derek pointed out, infuriatingly rational.

“Then maybe you should.” The words were out of Stiles’ mouth before he could really think of their meaning. Unintentional flirting was the worst kind of word vomit, especially with someone he wanted to intentionally flirt with some day.
Derek gave him a filthy scowl, entirely unimpressed, and then grabbed his face.

“Erhmahgerd,” Stiles murmured, Derek’s fingers pressing sharply against his jaw, index finger sinking into the softer flesh at the corner of his mouth. If he just made the effort to enunciate, he could probably force it to slide right into the corner of his lips.

Derek shoved his face close, forcing Stiles’ head to either side, back and forth at harsh angles. Stiles’ mind was in the fucking gutter, Derek was so close. “There’s nothing wrong with your nose,” Derek repeated, letting go of Stiles and moving back. “It’s hardly even bruised.”

“Maybe not,” Stiles responded in a sharp tone, rubbing his neck and leaning away from the crazy person. “But you probably just wrenched my neck.”

Derek shrugged, moving away from Stiles and sitting on the one comfy chair in the apartment. Stiles warily eyed him, wondering if he was genuinely nuts, but Derek seemed more or less sane as he settled with a sigh. Saner than Stiles, anyway.

“I used to have a chair like this,” Derek told him, the closest to happy Stiles had ever seen the guy.

“What happened to it?” Stiles asked, tentatively, pretty sure it was the same chair, because there were no coincidences in Stiles’ life.

Derek shrugged. “People had hate-sex on it during a party. It had to go.”

Stiles made a face. “Yeah, I can see how that would be a problem.” He made a mental note to go furniture shopping soon. Maybe the corner of 50th street and 8th Avenue – he nabbed a pretty great lamp there once. The first rule of owning pre-owned furniture was to never, ever, ever, ever find out why it had been dumped. Stiles didn’t care if someone died on his old-lady couch, so long as he didn’t know about it. “But only if you weren’t participating, right?

Derek gave him a sour look.

“Why are you even here if you’re just going to be a grump?” Stiles tried to replicate Derek’s face, but it was too difficult to maintain while taking a bite out of the danish Derek had bought him. It was no longer warm, but it was from the bakery next door that Stiles frequented about three times a week, and it was one of his favourite flavours.
Though he didn’t have a least favourite.

Maybe raspberry, not because of the taste but because when he was running late in the morning and shoving a danish in his mouth while cutting across traffic to get to the office, the seeds had a tendency to get stuck in his front teeth and remain there for hours until he was in the middle of a professional video conference and could see them in the live preview of his face.

Ok, that only happened once but it was enough to put him off raspberries forever. It wasn’t like he had a shot with Kristen Bell beyond outlining a plan to her and her manager, but it still rankled.

Derek really hated being called out on either his reason for being there or his grumpiness, because he not only looked super uncomfortable and angry, but also a little hurt, like Stiles was turning him out. Stiles would never turn Derek out during morning-after coffee, even if it was just ‘morning-after he broke into Stiles’ room and then punched him in the face’.

Then, because Stiles: a. thought this might be time to take a risk, or b. was an idiot, he took another sip of his coffee for confidence, chasing a drop with his tongue, and said, “I want you to stay, I’m not asking you to leave. I just... you confuse me because every conversation we’ve had, you look like talking with me causes you physical and mental anguish, and yet here you are, making yourself comfortable on my chair and plying me with coffee and baked goods.”

Derek shrugged. “I am deeply uncomfortable with this situation.”

“Well, honesty is a good start.”

“I punched you,” Derek took a breath, audible enough that Stiles could hear it, and then let it out in a solid exhale. “Why did you let me in the door?”

“Because you knocked this time.” Stiles was surprised to find that true. “Look, I mean this isn’t something you do on purpose, is it? You’re sleepwalking. So I have the solution, not to your sleepwalking problem, but to the horrible awkwardness of it.”

“So do I,” Derek told him, leaning back in the chair and giving Stiles what could possibly a half smile. “Lock your window.”
Stiles seriously couldn’t judge whether Derek was joking. The chair was magical, really. It was making crankypants into someone who was almost affable. “Are we back to that? Besides, I’m not entirely certain that’s a solution to anything. You’d probably just walk in on the couple downstairs, and I think that would be worse for you. I have it on good authority that Mrs. 304 owns a whip and isn’t shy about using it. No, I think the only solution is that we become a bit more comfortable with one another.”

“More comfortable with each other?” Derek asked. He couldn’t sound any more like a drone if he tried.

That right there was why Stiles wasn’t deliberately flirting with Derek any time soon. “Just a thought. I’ve kind of accepted that this is a thing that happens to me now. It might be far less weird to see you standing in my room if we can be civil to each other. You know, I see you in the elevator and say ‘hi Derek’ or you nod at me if we pass each other on the street. Think you can manage that? At least pretend not to hate me?”

“I don’t hate you. I brought you breakfast.”

“And you didn’t poison it. Hooray. Ok, don’t hate, don’t hate,” Stiles claimed as Derek turned his laser eyes on him. “I’m not entirely without sympathy and I’ll give you points for not maiming me last night, I can appreciate how difficult this is for you, coming here, to my apartment and all, considering...”

“Considering?”

“How hard it must be, knowing whose bedroom you’re walking into. How it was once somewhere you wanted to be. Somewhere you wanted to sneak into in the middle of the night, not because you were sleepwalking, but because there was someone here who would welcome you with open arms.”

“What?” Derek recoiled, expression alarmed.

“Well, I just mean the relationship you must have had with the person who lived here before I did.” Stiles screwed up his mouth and rubbed the back of his head. He definitely could have phrased that better.

“I didn’t have a relationship with him, he was just some weird old guy.” Derek’s voice was at least
an octave higher than usual, confusion still evident along his brow. That was something, Stiles decided. He had managed to confuse Derek with words instead of jarring him out of sleep.

“Oh,” Stiles responded, he had been so sure he was right, that his bedroom had some kind of special meaning to Derek. It was kind of surprising he was wrong. Stiles was barely ever wrong. “I read on the internet that sleepwalkers typically perform tasks they’re familiar with, so I just thought that climbing in through my window must have been a concept you were intimate with. Why do you--?”

“Don’t wake me up again!” Derek interrupted him, jabbing his finger towards Stiles in a threatening manner. “It might not be a glancing blow next time.”

Then he stormed out the door, leaving Stiles confused as to whether he had just been threatened or warned away in what (crazy people like) Derek thought to be a completely rational manner.
Stiles is a gentleman, and gentlemen don't allow strange men in their beds

True to his word (though not really, since Derek hadn’t made promises, just threats) the next time Stiles saw Derek, he got a bro-nod.

A nod. From his bro.

Who was Derek.

Either that or, coincidentally, Derek had some kind of spastic tic as he looked across the street and Stiles just happened to be there. Stiles knew a thing or two about spastic tics, one of his high school dating experiences had resulted from an eyelash in his eye, but he was pretty sure this wasn’t unintentional.

Stiles wasn’t exactly sure how being acknowledged on the street was supposed to make him feel better about the possibility of sleepwalking Derek. Chances were he was an idiot for suggesting it.

But then, he wasn’t exactly frightened at night with the threat of Derek’s night-time visits. No, fear wasn’t the emotional response Stiles was having to the situation. He had gotten into the practice of wearing clean pajamas and washing his sheets a lot more than he usually did, not for the reasons a teenage boy might, but because he wanted to be prepared. It would be just his luck if Derek snuck into his room on a night where Stiles was wearing sleep-pants with a hole in the crotch and his sheets were stained with salsa dip from the snack he definitely should not have been eating in bed.

And the crumbs, oh the crumbs. Talk about a cockblock. He wouldn’t even have time to open his mouth and ruin things for himself, a crumb-y bed would take care of it for him.

So clean sheets were the order of the day, without a side order of crumbs and feet-dirt (tracked in because he no longer owned slippers, something else that was Derek’s fault).

He wasn’t exactly sure if he wanted to make a good impression like he would dressing up for a first date, or if it was because he was fully prepared to wake Derek up, dodge whatever punch Derek threw at him, and then tackle him onto his bed.

So no, fear wasn’t the motivation Stiles was running on unless one counted the fear of rejection.
Rejection was horrifically frightening, yes, but when one was propositioning someone who looked like Derek, one didn’t get one’s hopes up.

One’s hope was not one’s penis, Stiles was pleased to note.

Stiles had been having frequent and detailed dreams about Derek wandering around shirtless. Some were incredibly weird, like Derek was some kind of wood nymph, frolicking angrily through trees, but most of them featured him doing pull-ups in the doorway of Stiles’ room, or making himself a snack in the kitchen, always in the background and periphery of Stiles’ life. Derek would sit in his favourite chair, eyes catching with Stiles’ as he tried to compose an email, and Stiles would be hopeless against the need to climb onto Derek’s lap and snicker against his jaw as the bare skin of Derek’s back squelched against the leather chair as he leaned forward and mouthed Stiles’ collarbone.

Detailed dreams were incredibly detailed. Stiles was getting to be grateful that spring was fast approaching, because March brought April, and April brought May, and May brought summer humidity, and summer humidity meant Derek would start being disgusted by his shirt again, which was part of the reason Stiles was in this whole mess to begin with.

Well, that was his excuse, he didn’t know what excuse Derek was using for this situation they found themselves in.

Sleepwalking, probably.

But the bro-nods were a thing that was happening now. Not that Stiles saw Derek that often, or at least not as often as he would like.

And not as much of him as he would like.

June couldn’t be here soon enough, but at the same time Stiles wasn’t willing to jump forward in time. He thought there was the slimmest of chances he could forge some kind of friendship with Derek before then, because it wouldn’t be possible for Stiles to trail Derek around the park anymore without Derek noticing and recognising him and giving him a bro nod.

It would be weird for one bro to chase another bro through the park waiting for him to strip off his shirt, wouldn’t it?
Damn, Stiles was king of shooting himself in the foot.

(He’d once seen one of his father’s dumber deputies do just that. It looked unpleasant. If bloodspray and leather encasement holding toes in place could be labelled something as mundane as unpleasant. Stiles felt like being on Derek’s radar was worse than that if Derek wasn’t actually noticing him in return.)

x.x.x.x.x.

Derek was the last thing on Stiles’ mind during the last week of March. One of Anderson, Joseph & Roth’s more illustrious clients went on a four day bender around the city, and Stiles had his hands full handling public relations, setting up decoy sightings, and more or less showing the media an alternate truth. He was very good at his job, and the amount of sleep he got that week while performing acts of genius showed the higher ups just how good.

By ‘amount of sleep’ Stiles meant that he caught maybe five catnaps at the desk in front of his computer over the span of seventy five hours, but it was worth it to prove their trust in him was not misguided.

He was just glad he worked in Public Relations and it wasn’t his job to locate the client and set him up in a detox facility.

Not his job.

The only job he had now was sleeping for the next twelve hours. It was going to be his best performance yet. Rave reviews across the board.

He was just settling under the sheets he hadn’t seen in days when he heard his window open.

“No. Noooo. Not tonight,” he moaned into his pillow. Hadn’t he done enough? He’d almost fallen asleep when he tripped over the mat in the lobby and fell on his face. Wasn’t that torment enough for one evening?

The window closed and there was the rustling of moment for a moment as Derek settled into his
normal stance watching over Stiles while he slept with sightless eyes.

Maybe if Stiles just ignored him he would go away?

Best idea he had all day, and today he paid Lindsey Lohan to scream at some vendor across town to distract the paparazzi from his important client.

Lindsey Lohan apparently took acting gigs where she could find them.

“Derek?” Stiles questioned, jolting back awake at the sound of footsteps coming nearer. That was new.

That was very new.

Stiles peeked out from under his comforter to see Derek standing over the side of his bed, staring down.

“Holy God,” Stiles exclaimed, rolling out of the other side of the bed. “This is some kind of Paranormal Activity shit right here,” he told Derek.

Not that Derek could hear him.

Stiles’ vision blurred black around the edges and he shook his head violently to wake up, entirely missing the incongruity of thinking Derek was the one who appeared ‘possessed by poltergeists’. “I’m just gonna assume you’re sleeping, no ghosts involved, ok?” Stiles slurred, still trying to shake off the fuzziness around his awareness.

He moved around his bed so he could reach Derek.

Was it too much to ask for just twelve hours of uninterrupted sleep these days? He was too tired to even enjoy the tight white shirt Derek habitually slept in. Or the way the pajama bottoms hugged his ass.
Ok, he wasn’t too tired for that.

He was awake now.

Derek shifted forward, and suddenly Stiles realized the intent of the movements.

His bed.

Derek was trying to climb into his bed.

This was definitely the worst week ever.

“No,” Stiles grasped at Derek’s arm, jerking away really quickly as Derek shrugged him off in a move that was borderline violent. Once he was free, Derek took another step forward, his knee up on Stiles’ mattress. “Oh you asshole!” Stile groaned, grabbing at Derek again. “No you don’t.”

Derek pitched forward with an unhappy grunt, ripping his shirt from Stiles’ hands, and landed face-first on the bed.

“Derek! No!” Stiles said in horror, recoiling away with his hands over his mouth and his eyes widened in disbelief. “This isn’t happening,” he told the world, flailing a little at the inability to process.

Derek was on his bed.

Derek was snuggling into his pillow.

On his bed.

Derek was curling his hand into a loose fist next to the pillow.
Derek sighed contently, rolling completely on his stomach.

Stiles was... understandably turned on right now.

Derek was on his bed.

Every time Derek was in his bedroom, the discomfiture of the situation just kept getting a little worse. First there was the frightening stranger in his bedroom element, and then there was the Derek’s self-survival instincts (by punching) element, and now there was the Derek sleeping in his bed element.

Derek who was more or less still a stranger (to Stiles’ bed at least). Derek who still probably punched anyone who startled him awake.

Stiles didn’t know what to do. What was the precedent in cases like this? Should he wake Derek and risk getting punched? He actually might have to make semi-public appearances this week, trailing behind a minor celebrity with the rest of the entourage, and a swollen jaw wouldn’t really reflect well on said celeb’s rumoured anger management issues. Should he just leave Derek in his bed? Getting punched now might be preferable to getting punched in the morning when Derek awoke, realized where he was, and jumped to the (right? Erroneous, completely erroneous? But maybe a little right) conclusion that Stiles had taken advantage of his sleepwalking to get him into bed.

God, he didn’t want Derek to think he was some huge skeeve.

“Oh man, that’s... that’s my pillow!” Stiles muttered incredulously as Derek snuggled on his bed, still asleep. His face rubbed against the cotton pillowcase, lips making a slightly unhappy pout at something as he reached across the bed and grabbed the pillow Stiles usually slept on, the one indented with the shape of his head, and hugged it to his chest.
“Jesus,” Stiles hissed. That was not adorable. That was petrifying. “Are you smelling that?” he asked, voice octaves higher than normal.

Holy Shit.

“It’s not that I don’t want you in my bedroom. Believe me, you’re more than welcome, and you kind of loom through my fantasies on a regular basis, I would just be so much more comfortable with this right now if you were awake, and quite frankly you still terrify me a little, so that says something.”

Stiles needed help. Possibly psychiatric.

He was way, way too tired to deal with this.

“Help,” he said hopelessly to no one.

Laura. Maybe Laura could deal with this.

He wasn’t sure he had the energy to go all the way upstairs for her.

He could call her.

Did he even own a phone book?

Did phone books even exist anymore?

So Stiles did what he usually did when faced with the impossible, he checked Google, settling down on the bed next to Derek with his work iPad. His eyes felt red-hot with exhaustion and he had to keep scrubbing them, ignoring the gritty sandpaper feeling of his palms against his eyelashes.
There were a total of 37 Laura Hales in the online phone directory, and Stiles was sure that even if one of them was the right Laura Hale, all 37 would deny a connection to the man who was currently snuggling with a stranger’s pillow, which was doing odd things to Stiles’ stomach, right above the situation he had going on in his pajama bottoms. Derek always gave him a situation is his pajama bottoms, though, whether he was present or not. The fluttering, fond reaction in regions above his dick was new.

Stiles was on the edge of completely freaking out. The phone directory was completely useless, and he had just wasted five minutes where he could have just manned up, stumbled out of his apartment and to 504.

It was testament to his exhaustion that he found himself in front of 504 without realizing he had left his apartment at all. His hand rapping against the door woke him from whatever stunned, automatic movements he was making.

Maybe Derek wasn’t the only sleepwalker in the building. Maybe Stiles did this to him all the time, and Derek was just better at getting Stiles back into his own bed than Stiles was at helping Derek.

He had his hand resting on the door for balance when it was yanked open, and he almost stumbled forward onto a very pissed off woman.

“What?” Laura snarled. This time she was wearing lace and the expression on her face was so much like Derek’s that for one giddy, horrifying moment he pictured Derek in the Morticia Addams gown Laura was wearing.

He was far too exhausted for this shit. Far too exhausted.

“No, no morning after. I would be one of...not the point. I’m here to beg, but not the kind you’ve obviously been enj—not the point either. Your brother is in my bed, get him out,” he pleaded, perilously close to whining.

Laura did not look impressed. “Not my problem. If you don’t want to deal with him the morning after, just man up and kick him out. There are a lot of people who would be absolutely thrilled to have Derek in their bed.”

“No morning after.” Stiles shook his head. Laura was supposed to be smart. If this was a morning after scenario, she wouldn’t be seeing Derek for days. “No, no morning after. I would be one of
the people who would love to keep Derek in their bed forever, I assure you, only he’s sleepwalking again and I don’t want to wake him because the last time he punched me in the face. I know a lot of people get the urge to punch me but I would rather it be because I did something and not just because my face was there.”

Laura looked even less sympathetic. “Maybe it was because your face was there. Believe me, it isn’t something I want to see in the middle of the night either.”

“Are you going to help me or not?” Stiles gave his best puppy eyes, but he wasn’t exactly Scott’s model student and right now he was sure his eyes were so bloodshot he looked like he was strung out on fifteen various drugs. That might be cute on Scoobie Doo, but not so much on Stiles Stilinski.

She sighed. “Anything to stop Derek from punching you. Just let me get my dressing gown.”

“Really?”

“No.” She slammed the door in his face.

Laura was evil. Stiles could definitely take lessons. He should have known no one would use the word ‘dressing gown’ in anything less than a satirical context.

When Stiles got back to his bedroom, Derek was still curled on top of his sheets. He made a halfhearted attempt to tug at Derek’s shoulder, encouraging him out of bed but not pulling hard enough to wake him. He knew it was wrong not to try harder to move him, or not to just suck it up and wake him, but seeing Derek like this was stirring some kind of primal, protective instinct in Stiles that was frighteningly caveman and completely inappropriate given that Derek wasn’t some kind of Disney Princess. And Stiles was tired.

He couldn’t deny that part of him enjoyed the way Derek looked in his bed.

“Derek, wake up,” Stiles cajoled, patting Derek’s face.

Derek didn’t even wince.
Stiles tapped his fingers against Derek’s cheek a little harder, hand resting against the warm, prickly scruff of his jaw line. For one moment of insanity, he wondered if Derek would wake up if he punched him in the face. Then when Derek reciprocated, at least Stiles would feel it was deserved.

“You win, I can’t deal with this tonight,” Stiles told him, dragging a plastic container out from under the bed and grabbing his spare blanket. It was a little surreal to tuck Derek in, but he was ready to crash, so he didn’t give it much thought.

x.x.x.x.x.

Bump.

“What the hell?”

Footstep. Footstep.

“—iles?”

“Stiles,” Derek’s voice in his ear.

Mmm, yes. Stiles inhaled through his open mouth, smacking his lips closed as awareness took over from unconsciousness.

“D’rek?” Stiles groaned, rolling over and almost falling off the couch.

“What the hell, Stiles?”

“Erg?” he questioned, forcing one eye open to the painfully bright morning light. “Itz m’rning D’rek. Timezit?”

“What?” Derek sounded confused, casting a gaze around the apartment.
Too bright.

It was too bright to appreciate Derek’s face. Which was horrible, because Derek’s face did amazing things in the sunlight, all angles and strong lines. The way, Stiles thought giddily, of those Greek statues. Derek’s godliness was showing again. His nose was its own sundial. If only Derek would just stand still so Stiles could look at him all day, maybe he could figure out what time it was on his own.

“It’s just after six,” Derek finally answered.


Less than three. He was so clever, Stiles congratulated himself.

Only, had he said that out loud?

He looked at Derek again. With one eye squinted open, he could see Derek scowl with extreme bitchface.

Yeah, he said that out loud.

Stiles consoled himself with the knowledge Derek was scowling at him because he had no idea what Stiles had said and not because he didn’t like the fact Stiles less-than-three’d him at six in the morning.

“Why are you on the couch?”

“You stole my bed,” Stiles grunted as he sat up, realizing Derek actually wanted to have a conversation. His old sleeping bag fell off his shoulders, material slithering off the couch until it puddled on the floor. Stiles wasn’t awake enough to really appreciate how slippery the sleeping bag was. If he was more awake, he’d remember the afternoons he spent with Scott taking turns tobogganing down the stairs in their Star Wars sleeping bags, and realize that stepping directly on it while half asleep might not be the best plan.
“Whoa,” Derek said, getting a good handful of Stiles’ shirt as Stiles pitched forward, his warm hand curling around Stiles’ bicep. Their faces were close enough that Stiles could feel the heat of Derek’s breath against his cheek and he swallowed heavily in response, his eyelids fluttering shut in surprise, only to open again because watching Derek right now seemed far more important. Stiles could see the intricacies of his eyes, golden stellar flares surrounding the irises, illuminating a universe of greens and blues, giving them life.

Derek had amazing eyes, and right now they were fixed on him.

Stiles wet his lips, pretending to be more disoriented than he really was as Derek centered him with a fleeting hand on his hip.

“Sorry,” Stiles muttered ruefully, rubbing the back of his neck in an attempt to get rid of the kinks sleeping on the couch had caused. They weren’t any worse than the sore muscles he had from sleeping on his office chair. “I spent the last seventy five hours in a work emergency. I’m not running on all cylinders here.”

Derek’s smirk looked slightly playful, as if to say ‘when are you ever running on all cylinders.’

If Stiles was entirely awake, he wouldn’t respond to that by leaning into Derek’s space, ostensibly for balance, until Derek’s mouth became stern. But Stiles wasn’t awake, and Derek’s chest was solid and warm, and hey, why not? Derek had just spent half the night in his bed. Certain liberties were allowed here.

Derek didn’t look like he wanted to take any of them. “Why didn’t you wake me up?”

It was Stiles’ turn to level Derek with his best bitchface. His was amateur hour in comparison, but not everyone could master the use of their eyebrows like Derek had for twenty three different variations of unimpressed stare. Things impressed Stiles, ok? Stupid things. Things like how they got the cream in the Boston Cream doughnuts. Not that he thought it was puzzling, he just thought it was clever. “Uh, because you told me not to.”

Suck on that, Derek. With tongue.

God, Stiles didn’t say that out loud, did he?
Derek didn’t seem to think so, if his eyebrow stare was anything to go by.

Then Derek was manhandling him through the door of his own bedroom.

“Ok, yeah, I can do that,” Stiles agreed, seeing his bed laid out in front of him like the most delectable dish. “Sleeeeep,” he hummed with contentment, sliding into the cool sheets on his side of the bed and making grabby motions for his pillow in the middle of the bed where Derek had left it. “Sleep, Derek,” he muttered against the downy softness.

x.x.x.x.

Stiles actually had no idea how Derek got back into his apartment. Presumably through the window again, but he could have used the front door for all Stiles knew. He could have spent the day reading a novel and playing on Stiles’ iPad in bed next to him, and Stiles wouldn’t have noticed.

It took him four days to regulate his sleeping patterns again, but that was ok because Stiles was a champion at misusing energy drinks after years of college cram sessions (and by cram sessions he meant online gaming with ‘best partner a dude could ask for’). Which meant he was early to the office three days in a row after his week-o-horror aka dedication to the job. His boss was super impressed. Stiles was getting promoted for sure.

Day five, he was adjusting his tie in the horrible reflective patina over the elevator door as it opened, revealing Derek’s sister.

“I can’t tell if you’re a gentleman or a huge pussy,” Laura said with a smirk as he stepped into the elevator. “I do think congratulations are in order. I didn’t realize Derek could consider himself any more of an asshole than he already did. But he does, so...” she gave a series of three slow claps.

Oh crap, making Derek feel guilty hadn’t been Stiles’ intent at all. He should have known that was why Derek had froze when Stiles gave him the bro-nod on Friday.

His intent had been to not put Derek in a situation where he woke up with Stiles spooning him. Stiles had a habit of spooning with his entire body; with the same kind of enthusiasm he did everything, which loosely translated to clinging like a barnacle.
Derek was not ready for that. If that made Stiles a pussy, then so be it. Though that wasn’t what he would label it. Allison would murder him and then Lydia would find a way to bring him back to life, her own Frankenstein’s Monster, just to kill him again. Scott would probably yell, because he was more considerate than all of them, and understood that sometimes people made mistakes. “Don’t women consider pussy a derogatory term?”

“I don’t know, you tell me. I’m not the one who had a guy who looks like Derek in my bed and wasted the opportunity.”

Stiles took a moment to think about it. “Definitely derogatory.”

Laura flashed him a grin that was more shark than mammal. Jesus, she must be one good District Attorney. She was terrifying. “I like you,” she decided. “Derek doesn’t date.”

Terrifying and insulting. “People like me, you mean?”

“I’m not touching that, because there are multiple meanings I could take from it and not a single one really applies to this situation. Derek just doesn’t date, for many reasons, but he specifically doesn’t date people who are after him for his looks.”

“But...”

“Just a thought, Charles Bingley,” Laura finished, exiting the elevator.

“What does that even mean?” Stiles called after her.

A week later, Stiles was tired of this shit. He hadn’t even seen Derek, and he felt like he was being avoided. It wasn’t abnormal to not see Derek for weeks on end, but what Laura said to him in the elevator made this week particularly sensitive to Stiles’ sense of paranoia.

“Look,” he said, finally spotting Derek in a restaurant near his place of work around lunchtime on a pleasant April afternoon about two weeks after the last incident. He had pushed into the restaurant and was now standing in front of Derek’s table, fueled by indignation and not just a little bit of fear that he might never see Derek again if he didn’t fix this. “I’m kind of an octopus
sleeper, like the creature from Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea, I just latch on and never let go. I couldn’t wake you, and it was kind of important not to get punched in the face that week because I had to get in front of a camera for work, so to save us both bucket loads of embarrassment I made what was probably a foolish decision at 3 am after sleeping a grand total of eight hours over the three days previous. I was pretty high off exhaustion, so instead of poking you with a broom handle, or blasting music in your ear, or something a sane person would try, I just said fuck it to all the options.”

Derek was comically paused with his sandwich halfway up to his face, and an actually expression of panic flickering across his eyes.

Stiles turned and noticed his lunch date. “So if you could find it in yourself to forget about the whole thing, maybe you could also think about forgetting about me barging in on what is obviously a business meeting.” Oh shit.

Stiles was going to get Derek fired.

This guy looked mean. Like, meaner than Allison’s father and grandfather had looked on prom night when Allison announced that Scott had proposed and so they were getting a hotel room for the weekend. Meaner than Melissa had looked when she found out the hotel was paid for by her credit card.

Meaner than Derek.

“Why don’t you sit down, kid? Maybe you can interrupt more of our strategic planning with sage wisdom on the benefits of Facebook. That’s the thing these days?”

Derek was trying to telegraph something with his eyes, but Stiles wasn’t allowing himself get distracted from the face-off he was currently having.

“Actually, sir, my job does deal in social media.”

Derek deflated out of the corner of his gaze, like Stiles had just failed some test.

“I’m sure it does. We have a rule around here. If you interrupt the meal, you bought it. So sit down.”
Only, Stiles’ personal life might be in shambles because of his personality (see current situation with Derek), but his professional life was amazing because it worked with the intellectual and logical side of his brain (along with a good dose of bullshitting and manipulation). Stiles had this. “I don’t doubt that you think you can intimidate me into sitting, but here’s the thing: I’m one of the Junior Associates at Anderson, Joseph & Roth and my time is worth, oh about $300 an hour on an initial consultation, and yes part of what I do is on various online forums like Facebook, but more generally I’m brilliant at Public Relations. So I can take lunch with you, and you can draw me into your business talk, but in the end the bill you will be picking up will be more than the cost of a panini. Alternatively, you can take my card, and if you decide that my time and services are what you need, call my office and we will set up a meeting where the sole focus will be you and what I can do for your organization.”

Stiles wasn’t well-versed in Derek’s expressions yet, especially the ones he hadn’t seen before, but he suddenly had that intent focus back on him, similar to the look Derek had given him the first time they unofficially met in the park. It was like Derek’s world narrowed down to just Stiles, and Stiles shivered in response.

Great, Derek was glaring at him again.

Was he angry? Stiles didn’t think that was it.

“Derek,” Stiles nodded a farewell. “I’m sorry to interrupt.”

A couple of days later, Stiles spotted Laura getting out of a taxi in front of their apartment. It was a particularly soggy April day, the kind that chilled through your skin and into your bones, despite the thermometer claiming warmer temperatures than the week before. Stiles had made the mistake of resuming his relationship with his Converse sneakers (his one true love), despite the fact that the New York sidewalks were still grimy with a combination of slush and the remnants of whatever the city put down to combat ice. The scent of spring was in the air, but what it really smelled like was car exhaust and decay, so Stiles envied her getting a taxi around the supper hour.

Then he realized what an opportunity this was to talk to Derek’s sister again.

If Stiles could face down Derek’s boss, he could certainly face his sister.

Laura wasn’t having the last word this time, Stiles decided, hurrying into the building after her and stepping on the elevator before she could realize he was behind her and force the doors closed.
Not that Stiles thought Laura would. She seemed to find him amusing in ways he didn’t want to think of too closely. Derek might, though. Derek was that kind of asshole. Derek was probably the jerk who hadn’t held the elevator open for Stiles last year as he was dragging in three bags of groceries and a side table he found on the side of the street.

Laura just looked at him with her smirky face. He would have some choice words for her if she wasn’t Derek’s sister. Some very choice words. That he would utter while avoiding the elevator and climbing the stairs.

Stiles reached over and grabbed the phone right out of Laura’s hands before she had time to react.

“Hey!” she snapped, grabbing for her iPhone, but Stiles was kind of amazing at this game. If only he could be this brazen with girls at bars or that he actual had any kind of interest in that had nothing to do with making sure he had her contact information in case he had an emergency with her brother.

Not that Stiles had given any serious thought to girls in a while. He was beyond that point in his typical crush spectrum. He was in the process of breaking through normal and straight into obsessive territory.

Case in point: stealing Laura’s phone so she could have his contact number, and maybe pass it on to Derek if she had any kind of heart.

 Seriously, it took no time at all to type in his phone number, send a message to himself, and save the bare minimum to Laura’s contact list. Seriously, 25 keys or less, and Stiles had decently agile fingers if he did say so himself.

“Thanks!” Stiles responded cheerfully, handing her back her phone as his chimed in his pocket. “I suggest not deleting it out of spite, I’ll be sending test texts at random intervals just to make sure you know who I am. I’ll expect responses, or else I’ll put your number on PlentyOfFish.”

“I could change my phone number, asshole!” Laura called after him as Stiles exited the elevator.

“That seems like a lot of work,” Stiles called back, even more cheery. “Next time Derek sleepwalks into my apartment, I suggest you answer me.”
He saved her contact info to his phone as B*tch in Apartment 504, mostly because Stiles couldn’t resist a good pop culture reference, but also because Stiles had talked to Laura a total of four times and so far he didn’t see anything refuting the title.

He was pretty sure Laura had no heart.

x.x.x.x.

Contrary to all evidence, Stiles understood when someone gave signs that they might find him attractive. In his experience, just because a lapse in judgement might mean someone was displaying signs of wanting to tap that, that didn’t mean they did. It didn’t mean they liked him as a person. It didn’t mean they wanted to date him, it just meant that for a second they thought he might be fun in bed and Stiles had gotten good at ignoring that.

It was a bit complicated to receive those signs from Derek. The fact that for that one moment in the restaurant Derek wanted him, in front of a man Stiles assumed was his boss, was a bit difficult to ignore.

But Stiles was so far over the ‘normal’ spectrum now that he either wanted everything or nothing from Derek. Part of him knew it was going to be painful, and an even greater part of him knew that it was going to end in misery, with him alone for another decade if his crush on Lydia was any indication, but he didn’t care.

Early May the landlord turned the central heating off in the building.

Stiles rejoiced. Summer humidity was rapidly upon them.

Two days later there was a cold front that threatened snow, though luckily no precipitation actually fell.

Stiles thought his life fucking sucked. May was supposed to bring a shirtless Derek and instead it brought the very real possibility of Stiles developing frost nip on his toes while inside.

He skipped jogging for the day, curled up in his chair sipping a mug of hot chocolate with his bare
toes tucked beneath the hem of the Wonder Woman snuggie Scott gave him for Christmas.

He could really use the lasso of truth right now.

It was cold as balls. His toes were icicles. Couldn’t he just have one thing? One thing. That one thing was supposed to be shirtless Derek, but Mother Nature was a fickle and heartless creature.

His phone vibrated from his pocket, and he spent a few seconds digging it out through layers of material.

Speak of the devil and she shall text.

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

*He’s wearing your slippers.*

Oh?

OH.

Uhhoh.

Stiles grinned against his mug, shuffling his toes beneath the snuggie, actually grateful for the chill.

If his toe-shuffling became a full-body wriggle, no one was around to see it.

Less than three, Derek, he decided, feeling it was an acceptable risk to send as an answer back to Laura: <3

(Sorry Converse.)
If Derek asked to get into Stiles’ pants, Stiles would offer to let him borrow them

Lunch with Greenberg was a simple affair this month. Stiles didn’t have time to do much more than meet with him on a Thursday in one of the numerous restaurants between his office and the theatre Greenberg worked in.

For once, Stiles was able to dedicate his full attention to Greenberg, actually enjoying the break from work. For once, Greenberg seemed distracted, something obviously weighing heavily on his mind.

“It’s just – I really like cookies. You remember from the caf at BHHS, right? I would eat all the cookies. I was worse at university. Some days cookies were the only point of sustenance that looked palatable in the meal hall. And I miss that. Cookies haven’t been nearly as good when consumed in restaurants that provide edible food.”

“That’s... sweet,” Greenberg decided on.

Stiles frowned at him slightly, giving an exaggerated expression of confusion. “It’s not... well literally I guess cookies are... are you feeling ok?”

Greenberg ducked his head. “I’m fine Stiles.”

But Greenberg wasn’t fine. Stiles could tell. That’s what happened when you met someone in second grade and then was forced to grow old with them, and then you couldn’t even get rid of them at high school graduation because of Facebook and visits homes with increasingly infrequent ‘high school reunions’ which was just an excuse to party with the kids who went to different schools and the ones who got left behind, until the parties stopped because of uncompromising differences between the two groups and the fact that as the years passed less and less kids returned home for breaks.

Greenberg always had because he had three younger siblings and Stiles always had because of his dad and Scott. So Stiles had gotten used to meeting Greenberg in the mall at Christmas or during 4th of July fireworks.

That kind of peripheral exposure led to knowing other things, like the fact something was weighing heavily on Greenberg’s mind and he was gathering the courage to say something. It was the same
look he had before challenging Harris about his coaching tactics and the same look he had before asking Amy Gillis to the homecoming dance in tenth grade.

It was a look of nauseated hopefulness and the expectation of doom. If this was how Greenberg looked before auditioning for musicals, Stiles thought the other man was probably lucky he made chorus line.

It finally came to a head when they finished eating, Stiles slipping his credit card to the waiter before Greenberg could even pretend to want to pay. Stiles had a feeling he knew what this was about.

Greenberg took a deep breath, the breath of a man bracing himself for something, and Stiles waited for the inevitable. Greenberg was about to ask him for a loan, and Stiles wasn’t sure he was ready for that kind of commitment to their friendship. It was one thing to feed Greenberg once a month, but quite another to forge a tie based in economic solvency.

But he didn’t want Greenberg to end up homeless in NYC either, because then he knew what would happen. He’d get an unwanted roommate he would never be able to get rid of. It would be like that movie and that other movie. He’d come home from work and Greenberg would be doing plie in his underwear, or he’d go for the last of his imported beer and Greenberg would have drank it and replaced it with cans of Miller Lite, or Derek would sleep-climb in his bedroom window and Stiles would be spending an all-nighter in the office again and Derek would climb into bed with Greenberg...

And that was just unacceptable.

“Look...” Stiles started only to be cut off by Greenberg’s mouth over his. Greenberg’s hand was heavy on the back of his scalp, fingers digging through his hair, and his mouth was a hard, unpleasant press of lips. “umf hrrrm oomph.”

Greenberg pulled away, looking apologetic.

“What the hell!” Stiles expressed.

“Sorry Stiles, I thought maybe I could do it, but it turns out I can’t be gay, not even for someone as great as you.”
“What?” Stiles asked, now fully confused.

“You keep treating me to lunch and giving me gifts and I...” Greenberg turned away, ashamed. “I liked the attention. You know what it was like in High School, the only attention I got was negative attention. And here you are, and you knew that kid too and still wanted me, and I thought that maybe I could try... I’m sorry I lead you on for so long.”

Stiles had a lot of responses on the tip of his tongue. First and foremost was denial and repulsion, the urge to tell Greenberg that even if he was the last person on earth Stiles still couldn’t be attracted to him because he was Greenberg back in high school. Then he thought about everything Greenberg said and remembered how badly he needed acceptance back in Beacon Hills, and how he wasn’t the only one who got through those years and promised to never look back.

He had his dream job now, and so did Greenberg, and they were different people who overcame the same casual cruelty from the same people.

He thought about all the assumptions both of them had made.

So instead he clapped his hand over Greenberg’s shoulder. “It’s ok, Ben. I’ll see you again next month if it’s not too weird for you. Your treat?”

And when he walked away he felt like an adult.

It wasn’t a terrible feeling.

x.x.x.x.

Stiles woke up with a line of heat against his front, and Stiles broke off a groan, his lips pressed against someone else’s skin. There was hardly a space where his front wasn’t plastered against the warmth of another body and he turned his head to get a good look, heart beating soundly as hard muscles made miniscule shifts in response to his movement. He suspected he knew what was happening, but seeing was believing and all that.

It was a sight that did horrible, horrible things to his ability to separate a fantasy life of having Derek in his bed and the reality of their relationship, and he almost wished he hadn’t seen this because it was far, far more gorgeous and right than he had ever imagined it would be.
Derek was

Derek. All six feet and many, many pounds of pure unadultered sexy. All of it in his bed, trapped in his limbs like the jaw of a bear trap clamping down and not letting go. One of his arms was thrown around Derek’s shoulder, hand tucked beneath him, the other was curled around the small of Derek’s back. His legs were... well, his legs were in indecent places and he was more or less riding one of Derek’s thighs.

Why would he ever want to let go?

Stiles bit his tongue against another groan, working the hand beneath Derek’s shoulder free so he could roll off him. It wasn’t easy to do considering his fingers were numb, a sure sign that they had been in this position for a while. Once free, he flicked his wrist a few times, trying to regain circulation before he pressed his palm against the mattress next to Derek’s head and pushed. His knee inadvertently pressed into Derek’s kidney and he awoke with an “OMPH” as Stiles managed to dislodge himself and flop back onto his side of the bed.

“What the fuck,” Derek croaked, voice dry and craggy with sleep. His hand came up to rub his face as he squinted at the ceiling, wincing. “You weren’t kidding about the octopus thing,” he said wryly, yawning and throwing his arm over his eyes. “I think that was a kidney punch.”

Stiles wasn’t sure what it was he expected. Yelling, maybe? Derek falling out of bed in horror and shock?

Quiet acceptance wasn’t high on the list.

Adorable sleepiness definitely wasn’t.

Derek’s mouth opened in a yawn and blinked hazily as though he was still half asleep despite being rudely jarred out of it moment ago.

“Sorry,” Stiles said, also staring up at the ceiling. Light was beginning to filter through the window, casting smokey indigo shadows along the white paint. It would soon be time for him to get up for work, dawn quickly encroaching on his sleep time. “I didn’t hear you come in this time,” he said honestly in the direction of Derek’s bedroom rather than the man himself.
Derek was life-sized and real, warmth and heat, and a person. He was everything Stiles had ever wanted, and that everything was something Stiles could probably never have.

He tried to ignore how much this was like some of the post-orgasm situations he’d had throughout his life. Unfortunately, it was hard. Not a pun. He was literally so unbearably turned on that he was giving serious credence to the urge to just roll back over on top of Derek and ride out the potential embarrassment.

“I’m just gonna go,” Derek said after about five minutes of silence that Stiles could pretty much hear in the rhythms of their breathing and the minute shifting of limbs. Stiles was fidgeting with a loose thread on his comforter and Derek was mindlessly rubbing his sore side.

He reassessed. This was like the aftermath of really terrible sex where one of the partners wasn’t able to perform or prematurely ejaculated or made a really misplaced comment about the attractiveness of the other’s father.

“Yeah,” he breathed as Derek rolled off the bed in a graceful movement of limbs. This early in the morning Stiles had a 50/50 chance of falling out of bed. It was really unfair.

He watched from the corner of his eye as Derek left the same way he arrived: through the window and without a word.

Did it still count as getting off with someone when your bed was still warm from their body heat and you could hear their footsteps on the floor above you?

Because he might actually owe Derek dinner for this.

x.x.x.x.x.

Stiles got to work five minutes late, which wasn’t that big of a deal considering he usually arrived early enough that he had time to turn the coffee machine on before the rest of his floor started to filter in. He imagined that they all stared blearily at the lack of coffee before someone who stopped by Starbucks arrived and, freshly caffeinate, was able to solve the problem.
It wasn’t that he was incredibly early most mornings, Stiles’ department just happened to be made up of the Tweeters. Half of them were professional hipsters, and the other half were an eclectic mix of Whovians, computer science majors / communication majors with a huge chip on their shoulders for having to compose tweets all day, and one middle aged woman who was convinced Twitter was the path of the future and not a trend of the past.

Not a one was particularly good at getting out of bed in the morning.

Six months ago, Stiles had been one of them. Now he was their supervisor. He had his own office, his own accounts, and the eye of the higher ups for doing an exemplary job. Not that he was that high on the office totem pole at large, or even in this department. He just wasn’t the lowest, and considering he’d only been in the workforce for a year, he considered that mighty impressive.

The best thing about his job? No one blinked an eye to see someone consulting with their phone in the middle of the work day.

Which was good, because he kind of needed advice on Derek. If sleeping together was a thing that happened now, he didn’t know how to handle it. Stiles hadn’t slept with a lot of people where there was actual sleeping involved and none of the sex. The few times – college pass-outs on couches in little doggy piles, and childhood sleepovers with Scott – never had the wake-up possibility of accidentally dry humping someone. If that was a possibility, and looking at Derek’s everything Stiles thought it was a relatively small possibility, then he wasn’t sure what to label the chance Derek would sleepwalk into his bed and stay. Was it a sexy sleepover or not?

And how did he apologize for boner city if it wasn’t? How did he apologize for clinging to Derek like an iguana to a rock, like a teenage girl to her poster of One Direction, like the iratus bug to someone’s neck? Should he be making Derek breakfast?

Was that weird?

He kind of wanted to make Derek breakfast. Mostly to see if it would wig him out.

Was that weird?

He thought it might be.
So he texted everyone he could think to ask who might have advice on the subject.

For future reference, if you find a dude in your bed who wasn’t there when you went to sleep, is it acceptable to make him breakfast?

His dad: Were you drugged?

Worry was not helpful.

Allison: Haha, Derek? It’s getting serious between you and his sleepwalking persona. Some day you’ll accidentally marry him in Vegas.

Teasing was less helpful.

Greenberg: I’m glad ur getting over me, but please don’t waist yourself on one night stands. You deserve someone special.

Fucking Greenberg.

Scott: Breakfast? U shud buy him flowrs for wanting to wake up nxt to you.

Scott was inspired, Stiles realized.

Stiles should buy Derek flowers.

x.x.x.x.

Stiles had the phone number to a flower shop close to his apartment and their website pulled up in front of him.

Most importantly, he had a grin on his face.
Best idea ever.

“I’m playing a prank on a buddy of mine who accidentally climbed into my bed while drunk. What do you have that is garishly colourful?” he asked once the clerk picked up. He elaborated the story a little because, well, this one was a tad more believable than the truth.

Not that he thought she actually believed that story.

Stiles wasn’t ashamed of the sliding scale of his sexuality, but he knew a lot of people who were.

“We have the garden bouquet.”

“Hold on,” he said clicking the link. “No, too bland. I want something so colourful it is almost offensive.”

“We have the Zantedeschia bouquet,” the girl offered uncertainly.

“Oh my god!” Stiles said once the page loaded. “Those look like something right out of the Alien movies.”

“They’re very lovely in person.”

“No, no,” he assured her with a grin. “I’ll take that bouquet, and put in the creepiest flowers you can find. Do you have any that look like a penis?”

“Anthurium maybe? But it doesn’t really go with the bouquet.”

“Doesn’t matter!” Stiles answered, trying not to snicker. “Put some in. The more obscene the better.”

“Okaay.”
“Now, for the card. Give me your opinion on this. I want it to say: You’re a very silent bed partner. I didn’t even hear you come. In. Come in? What do you think?”

She actually thought about it. “Come in might defeat the purpose of the innuendo, but come isn’t subtle at all. How about ‘arrive’?”

“I didn’t even hear you arrive?” Stiles asked. “Grammar, perfect. Innuendo, not so much unless he secretly reads Harlequin romances. Would ‘come in bed’ work better?”

“Not grammatically?”

“I’ll sacrifice it. Read me what it says.”

“You’re a very silent bed partner. I didn’t even hear you come in bed.”

“Emphasize come, and sign it Stiles,” he finished with an evil snicker.

Hehehehehehehe.

“I don’t know if I want to invite you to be my new best friend or be glad that you’re not.”

“I know,” Stiles said with pride and set the delivery time.

He was the best.

He was home, doing his best not to outright laugh every time he looked upwards towards Derek’s apartment, when he received the text.

New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:

YOU SENT HIM FLOWERS
Stiles grabbed his phone and snickered in delight. *TELL ME EVERYTHING!* He sent back.

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

He scowled at the delivery girl as if they were from her. She told him Mr. Stilinski sent them. He grabbed them and gave her $$$

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

Derek hates tipping. I think he gave her a $20. He’s standing there frowning at them. He doesn’t know what to do. You broke his brain.

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

He just found the card. Just scowled and tore it up and threw it out with angry face. ˩:-[

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

You! You are my favourite. He just violently threw out the flowers with extreme prejudice and stalked out of the room then came back and dug them out

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

Ugliest obscenest flowers ever and they’re on the coffee table obstructing his view to the television and he keeps scowling at them

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

*I JUST DUG OUT THE CARD. OMG. If there was sex he’d be happier so did you really send him flowers for sleepwalking into your bed?*

Yes, Stiles beamed in pride, he really had.

After, it wasn’t that texting Laura became ludicrously out of control, it was just something that happened occasionally, mostly because Stiles could be equally as creepy as Derek.
It was only small instances, like:

_Nice shoes._

She was walking down the sidewalk carrying a pair of killer heels with a battered pair of sneakers on her feet.

_Do you need help? Text y for yes._

She had a stack of take-out containers balanced in her arms, the paper bag long-since disintegrated in the rain. When her phone vibrated she jumped, torso contorting slightly as she considered whether to check the message or not.

All it really served was proving that Stiles could be just as huge of an asshole as she was, but then he sometimes received texts from her too.

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

_Who told you bowties were a good idea?_

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

_Good luck getting a taxi during rush hour_

And his favourite

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

_At first I thought fleet week came early and then I realized it was you in a white tux. Prom night?_

Sometimes it worried Stiles that his relationship with Laura was developing while his not-relationship with Derek was at a standstill, but then he reminded himself that he had never sent Laura flowers and he had never woken up with her in his bed.

And he never would because his mind had firmly slotted Laura as a non-sexual entity. The same
as his mind had categorized Allison as rationally very attractive but not his type years before when Scott met her.

It was just the tiniest bit worrisome if he thought about it too hard, because then he’d have to admit why he thought of Laura as a sister, and he and Derek weren’t there yet.

At the rate they were going they wouldn’t be there in three years either.

When one lived in New York City, one learned to measure the passage of time not only through regular holidays and seasons, but also through New York events. Fleet Week, Fashion Week, various marathons, and the Macy’s Parade were examples of this, mostly because of the impact they could have on one’s ability to navigate the city, or the level of douchebaggery impact having so many fetishized professionals on one island could have on one’s coworkers.

He wasn’t just referring to the models.

So Fleet Week came and went without Stiles seeing or hearing from Derek, despite the hope that Derek sleepwalking would become more of a regular event.

He did, however, see a little too much of Laura one evening as she was stumbling out of cab with a fake sailor’s cap jauntily tipped over her brow at three in the morning.

Life went on, with or without Derek sleeping in his bed.

Of all the scenarios he came up with about the next time he saw Derek, and there were quite a few of them, mostly sexual in nature, he never would have guessed police station.

Except in his fantasies that Derek was a cop. Cite me up, officer, because I’ve been bad. There was one where Stiles was a stripper and...

That was actually enough of that.

Because the reality of the situation was anything but.
Stiles was the dancing queen.

No. No, that wasn’t right. That was a title that did not belong to him at all.

Greenberg was the dancing queen. Stiles was just a dancing handmaiden along for the ride.

That was possibly the gayest thing he had ever thought about himself, but then again he was in a club with the entire troupe of background dancers for Bring It On the Musical, so...

And he was seriously regretting the leather pants Lydia had talked him into buying and then Greenberg’s roommates had talked him into wearing, even as Greenberg tried to tell him it was a horrible idea, because leather in a crowded club while dancing was never a good idea.

It seemed that when Greenberg wasn’t worried about whether or not he was leading Stiles on, he was awesome!

Greenberg spun past him, giving Stiles a thumbs up as he grinded against one of Greenberg’s roommates. Kyle? Kenneth? Devin? It didn’t matter, because Kyle Kenneth Devin had a serious girlfriend back in Ohio and just wanted someone to mimic various obscene sex acts with in the name of dancing. Stiles could get on board that, since he was not-actually-taken, but actively-worried-Derek-would-be-in-his-bed-if-he-tried and one night stands didn’t hold much appeal.

He was down to his undershirt, half convinced the sheen of his sweat was rendering it semi-transparent, and unable to care considering his legs felt like he was actually wearing a dead cow, innards and all, and it was disgusting and hot all at once.

Kyle Kenneth Devin’s hand trailed up the side of Stiles’ waist as he leaned in and murmured, “God you’re gorgeous, I can see why Ben tried with you.”

And that was, well that was really fucking flattering. Or would be if Stiles wasn’t convinced he was being pitied for Greenberg ‘dumping’ him.
“CUM SHOTS!” Andrew yelled, carrying a tray of obscenely creamy shot glasses.

“No, stop!” Greenberg yelled. “We need to bodyshot these! Who volunteers?”

Seriously. Where was this kid in high school?

“Stiles!” Craig suggested, grabbing his arm and dragging him towards the table they had commandeered on arrival.

“Stiles! Stiles! Stiles!”

That was how Stiles ended up losing his last shirt, lounging across the sticky table as a cold shot of alcohol was poured into bellybutton.

“It’s cold!” he shrieked, laughing.

“Stop squirming!” Ben chided. “You’re terrible at this.”

“I have a great navel, I’ll have you know!” Stiles informed him primly.

Somehow, he was sure, that wasn’t the real beginning of the story that led to his arrest.

The sequence of events went something like this:

4:38 PM

“You’re young and hot, right?” His boss asked, coming into Stiles’ office without knocking. He may as well be back in the cubical for all his actual door mattered.
“Uh, is this going to lead anywhere that’s grounds for a sexual harassment suit? If not, I’m trying to finish this project before 5 so I can go home on time tonight. But if so, continue – I could use settlement money.”

“Big date?”

“Supernatural is on.” Stiles had never really cared about hiding his nerd. But then his boss told them all they were allowed one television show a week that they could use as a get-out-of-the-office free card. All in all, he was pretty glad Mr. Joseph never had gotten the hang of TIVO and had a Survivor addiction.

His boss scrunched up his forehead. “I thought that was on on Fridays. You used that excuse before and I distinctly remember it being on a Friday.”

“New year, new time,” Stiles said with a shrug. “You can check online if you want.”

“No, no, I believe you, but it just illustrates my point. I’m not young and hip. I’m not in the know. I need someone like you, Stilinski.”

This wasn’t going to lead anywhere good, Stiles realized with dawning horror.

“That club downtown – Copacetic? They’re looking to change PR representation and I’d like for you to go scope them out to see if they fit our image.”

Stiles froze. “Copacetic has fantastic representation already.”

“Crowley and Sons,” Joseph sneered. Then his face brightened. “They just got bought out with someone with a... how do I say this? Anti-progressive agenda. And if we can prove that we’re willing to take on some of their more salacious accounts, then more of their clients will jump ship.”

“That’s... you want me to go to Copacetic?” Stiles was still playing catch up, because Copacetic? Everyone had heard of it, but no one had ever been inside, as far as Stiles could tell. Getting in was like an urban legend – happened to a friend of a friend – but no one had actually entered the hallowed halls.
“Your name is on the list,” Joseph said, which usually would drive Stiles bonkers because his boss was taking liberties with Stiles’ free time again, but instead hit him with a rush of excitement he hadn’t felt the likes of since Christmas time when he was a child.

His name was on the list.

There was a list.

His name was on it.

Somewhere on the same list were names like Lady Gaga and Jennifer Lawrence.

His name was on the same list as Lady Gaga.

It took serious willpower not to flail.

“You’ll report everything back to me,” Joseph said, railroading through any possible denials Stiles could give him. “It’s almost a done deal, but I want to know that there aren’t huge landmines we’re about to step into. Never let it be said that Anderson, Joseph & Roth is not all about the gays.”

“No one says that, sir,” Stiles managed with a straight face. “Half our accounts are Broadway and Off Broadway.”

Joseph nodded as though that was right and just. “Damn right, we’re all about the gays.”

“Copacetic isn’t actually a gay club,” Stiles pointed out.

“That’s why I need you on this Stilinski. You know about these things.”

Stiles wasn’t entirely sure he wanted to know what that meant.
Stiles had no idea what to wear to Copacetic. He had narrowed it down to the stupid leather pants Lydia had strong-armed him into buying on her last visit, because those were suitably club-y, right? He wasn’t entirely sure, given that his usual clubbing was limited to nightclubs mere mortals could get into.

He needed someone with knowledge about these things and Lydia was on a week-long sexcation with her boyfriend. Or, Lydia said she was on a sexcation but Stiles had the worrisome impression she was playing around with CERN’s Large Hadron Collider and either the world was about to implode on itself or the mysteries of the physics world were about to be solved.

Either way, he still didn’t know what to wear to Copacetic. He couldn’t rely on a quantum vacuum collapse to solve all his problems this time. He’d used that excuse earlier this year.

“Ben!” Stiles said when Greenberg picked up the phone. “This is your night off, isn’t it? You know about dancing, right?”

“It’s my job,” Greenberg answered warily, because nothing good could ever come from Stiles calling you out of the blue. Everyone knew that. It was a fact that had been established back in grade school.

“I’m over you for sure, I’m crazy into someone else, and now that that’s out of the way, I need your advice on what to wear to Copacetic.”

“Your pyjamas are fine, Stiles,” Greenberg answered, exasperated. “Because there’s no way you’re getting into that club. No offense. Last week the star of Bring It On couldn’t even get in.”

“Kirsten Dunst? Eliza Dushku?”

Greenberg sighed, like this was something he had been over already. “Bring It On: The Musical. The musical I’m in? I’ve told you about it at least three times now.”

Stiles honestly had no idea how Greenberg had thought Stiles was interested in him. “I’m on the list.”
“You’re not on the list.”

“I’m on the list,” Stiles argued back.

“Stiles! You’re not on the list. Kirsten Dunst couldn’t even get on the list.”

“No, I’m serious. The PR firm that usually handles their account just got bought out by Mitt Romney or like a member of PETA or something and we’re going to take it over. I’m on the list and I don’t know what to wear!”

Greenberg was silent for a moment. “You need an entourage.”

“Is that a question or a statement?”

“Statement. I’m going to grab my roommates and we’re coming to you.”

“I can’t wear an entourage, Greenberg!” Stiles yelled into the dial tone. “That’s an accessory at best!”

7:56 PM

There was a fight over guyliner. Stiles lost.

9:00 PM

He had time to watch Supernatural, because no one went to clubs before at least 10:30 PM.

Thank god for Greenberg and his roommates. Otherwise Stiles would have gotten there before 10:30 PM and would have been immediately labelled as not cool enough, list notwithstanding.
Supernatural gave a good pause for the weird makeover montage that was his life now.

10:11 PM

Stiles put on his pants, shoved some cash in his pockets, and prepared for a wild ride of a night.

10:12 PM

“Don’t wear those pants, Stiles,” Greenberg warned.

2:43 AM

Stiles got arrested.

If asked, Stiles wouldn’t be able to remember exactly what happened after he put his shirt back on. He’d done some shots and the alcohol hadn’t helped him cool off in his pants, so he had gone outside, checking with the bouncer to make sure he could get back in.

(cool off in his pants sounded way sexier than it was. Sweat and leather were no one’s friends.)

He was leaning against the side of the building, legs spread in front of him hoping to get some air, when the cops showed up and -- this was the part he was fuzzy on considering his father was an officer of the law and Stiles might occasionally run his mouth, but he knew a little about due process and how to avoid arrest when there were no grounds -- he ended up in the squad car.

No, seriously. He wasn’t that drunk. He wasn’t sure he had ever been drunk enough in his life for this.

Stiles sat on the hard wooden bench behind bars and questioned all his life choices over the last
eight hours.

Nope, he still would have done it all.

Now, he just needed to call his lawyer.

He knew he should have helped her with those takeout containers.

x.x.x.x.x.

“Wha? Stiles?” Laura asked groggily. “What the fuck? Is this about Derek?”

“No,” Stiles answered quickly. “Yes. Listen Laura, I’ve been arrested and I’m at the 17th precinct. My ID is still at Copacetic with my friends, so I need you to get Derek to run down to my apartment and find ID. My passport is in the bottom drawer of my dresser.”

“Are you calling me because I’m a lawyer?” Laura asked, unimpressed.

“You’re the best lawyer I know.” Flattery was the way to go.

“How can I be the only lawyer you know?” she asked. “Manhattan bars are full of them. They’re usually the ones weeping into the 50 year old scotch they can’t afford.”

“I know lawyers,” Stiles answered sharply. “You’re the only one I would call, not that I could call.”

“That’s... actually flattering Stiles. Ok, I’ll be there. Listen, don’t piss off the cops ok?”

When had he ever?

His dad didn’t count.
By the time Laura arrived his legs had cooled off enough that he could feel them again, even if they were a disgusting moist cesspool. He was probably going to have to throw the pants out, possibly in a hazmat container. His stomach was a sticky mess of alcohol that was now dry and itchy, and his sweaty hair was sticking up in all directions from the way he kept impatiently running his fingers through it.

When he was led through the door of the interview room to find Laura on the other side he almost wept in relief.

Laura, however, took in his appearance with her mouth dropped open. She did not look relieved in the slightest. In fact, she looked suspiciously like she wanted to send him back. “Holy shit, Stiles! I just staked my reputation on the fact you’re not a prostitute and now that I’ve seen you, I can’t even say for sure that you’re not.”

“A... what?” Stiles skittered to a halt at the side of the table in shock. He needed to brace his hand against the top in shock, because he certainly hadn’t expected that. “I can’t be arrested for prostitution,” he said loudly.

“Maybe if you didn’t look like one!” Laura snapped and then looked slightly contrite about her outburst. “I swore to people I actually work with, Stiles. I said you were a good friend of mine. Promise me you’re not turning tricks!”

Stiles snorted with mirth, but it was based more in hysterics than actual humour as he slumped into a seat. “Did you really just say turning tricks? Of course I’m not! Why would you think that? Why would anybody think that?”

“Maybe if you were wearing a shirt people wouldn’t jump to conclusions!”

That was unfair to his undershirt. He’d seen far worse offenses in college peace rallies.

"I was wearing a shirt!" Stiles countered crossly. "I was wearing three!"

"Then where are they now?"
“Well I couldn’t very well take off my pants, now could I? And let me tell you, these things are like a sauna. I was just trying to get some air!”

“By lounging provocatively on a street corner!” Laura pointed out in her Derek’s-I’m-highlighting-what-I’m-saying-in-an-angry-manner voice. “That’s why you were picked up. This was just a scare tactic to keep you off the streets. We’d actually have a case for wrongful detention if this went anywhere.” She sighed. “They would have fingerprinted you and let you go, but at least you were smart enough to refuse and call me.”

“My dad’s a cop,” Stiles answered piteously, banging his head against the table. “Oh god, my dad. You can’t let them arrest me!”

“They can’t,” she assured him. “They’ve seen your ID so they’re not worried you’re a minor anymore, and they can’t arrest you for lifestyle choices.”

Stiles groaned. “No Laura, you don’t understand. I can't be officially arrested because then my dad will find out. He's a sheriff in a small town, I wouldn't put it beyond him to have an alert set up to notify him if my name ever comes up in the system, and if he finds out about this I will never hear the end of it. I literally will be hearing about this when I'm 60 and my first kid gets married and my father mentions to the new in-laws that the father of the bride or groom once got arrested for prostitution. You need to help me.”

“You weren’t arrested,” Laura assured him. “They don’t have enough to charge you. For that they would need actual proof,” she eyed his shirt, “and they can’t say for sure that any money exchanged hands for the sex.”

“What sex?” Stiles questioned wildly, tugging on his hair. “I haven’t had sex!”

She eyed him doubtfully.

x.x.x.x.

Derek was pacing when they emerged from the bullpen into the wait area. He froze when he caught sight of them, eyes widening as he took in Stiles.

“Are you hurt?” he growled at Stiles.
Which, rude. Stiles knew he looked like someone died and then rolled around on top of him, but he didn’t think it was that bad.

“No, he was picked up on suspicion of prostitution,” Laura informed Derek cheerfully. “I’m still not convinced it was a mistake.”

Stiles wasn’t entirely sure what was going on with Derek’s face.

“Stop telling people, Laura,” Stiles groaned. “I was at the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“You’d think the wrong place was someone’s dick,” Laura agreed, addressing Derek with a smirk. “But Stiles says it wasn’t. I don’t think he was even on his knees all evening. I have serious doubts he could bend over in those pants.”

Derek still had a face. It was still doing something, if by something Stiles meant Derek’s eyebrows seemed to be frozen in place staring somewhere in the vicinity of Stiles’ stomach.

Stiles idly scratched his stomach. “I swear to god, Laura. I saw what you wore out during Fleet Week, stop judging my clothes or I’ll bring up the zebra print.”

“Stiles,” she soothed. “Derek and I don’t care if you have wildly inappropriate sex in clubs and/or alleyways, we’re just insulted you didn’t take us to *Copacetic* with you. And I’m not judging your clothes, I’m judging the obscene mess dripping down the front of them!”

“What?” Stiles questioned, looking down at himself. “What are you—oh my GOD!”

**HOW HAD HE NOT PUT THAT TOGETHER?**

“Oh my god,” he said, rubbing at a stain down his crotch. “Oh my god. It’s just shots!”

Laura took a picture with her phone.
Laura was literally the devil.

“Just body shots!” Which was like saying “look, I didn’t cannibalize someone, I just stabbed them” on a morality scale, but Stiles seriously didn’t care because he didn’t want Derek to think he cannibalized someone’s dick – or, well it looked like he was the one who had their... no, he wasn’t going there.

“We’re not judging you, Stiles,” Derek finally spoke, not looking directly at Stiles. In fact, if anything, he was looking deliberately away from Stiles. “You’re right, we have no ground to stand on. Laura once got caught in a senator’s bed with his son.”

Laura gasped at her brother. “You did not just bring that up!” she yelled at him. “We’re still in front of the precinct! You... you... holy shit, you’re not perfect Derek but I cannot think of a single instance to bring up right now.”

“It’s seriously just a combination of schnapps and Baileys. You can taste it if you want!”

“Ew, Stiles!” Laura exclaimed, but she was laughing.

“Seriously! I wouldn’t be so vehement if it was just sex, but I haven’t had sex in like – oh god, since last July, and I think you should know that...” he trailed off, because oh no.

Oh no.

He had just basically admitted to Derek everything.

“That’s sad,” Laura agreed, “and boring. Thank god the taxi’s here.”

x.x.x.x.

The taxi ride home was comprised of stony silence. Laura seemed to be wilting in exhaustion and Derek was... equally as unimpressed that Stiles dragged them both out of bed to come bail his ass
out of jail.

Part of Stiles thought Derek deserved this for all the uncomfortable things he’d put Stiles through, and then slept for the duration of.

Derek deserved all the discomfort.

More discomfort than Stiles was currently going through with these leather pants.

Derek deserved all the discomfort in the pants.

“I don’t understand,” Stiles finally expressed, airing his confusion. “Who would pay for a piece of this? I can’t even get people to want it for free.”

Derek snorted. Then he brought his fingers up to pinch the bridge of his nose, shoulders shaking.

It took Stiles a good moment to realize Derek was laughing.

Stiles pouted, crossing his arms across his chest and facing out the window.

“It’s seriously not funny Derek.”

Derek. Wouldn’t. Stop. Laughing.

“It’s not like I’m deformed or anything. Someone even called me hot tonight, though it might have been a pity compliment. But seriously,” Stiles picked at his shirt. It was a stiff mess over his stomach, one step away from crunching at his touch. So gross. He was never letting anyone do cum shots off his stomach... oh, this was Greenberg’s fault, Stiles decided. He should have known Greenberg was trying to get him laid. Joke’s on you, Greenberg! “I’m not exactly a walking sex advertisement.”

Derek practically howled.
Stiles gave him a sour look.

“Oh,” Laura said quietly from between them.

x.x.x.x.

Stiles was in for another surprise when he got home and got a look at himself in the mirror.

Holy Shit.

He looked *wrecked.*

*HOLY SHIT I LOOK LIKE A PROSTITUTE AND NOT EVEN THE EXPENSIVE KIND* he texted to Laura.

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

*Don’t be so hard on yourself. Those pants are real leather. You’re AT LEAST a prostitute who can afford nice things.*
Stiles, Everyone Will Judge You After This

Stiles was decently secure in his looks. He knew that he was attractive, with a great mouth, hands with long fingers that sometimes led people to distraction (he was told his fingers weren’t the only long thing that drove people to distraction). He was smart, funny, made decent money, and when he loved, he loved with his entire being.

In short, Stiles was a catch.

Derek. Derek was the type of GQ motherfucker who made Stiles feel insecure. He didn’t mind entirely because he figured a man would need to be the Dos Equis man not to feel a tiny bit unsure of himself next to Derek.

Because Derek was perfect.

Stiles wasn’t just talking about Derek’s face or abs.

He didn’t really care anymore that Derek even had abs, because Derek laughed like it caused him pain, frowned like his face was stuck in that expression, and asked Stiles if he was ok when everyone else avoided looking directly at him.

Stiles was sitting on the patio part of his favourite bakery, people watching as he read a book, an actual book, made with paper. He would consider it low-tech if he wasn’t also toying with his iPhone, texting, listening to music, and browsing the internet all at the same time.

He kind of loved technology, ok?

He was enjoying a bagel and the warm sun, sipping at an iced coffee, when he heard a familiar sarcastic laugh.

Laura.

He had his phone in his hand, anticipating what snarky thing he could say to her this time as she walked past his line of sight. Maybe he could make her wonder if her new haircut was nearly as
flattering as she thought it was (it was), or... no, he wouldn’t go so far as insult her weight. He’d learned from that mistake when he was in grade school, ok?

He froze when he noticed Derek was with her.

Oh my god.

He’d seen Derek in jeans before.

Surely.

Surely.

But he was pretty sure he hadn’t seen Derek in those particular jeans before, because Derek’s ass had never looked so good. Stiles had followed that ass around a lot, he would know.

Before he could think better of it, he opened the text conversation with Laura and sent: *Tell Derek his ass has never looked as good as it does when he’s standing next to you.*

Let her figure out that one, he thought giddily as he watched Laura fish her phone from her bag.

She scowled at the screen and looked around.

She spotted him almost immediately, considering he was about seven feet away from her. Laura’s eyes narrowed and Stiles grinned and waved at her.

“Stiles says that your ass has never looked so good,” Laura said sweetly in an overly loud voice.

“What?” Derek asked, grabbing the phone in her hand and turning it towards him. “You have Stiles’ phone number? You text Stiles?” He scrolled up. “You text Stiles a lot.”
Judgemental.

_Maybe if I had your number I would text you commentary on your ass directly_, Stiles sent.

Derek’s eyes narrowed at Laura’s phone and he turned her wrist at an even sharper angle to get to the touch screen.

“Ow, ow, stop it Derek, ow, ow,” Laura said as she turned to accommodate him.

“Let go of your phone,” Derek growled in return.

“Are you kidding?” She asked. “The last time I let go of my phone you saw one of my sexts and accidentally dropped it down a sewer grate.”

**New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:**

_Where are you?_

Stiles snorted at the message, enjoying the sibling dynamics in front of him. Laura and Derek were all the entertainment he needed, but he still held his book up, putting it between himself and their bickering. Derek’s eyes narrowed as he dropped Laura’s wrist and he looked around carefully, eyes landing on Stiles sitting on the sidewalk patio.

Stiles grinned at him and pushed his sunglasses up on top of his head to watch Derek approach, enjoying the swagger the jeans seemed to bring out. Or maybe that was anger?

Derek loomed over him and swooped in, grabbing Stiles’ phone off the table.

“By all means,” Stiles said with a gesture as Derek stole his phone. “Take my phone, I’m not risking my wrist,” he flexed his hand. “I’ll need this baby later.”

Derek punched at the touch screen a tad too hard for comfort with his fingers, despite seemingly understanding the Apple OS enough to navigate it efficiently. Some cretins just weren’t made for touch screens.
“Do you want half of my bagel, too?” Stiles offered, gesturing towards the raisin bagel with both cream cheese and strawberry jam on top of it.

Derek actually made a face at him. It was a judgemental turtle-face, and Stiles wasn’t sure he had seen it before, which actually said something about his relationship with Derek Hale.

“Here,” Derek grunted, tossing the phone back onto the table where it clattered ominously against the metal bistro table.

“Hey! Have some respect!” Stiles sniped, grabbing his phone in protective hands. It was still open on the page where Derek put in his new contact information, filling in only the phone number field.

“You can text me now,” Derek growled.

But was that hope on his face?

Stiles was taking it as hope as he typed in a new text that said ‘Turn and face me or I’ll save your contact image as a pic of your really fine butt.’

“I will,” he promised with a smile out loud, finger waiting to press send.

Derek leveled him with a look.

“All the time,” Stiles continued blithely. “It won’t ever stop.”

“He really won’t!” Laura called out in her best ‘you’re an idiot’ voice.

Derek turned back towards her and Stiles pressed ‘send’ on the text he composed, hoping that Derek had his phone on him or else the line would be a pretty foolish first text.

Derek didn’t move towards his pockets, nor did he give any indication he heard the incoming text.
Honestly, wasn’t that a staple for these kinds of exchanges? Turning your phone on so you could receive the first flirty text?

Derek must be new at this, Stiles decided, taking a picture of his ass as he walked away. As if he wasn’t going to. Even if he had a phone full of ass pictures – which he certainly did not – Derek’s would be immediately recognisable.

He’d put in the time memorizing it, ok?

Then he looked down at Derek’s contact info, fingers moving to put ‘Derek’ into the field. But. But. He rarely put actual names into his phone. He had Beam Me Up Scottie, Allison My Aim Is True, O’Father-mine, Greenberg, and of course, Laura’s. He wanted to put Derek’s name in as Derek because it showed a bit of respect that wasn’t present in the others.

But he was worried SIRI might judge him for not giving Derek a fun nickname.

SIRI might know how he felt about Derek, even when others didn’t catch on.

He needed to give Derek a fun nickname.

He needed to give Derek a fun nickname because Derek had just given him his number.

Derek had just given him his number.

Holy shit.

His brain buzzed to a halt. He had Derek’s number. He looked up to see if Derek was still in sight, the urge to chase after him and ask why it was important for Stiles to have his number suddenly a very large pressing concern in his life.

Derek was out of sight, so Stiles was only left with his phone and half a bagel, and a blank space where Derek’s name should go.
Godly Jogger?

No, that wasn’t how he saw Derek anymore. Derek was so much more than the guy in the park. He was also the Creeper Sleep[walk]er.

Maybe that could be his name?

Only, what if Derek saw that Stiles had labelled him as a creeper? He didn’t care if Laura saw she was a Bitch, mostly because Laura was a Bitch (and he had the sneaking suspicion that she saved him as Asshole). Derek might not appreciate being labelled by his sleepwalking considering how defensive he got about it.

So not sleepwalking, not jogging, what else did Stiles really know about Derek? Stuff. But nothing that really lent itself to a really great phone name, because Derek deserved the best.

So much better than Stiles could give him, really.

x.x.x.x.x.

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me

I like those pants. They fit well.

What did that mean? Stiles scowled at his phone. That seemed genuine. He didn’t understand genuineness. It didn’t compute to his standard language of sarcasm.

You’re doing it wrong. Laura is queen of backhanded compliments. ‘Your shirt leaves something to be desired’ for example.

Then he added But thanks for the compliment.

x.x.x.x.x.
Stiles owed Laura for more than the legal save.

He owed Laura for not putting the picture she took up on Facebook.

They were Facebook friends now.

As far as he could tell, Derek did not have a Facebook, but he spent about three hours on a Saturday afternoon going through the last seven years of her pictures. It seemed like Laura had been at Columbia back when Facebook was a bit of an inclusive club. There was photo evidence.

Then there wasn’t. Then there was a span of about three months where photos of Laura at parties just stopped.

Stiles was very aware of what happened around that time. He’d forever associate the cold winter months with Derek’s first sleepwalking adventure, and seven years ago Derek would have been at least a year and a half into his undergrad, and Laura would have been almost finished hers.

And that was why they weren’t home, potentially in the same car their entire family had been driving in when they died.

Facebook sometimes told a little too much of the truth, because after that point, there were suddenly pictures of sullen Derek in the background, which made Stiles think that Derek hadn’t even been in New York City before his family became just he and Laura. He couldn’t help but continue going through picture after picture, surprised when the apartment building they were currently living in started popping up as a setting.

How long had they lived here? It seemed to Stiles it might be since their family died, and there was something a little heartbreaking about Laura and Derek moving in together because they were all the other had, and staying together for the same reason.

It was far too much information for Stiles to take for granted just because he thought he had it pieced together.

The point was, Laura had the means to post the picture of him from the police station online where his friends, his dad, and everyone he ever met could see it. Sure, he could untag himself, etc, but she hadn’t even brought up the threat. Luckily, Laura didn’t know anyone else in his social circle,
but he really wouldn’t put it past her to research him in return, figure out Scott was his best friend, befriend Scott, and show Scott the picture.

Scott would make sure everyone he knew saw it, even if he had to physically show them using his phone. Even if he had to drive home for a weekend.

Even if he had to fly to MIT to show Lydia.

Stiles actually couldn’t say for sure that wasn’t happening.

But he felt he owed Laura anyway.

He got his chance as he waited for the elevator bright and early one morning, a travel mug clutched desperately in his hand, not because he was conserving the environment – he’d need 3 travel mugs to equate to the size of the coffee he usually ordered from Starbucks – but because he promised his dad he would try out a new caffeine-free cleanse his dad had found in a magazine. He hadn’t even understood half the ingredients and the clerk at the health food store had been really judgemental as he explained it all to her while drinking his last Starbucks Venti.

He couldn’t quite bring himself to take a sip. It smelled like stewed manure and he was hoping that once it cooled down a bit, the mint leaves kicked in.

1. Stiles was sure this was payback for the war he had been waging against his father’s cholesterol level since ninth grade
2. Stiles was sure this was payback for the twenty miles of running they did a week. As if the act of running wasn’t bad enough
3. Since when did he dad even read the kind of magazines that had caffeine-free cleanses? He was half convinced that it came from a female fitness magazine and the reason it helped cleanse caffeine was because it boosted estrogen
4. He felt that was just his luck, not getting to drink coffee and on top of that potentially growing boobs.

At least something was looking up, he decided, upon hearing voices coming through the elevator shaft.

“I’ve tried everything, but his insubordinates are blackballing me. I wouldn’t ask, but I fear this kid really was wrongfully arrested and if I can just talk to the Captain...”
“Laura!” Derek’s voice was clearly annoyed. “I don’t have the kind of contacts it would take to get you in, especially not at the last minute. You have a better chance of finding a way on your own. Go as someone’s date!”

“But you’ve met the Commissioner!” she insisted stubbornly.

“Hey guys!” Stiles greeted cheerfully as the elevator doors opened. They both fell silent as he came into sight, not something he entirely took offense at. “Nice morning. I love spring!”

“It smells like you’re having it for breakfast.” Laura sneered once the doors closed on the three of them.

“Bluureuugh,” Stiles made a vomiting sound, giving a mock-shudder as he stared down at the travel mug. “That bad?”

“That bad,” Derek reaffirmed.

“I promised my dad I would give up coffee. So far I’ve made it,” Stiles looked at his watch. “Fifteen minutes. I don’t think I’m going to make it another fifteen.”

“I would judge you for a lot of things,” Laura promised him, “including drinking that, but I would never judge you for coffee habit.”

Laura so secretly judged him. This was the second time she had brought up judgement in a conversation with him the last three times he saw her.

“Bless your judgemental heart,” Stiles sniped as he stepped out of the elevator with the singular goal of finding a coffee shop between his apartment and work. It shouldn’t be too hard, he had actually graphed them out his first month in New York City. Accounting for busy intersections and popularity versus taste, there were about twenty-seven of them in the six block walk. “Good talk, Derek.”

The thing was, Stiles kind of knew what Laura was talking about. He kind of knew because *Anderson, Joseph & Roth* handled some of the PR for the New York City Policeman’s Ball
fundraiser because they handled the PR of the location it was being held at.

By ‘kind of’ he meant that he had never even seen a glimpse of the account. Anderson handled it himself, the event being kind of a big deal.

A huge deal.

So huge of a deal that if Stiles even somehow obtained tickets for Laura to crash it so she could harass a police force Captain and it was discovered that Stiles was the one who did it, he could actually lose his job.

The question wasn’t whether he could get the tickets. The question was whether he wanted to.

In the end, the idea of impressing Derek with his resourcefulness was the deciding point.

His idea of cooking might be one step away from ordering take-out, and his idea of hunting might be finding the number for take-out, but Stiles had his own way of providing.

x.x.x.x.x.

“Hey,” Stiles said when Derek opened the door. Derek looked momentarily surprised to see him, then he moved closer so the door wasn’t between them. Stiles was really glad Derek opened the door because it was nice to see him one-on-one sometimes. He knew for a fact that Derek worked, but he’d never really found evidence of it. “I have something for you.”

“Me?” Derek seemed to relax, leaning against the door jamb as he waited for Stiles to continue.

“Tickets!” Stiles said with a flourish, presenting them with a flick of his wrist – like magic – and spreading them so Derek could see there were two of them.

“Tickets,” Derek repeated. There was a hint of a smile at his mouth.

Ah, Derek knew what was coming, then. Stiles felt less like a complete and utter eavesdropper
secret-Santa now. “Yeah, you know I overheard you and Laura in the elevator this morning, and my firm does all the promotional material for the ball and I just made sure I scored a couple. It sounded really important to her, so here.” He pushed them towards Derek.

“For Laura?” Derek asked flatly, straightening his posture and eyebrows furrowing in disbelief. “You got tickets to the Annual Policeman’s Ball for Laura.”

Not a question. Wow, Derek was touchy today. It looked like Stiles miscalculated and Derek considered this his toes being stepped on, and then the pulpy remains ground into the floor under Stiles’ heel. It wasn’t Stiles’ fault he was better connected than Derek was at whatever job Derek did for this one thing. He was sure Derek was connected to – whatever? He’d figure out Derek’s job one day. “And you too, if you want them. Or Laura and a date,” Stiles shrugged. “I don’t care. She seemed to indicate that it was crucial that she go, for a case, and my dad’s a cop so I get how someone in the DA’s office might use a Ball like this to their advantage, so just tell her to do me a favour and not tell anyone they came from me.”

“Why don’t you go with Laura and tell her yourself.”

Still not a question. A really hostile, not a question-mark-in-sight question.

....With eyebrows furrowed like angry black wings towards him. Stiles always hated crows and it looked like Derek hatched one over his eyes.

“Whoa,” Stiles said, backing up a step and eyeing Derek like he was a crazy person. “Why would I want to go with Laura? Or why would Laura want to go with me, for that matter? I clean up ok, but she can do so much better, especially if she takes you along. The weirdness of you being her brother is way, way overshadowed by your extreme hotness. I’ve seen you in a suit, Derek Hale, and no one would mistake you for a member of the catering staff. Whereas,” Stiles gestured to himself.

“I’ll see you there,” Derek nodded. “I won’t ask for canapés.”

Ha. Ha.

“Why would you see me there?” Stiles asked, slapping the door back open as Derek tried to close it on him like the graduate from Oscar the Grouch’s Finishing School for Manners that he was. “I just gave you my tickets. The only permutation of this where we both get to go is if you forget
about Laura wanting them entirely and take me as your date. And that would be idiotic, because Laura was the one who wanted them in the first place.”

“Idiotic,” Derek repeated.

Agreed?

His eyebrows were back at glowering as he moved to close the door again. Stiles was not having a wrestling competition over a door with someone who had biceps like Derek.

“Hold on, I just gave you a gift!” Stiles said loudly, displeasure evident in his tone as he moved to shove his foot in the doorway. “Do you have no manners at all?”

“You just gave my sister a gift,” Derek snarled, slamming the door in Stiles’ face.

“Fuck your sister and fuck you too!” Stiles yelled through the door. “Have fun wearing a monkey suit, because you were raised by wolves. By wolves.” Stiles paused. That didn’t make as much sense as it did in his head. “And wolves eat monkeys!”

That made less sense.

He was just going to leave now.

What the hell was Derek’s problem, anyway? Stiles fumed as he stomped back down to his apartment. They were getting along, then they weren’t getting along, then there was maybe flirting, and then they were yelling at each other.

Stiles tried to sketch out the conversation, but it didn’t help.

He had no fucking idea where he went wrong. It was baffling.
An atypical conversation between Stiles and Allison went something like this:

“Hey girlfriend, is boyfriend home?”

“Stop saying it like that, people might think we’re a threesome.”

“Aren’t we an emotional threesome?” Stiles asked.

Allison sighed. “Ok, what did you do this time?”

“Well, say you like this guy...?”

“Derek AKA Godly Jogger AKA the weird sleepwalker guy AKA the guy you’ve been obsessed
with for about a year. Yes. Let’s say you like this guy. You can do it, Stiles.”

“I like Derek,” Stiles affirmed. “Now, say I just brought a gift upstairs for Derek and got a door slammed in my face.”

Allison sighed again. “Was it a gag gift?”

Stiles thought about that. Fair question. “No, it was a genuine gift.”

“What was it?” she asked curiously.

“Tickets to this event that is really difficult to get tickets to.” Stiles answered, looking in his freezer for something easy to make.

“Ohmigod!” Allison shrieked in delight. “You got him tickets to something! More than one?” she asked slyly.

“Well, yeah, they were for his sister. So one for him and one for Laura.”

“They were for his sister,” Allison repeated flatly.

“Why does everybody keep saying it like that!” Stiles answered in frustration.

“I think you need to reflect on your life choices, Stiles,” Allison answered him, entirely genuinely.

“I did it for him!” Stiles answered hotly, wondering if frozen cookie dough was a viable meal.

“If you’re going to do something for a guy, do something for him. I think you owe Derek flowers again.” Then she made a slight snickering sound and tried to cover it up, because everyone thought Allison was a sweetheart but she was actually kind of mean sometimes.
“Well, it was a twofer, I wanted to help Laura out too. Ok, mostly it was Laura.”

“Do you like Derek or do you like Laura?”

“Derek!” Stiles answered hotly. “I’ve always liked Derek. I will probably like Derek until the day I die.”

“Oh Stiles,” Allison answered, empathetic, because of course she understood him enough to know he wasn’t being overly dramatic. “Then show him.”

Stiles still didn’t understand. Wasn’t that what he had done?

x.x.x.x.x.

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me

I found you here *picture attached*

That’s a member of the wait-staff, Stiles sent back with a grin. Home in my pyjamas. Wish you were here. *picture attached*

x.x.x.x.x.

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me

Turn off the music.

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me

I’m not joking Stiles.

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me

I’m not joking Stiles. Turn off the music.
New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me

You Don’t Bring Me Flowers is a classic. Have some respect.

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me

Don’t play it between Take it Off and SIR MIX-A-LOT

I’m impressed you recognised any of those, Stiles wrote back as he pressed ‘next’ on his iPod dock. Can You Feel the Love Tonight started playing and Stiles scowled, turning the machine off.

x.x.x.x.

New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:

Laura’s Legendary Partay this weekend. Saturday night. Be there.

x.x.x.x.x.

3 AM

Derek was still awake. Stiles knew, because he couldn’t sleep either, and every time Derek got out of bed to do push-ups, he could hear it.

Do you ever get tired of ppl asking you rhetorical questions and you don’t know if they are rhetorical questions or not?

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me

Go the fuck to sleep.

You too.
A typical conversation between Stiles and Allison went something like this:

“At your 3 o’clock.”

“Shoot. Shoot.”

“Nooooo, to the left. TO THE LEFT.”

“A FRAG STILES!”

“MOTHERFUCKER. GET DOWN. GET DOWN.”

“DON’T TELL ME WHAT TO DO. I DO WHAT I WANT.”

"OH FUCK, No no nonononononono I'm STUUUUU- FUCK!”

“IDIOT.”

“HOLY SHIT YOU ASSWIPE. LET’S SEE YOU DEFLECT THAT IN PERSON YOU UGLY PIECE OF SHIT. I HAVE THE SKILL OF HAWKEYE AND THE KILLING DRIVE OF BLACK WIDOW, AND THIS WOULDN’T EVEN PUT RED IN MY LEDGER BECAUSE I WOULD BE DOING THE WORLD A FAVOUR.”

“Jesus I love you.”

“Keep it in your pants Stilinski.”

“EEEUGH NO YOU DON’T, YOU UGLY ARKANSAS PIECE OF SHIT. I SEE YOU THERE MOTHERFUCKER.”
“I just heard something.”

“The sound of us winning,” Stiles answered cockily.

“No, I think Scott is home. WHY WON’T YOU DIE!?”

“Scott’s not – YEAAAH EAT BULLETS!!”

Scott’s voice: “What is this? Is that Stiles? Are you playing with Stiles?”

Allison was silent over the line. Stiles winced, exiting the game. Well won, Arkansas. Well, Scott probably was going to find out eventually that Allison and he played sometimes and that Allison was kind of the perfect partner. “No need to make it sound so dirty, buddy.”

“ARE YOU CHEATING ON ME?” Scott yelled helplessly. “WITH MY WIFE?”

Ouch. He really wasn’t. If anything, he felt bad for Allison every time he played with Scott. “No Scott, of course not. If anything I’m cheating on Allison with you. Who do you think is getting the high scores?”

“But my character has always gotten high scores.”

“Uhm...”

“How long?”

“Since high school.” Allison answered decisively.

“Yeah, pretty much since you created the Allison Avatar.”
“Oh my god I feel so betrayed right now.”

He forgot about the party, feeling sorry for himself after Scott hung up the phone, probably to go sex up Allison, because it would be just like Scott to love Allison for even her secrets and stay mad at Stiles at the same time.

Stiles seemed to be unwittingly messing everything up this month, he realized, staring at his ceiling. The noise from upstairs was getting louder, now in Derek’s room, and it churned his stomach to think of what Derek could be doing up there with any one of Laura’s beautiful coworkers.

Feeling immensely sorry for himself and needing the kind of quiet that one could only achieve in New York City by embracing the noises outside his window, Stiles grabbed a bottle of Scotch he had bought for the weekend he got his promotion, the weekend Scott was supposed to come visit to celebrate, and it had never happened, and went outside.

Drinking on a fire escape was 100% the stupidest idea he had all month, he decided. It would be just his luck (and his fault) if he got drunk, fell off, and died.

It was probably karma for not keeping his father’s cleanse.

He was just settling down into a seated position, when he noticed legs hanging off the edge of the ledge above him, bare feet dangling in his face.

Derek’s maybe?

So Stiles went to investigate, carefully climbing up a level to find Derek sitting with his back to his bedroom window.

“My sister is having a party,” Derek said as Stiles sat next to him on the metal shelf.

“I can tell. You’re not a secret party animal, are you? It’s weird, but I picture you as the keg stand
“I’m the life of the party,” Derek informed him, deadpanned.

Stiles snorted. “Yeah, and that’s why you’re sitting out here.”

“Yes. The real question is why are you sitting out here with me? Aren’t you here for Laura’s Legendary Partay?” Derek managed to say without sounding very sarcastic.

Not very.

“If I was here for Laura’s party I would have come in through the front door,” Stiles assured her. “With the adult equivalent of beer and Doritos. What’s the adult equivalent of beer and Doritos?”

“Wine and a cheese plate,” Derek answered without hesitation. “But this is the first kind of party so long as you brought good beer.”

“Good to know, but I’m not really in the mood to party right now, so even if I did enter through the front door I probably still would have ended up with you,” Stiles told him, leaning back and staring towards the sky. It was a bit difficult to see the stars, considering there were still the fire-escape stairs up to the roof above them, and then light pollution would have made it a challenge in the city anyway. “Have you ever just had one of those months where everything you did was with good intentions, but somehow it all went wrong anyway?”

“No,” Derek told him. “Or was that rhetorical?”

“No,” Stiles was gaining momentum now. “Because my best friend thinks I’m cheating on him with his wife, and the idea of social interaction makes me tired, but the thought of sleeping seems impossible.”

“You’re having sex with your best friend’s wife?” Derek actually seemed surprised. Which was nice, Stiles guessed.

“Whoa, who said anything about sex? And besides, that’s not what I said. I said my best friend
thinks I’m cheating on him. With his wife.” Stiles gave Derek a moment to let that sink in. He still didn’t seem to get it, if his frown was anything to go by. Stiles wasn’t convinced that it wasn’t his default expression. “She and I have been playing this multiplayer online game behind his back for years. We’re pretty good at it, she’s a much better partner. He just feels betrayed right now because he thought it was he and I getting the high scores.”

“That’s... possibly the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“I know! Who doesn’t notice how badly they suck at a game and then sees how high his Avatar ranks nationally and thinks ‘I did that.’” Stiles placed the Scotch on the ledge beside him, not as interested in drinking anymore. “So my month has been kind of a drain.”

“Lack of caffeine?”

“Heh,” Stiles snorted. “That lasted about three minutes after I met you in the elevator.”

“Congratulations,” Derek said with what sounded like sincerity but had to be sarcasm. “You gave up coffee for a whole twenty-two minutes.”

“I never could get the hang of denying myself something I really wanted,” Stiles answered, and it sounded a little like a warning.

“I never could get the hang of Thursdays,” Derek offered, leaving Stiles to snort with laughter, curling up on his side on the metal ledge, staring at Derek.

Derek making jokes.

Because he was perfect.

“I think people are having sex in your bedroom,” Stiles told him.

Derek grimaced. “That wouldn’t surprise me. It happens at Laura’s parties, I might need to buy a new mattress set.” He paused and looked at Stiles intently. “That reminds me that there was something I wanted to talk to you about.”
“Me?” Stiles asked, heart suddenly pounding because Derek wanted to talk to him about something. Something sex reminded him of.

Oh yeah.

Or, he was going to ask for his chair back. One or the other.

Stiles looked back at Derek with interest, but Derek was kind of studiously avoiding his gaze now, looking at the bottle of Scotch over Stiles’ shoulder.

“Stiles, I... Laura likes sex,” Derek finished with.

“OKaaay,” Stiles trailed off in horror, because he had no idea where this conversation was going, but it felt horribly awkward to be talking about the sex life of someone he had sisterly feelings towards with her actual brother. Derek didn’t even seem as horrified by it as Stiles did.

“She does sex easily, but never relationships....”

Get the conversation off Laura, Stiles’ common sense was telling him. Screaming at him. “What about you?” Stiles asked.

“Me?” Derek questioned, thrown. He finally looked back at Stiles’ face intently, checking for something Stiles wasn’t sure of. “I don’t do relationships easily either, or casual sex.” Derek’s brow was definitely furrowed now. “It isn’t a problem with either of us, it’s just what we enjoy.”

Stiles wasn’t going to get into what issues Derek or Laura might have. “I wasn’t criticizing. Personally, I could go either way, but I’m less likely to enjoy the idea of casual sex if there is a possibility of something meaningful in my life.”

“I know... I mean, I’ve noticed. Laura... Laura will never be meaningful. Back. To you.”

Wait. What?
“I don’t like Laura!” Stiles denied vehemently.

“You got her tickets,” Derek started with confusion.

“The tickets!” Stiles exclaimed throwing his hands up. “It keeps coming back to the tickets! They were to thank her for bailing me out of jail!”

Derek frowned at him. “You text her all the time.”

“I think she’s funny. Seriously Derek, I’m not harbouring a torch for Laura.”

“She’s very attractive.”

“She’s not my type,” Stiles promised. “Well, I mean she’s very beautiful and she kind of is my type, but I have very platonic feelings for Laura. Sisterly feelings. I don’t know what I can say to convince you of that. I really don’t.” And, because he was Stiles, he tried. “If she was the one sleepwalking into my bedroom, I still wouldn’t be interested in her sexually. She could probably go home without any weird, awkward boners pressed against her.”

Derek froze, staring at him. “I’m... flattered?”

Stiles let his head slam back against the metal floor of the fire escape. “This month, seriously,” he groaned.

“I just figured it was normal waking behaviour,” Derek pressed.

“It is normal!” Stiles snapped. “That wasn’t the point at all,” he turned to scowl at Derek, but found Derek was grinning at him, his shoulders shaking slightly with laughter. It wasn’t as intense as the taxi, but it seemed a bit more relaxed, less of a stress release and more actual amusement. Stiles kind of loved making Derek laugh because it didn’t look like Derek smiled enough, let alone quivered with mirth.
“But there is someone,” Derek asked quietly a few moments later. “Isn’t there?”

“Yeah,” Stiles said to the fire escape above them. “There’s someone. I think he’s really worth it. The waiting. For a year.” Stiles grabbed the bottle of scotch from beside him, finally ripping it open and taking a mouthful.

“Yeah?” Derek asked. “I think he’d kind of really want to know for sure why you’re interested in him,” Derek pointed out, grabbing the bottle from Stiles’ hand and taking a healthy swig himself.

“He’s kind of perfect,” Stiles answered sincerely.

Derek handed the bottle back. “I think my room is free,” he said brusquely, climbing to his feet.

Free for sex? Stiles wondered. Was that where this was going? Year-long drought ended, and all he had to do was share his feelings in a clear and precise manner.

Derek gave him a long look. “Go back home, Stiles, so you don’t fall off the fire escape and end the month with your head bleeding out on the sidewalk.”

What? Stiles blinked in a daze. That might actually be less painful than what was happening right now.

Of course it wasn’t the month for sex because this month fucking sucked.

“I was talking about you, asshole,” Stiles muttered to the bottle, glaring in the direction of Derek’s window before retreating back to his bedroom. Obviously Derek hadn’t picked up on that.
“Uhm,” Nancy said, hovering in the doorway with his suit held in one hand and a Styrofoam tray of coffee in the other. She was a million times more talented than he was, and he tried to remind her of that every day, because there was no way he could have travelled up the elevator, let alone through New York City streets with both his expensive suit and steaming coffee.

“You’re amazing,” he reminded her, jumping up to grab the coffee from her. “You must do some sort of arm strengthening exercises, right?” he asked because he had never seen her allow anything to waver in her grasp.

Usually, she would say something like “yes, I believe it is called out-manoeuvring you” because his personal assistant was both snarkier and classier than he would ever be.

Today, though, her face was ashen.

“Did you drop my suit?” he asked. “Drag it? Smear it along city street grime? Spill coffee on it?” It was covered in a protective plastic carrying bag, but he had never seen her face do that expression, and he was sure something tragic had happened.

At the questions, Nancy gave him her best haughty ‘bitch please’ expression.

“You could have warned me your boyfriend would be there,” she finally told him with an expression of pure judgement. “You could have warned me you have a boyfriend.” She crossed her arms over her chest and raised an eyebrow at him. “You could have warned your boyfriend I was coming over to grab your suit.”

“I...” Stiles started, because what boyfriend? Only, it was easy to guess the answer to that one. Dammit, he hadn’t seen Derek in ages, not since the night of Laura’s party, and now he was missing Derek in his bed.

Derek was in his bed.

And Stiles was at work.
FUCK HIS LIFE.

It wasn’t often that Stiles disliked his job, only after ridiculous all-nighters he had to pull occasionally and when it made him miss important things like flying out to celebrate Scott and Allison’s first year wedding anniversary ‘you haven’t killed each other yet’ party. So considering he had just spent all night in the office, catching a three hour nap on the tweeting couch Stiles had Joseph set up to foster a more sociable work environment, and then he missed the event of Derek in his bed, Stiles was pretty put out.

Then he imagined the look on Nancy’s face when she found Derek in his bed.

The idea was a little priceless.

Nancy had been after him to ask out Greg down in Accounts because Greg kept hitting on him. Nancy was under the impression Stiles couldn’t do much better than Greg, mostly because Nancy had the misfortune of being the one who had to occasionally grab spare clothes for him and she’d seen his grungy weekend underwear and the closet full of t-shirts Stiles owned that were so painfully nerdy they weren’t even ironic. She was also the one who had to go to McDonalds to get him a kid’s meal every day for two weeks because he wanted to collect the entire Marvel collection, until she finally just bought the Iron Man he was missing off Craigslist.

Nancy knew all Stiles’ dirty little secrets, and he was eternally grateful she hadn’t requested a transfer to another office yet.

She was probably right about Greg down in Accounts. Stiles actually had a chance with Accounts Greg, but compared to Derek, Greg looked like Quasimodo and had the personality of Claude Frollo. It wasn’t the Quasimodo part that bothered Stiles because evidence to the contrary, Stiles wasn’t really into depersonalizing someone based on their looks, at least not for a real relationship.

Claude Frollo was kind of a deal breaker though, and Stiles wasn’t desperate for just any relationship, he only really wanted the one.

And now his personal assistant thought he had it, which was both tragic and awesome because now she wouldn’t make pointed remarks about his lack of love, but now she would also expect him to have her make reservations for two instead of one at his favourite restaurants.

Stiles could see a long range of dates in front of him where he bought two tickets and ended up
going alone just to keep face. Maybe he could invite Derek and then it would be even more tragic because they weren’t even together.

“Oh,” Stiles finished the thought, rubbing his hand over the back of his head sheepishly.

“Yes,” she said, taking her own coffee off his desk and taking a delicate drink. “Do you need me to change your RSVP to the event at Per Se in August?”

“I...” Stiles blinked at her. He could actually feel the panicked expression cross his face. “We’re not... there yet.”

“But will you be in August?” she asked, watching him carefully. “He’s sleeping in your bed, Stiles, without you there. That’s a level of cohabitation that indicates you can start making plans two months in advance.”

“I...” oh hell, how had he reached this point? He had no idea what was going on. Was he being punk’d? “Yeah, change the reservation,” he finally conceded, because what the hell? Nancy was giving him a look like he was the stupidest person ever at relationships, and he absolutely was not.

He wasn’t.


“That too,” Stiles insisted in a strangled voice.

It was ok. Maybe he could bring someone else. Maybe he could hire an escort?

Fuck.

No.

Maybe Lydia would come out from MIT for the day? For the weekend?
Maybe he could bribe Scott? Danny? Laura? Derek?

“Name?” Nancy pressed.

“Stilinski,” Stiles answered, giving her an unimpressed look.

“Oh, are the two of you married?” she asked sweetly. “Because I was referring to the horrifically attractive man I startled out of your bed this morning.”

Stiles couldn’t even appreciate the mental image of that, because he was in a full-blown panic now. There was a gun pressed to his head, and he was about to pull the trigger himself. “Derek. Hale. Derek Hale.”

“Breathe Stiles,” Nancy reminded him. “You did a good job because wow.”

Stiles slumped in his seat with a relieved and soft smile. “Yeah,” he said, forgetting for a moment that Derek wasn’t actually his boyfriend. “I did.”

Nancy smiled in return, like she was happy for him, and left.

Wait.

No.

Fuck.

He should have just told her the sleepwalking story. It would have been easier. He picked up his phone to text Derek, maybe about how he had just planned Derek’s social calendar for the upcoming year, and settled for: Work all-nighters suck, but hearing about how you startled my personal assistant made my day a little better.
He was half-way through his morning when Derek texted back.

**New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me**

*I startled her? For a second I considered whether the window was a viable exit strategy.*

That. That mental image made everything so much better.

x.x.x.x.

Some hours later Stiles was at an event hosted by his firm. It wasn’t exactly rare for **Anderson, Joseph & Roth** to be invited to hot events around the city based on their reputation and the work they did for a lot of the big name companies within Manhattan. Trickle-down happened sometimes, where Stiles’ boss was required to attend and so Stiles ended up going instead to represent the company he worked for. It could sometimes even be fun.

This, however, was actually an event **Anderson, Joseph & Roth** was hosting in partnership with one of the big name law firms downtown in support of the restoration and redesign of one of Central Park’s less popular zones. It was a big project, a lot of it hinging on donations, and his firm was chomping at the bit to get a chance to do some PR work on the project, because while having a client list of celebrities meant something to the world outside New York City, doing work for Central Park was a foot in with the old money and the elite of the city, and **Anderson, Joseph & Roth** hadn’t quite made it there yet.

Stiles understood how cohosting a fundraiser could score the firm brownie points, but it felt like brown-nosing to him on a very expensive whim.

**Anderson, Joseph & Roth** were salivating at the bit to get a shot at doing PR work for the Chancellor Restoration project. Stiles had managed to get a look at the plan, and it was ambitious. Part of him wanted to get his hands on it himself.

He vaguely recognised this part of the park from one of his accidental detours after Godly Jogger – Derek – last year. He’d been lost for about an hour until he found the reservoir and was able to following it back to civilization. Seriously, he never thought he would get lost in the woods in the middle of Manhattan. On the subway system, sure, probably that would happen to him eventually, but not in the middle of Central Park.
Stiles fidgeted, resisting the urge to slip away from the party, or to at least slip out of his jacket.

It wasn’t that he was bored, it was just that it was a warm July evening and even his lightweight suit was a little too heavy for the humidity rolling in off the Atlantic and coating the city in a layer of oppressive smog. It was a little cooler now that the sun was setting, but there were also really tacky tiki torches set up to keep the bugs at bay.

Stiles had never really seen any mosquitoes in the park, but maybe people who grew up in New York City had a very different bug-quota than Stiles. But then Stiles had never seen a cockroach as big as his head back home, so maybe it was all a matter of exposure.

Unless the tiki torches were actually decoration? Stiles didn’t really know much about event planning, but they didn’t really seem to fit into the whole Prohibition Era New York vibe the party was supposed to replicating. Part of him, the part who had been friends with Lydia since part way through high school, wanted to take note of the decorator and make sure, if he ever had to plan an event like this personally, that he never used this particular company.

He was casting his eye around, trying to spot anyone to talk to and making sure that the people Anderson, Joseph & Roth were trying to smooze were sufficiently smoozelled but mostly watching where his boss was, because Stiles was on call to Joseph’s every whim, and he had a really good one-liner to start a conversation with, if it ever came up.

“Wow,” Nancy said, sidling up beside him in a very pretty dress. “I guess you really can’t tell the cloth of a man with the shape of his pyjamas,” she said, gesturing somewhere towards the middle of the party with a wave of her champagne glass.

He frowned after her in confusion as she sauntered towards one of the rich lawyers who seemed more interested in judging people around him than drinking or eating appetizers.

What did that even mean? He wondered, eyes scanning the crowd.

And then he spotted him – his old friend Derek Hale in a business suit.

Or, more like, his fake boyfriend Derek Hale in a business suit.

Possibly: the most damn attractive man in a business suit.
It was a really good suit too, lightweight for the summer, in an appropriate silver colour that would make Stiles look washed out but went with Derek’s dark hair like it was made specifically for him.

And maybe it was, because it looked like that kind of suit.

Suddenly, Stiles couldn’t be there quickly enough.

“Bank’s closed, old bird. I thought this shindig would be putting on the Ritz. You’re a wet blanket but I’d rather get spifflicated with you, because I’m goofy for you and you have great gams.”

Derek looked at him, surprised, but recovered quickly to Stiles’ sudden appearance, as though he thought he should expect it now. Stiles wasn’t sure if that pleased him or didn’t. “Do you have any idea what you just said?”

“Pffft,” Stiles debated, blowing air through his mouth, making a ‘could go either way’ gesture with his hand. “I read a helpful online webpage on the ride over here. It was supposed to be 1920s slang, but I don’t remember if it even said where the slang terms originated. I mean, no one here is even dressed up in period costumes. I’m a little disappointed to be honest, I feel like Gossip Girl lied to me about the real lives of the Manhattan elite. What it looks like to me is that this theme is just an excuse not to have to provide alcohol.”

“There’s alcohol,” Derek corrected him, nodding towards the tumbler in his hand. Derek seemed to be using the glass as a prop, same as Stiles, and he couldn’t help wonder if Derek was from the law firm. Surely he would know if both Laura and Derek were lawyers. That would have come up, wouldn’t it?

“That might be even more disappointing,” Stiles spoke mournfully. “Considering the theme and all. If this was the Prohibition Era, we would all be courting arrest for this.”

From the corner of his eye he noticed Joseph give him the ‘come here’ gesture.

Stiles ignored it. Some things were more important than his job, like flirting with Derek.

“Arrest,” Derek said with a quirk of his lips. “You don’t say. Well, considering your state of
undress the last time I saw you out in public and alcohol was involved, I think maybe you should go back to believing the party is dry. This is a work event for you, isn’t it?” Then, miracle of miracles, Derek’s lips curled even more. “Your day job, that is.”

“That’s... really well done,” Stiles grinned at him, saluting Derek with his glass. “Excuse me, my boss is literally beckoning me over,” Stiles said, nodding towards Mr. Joseph who was giving such frantic ‘come here’ signals that Stiles worried he would strain something. “Though to be honest,” he murmured to Derek, “the last time this happened he wanted to ask me if the stunning statuesque woman he was talking to was Beyonce. It wasn’t.”

“Try not to get accosted by someone wanting smoked oysters,” Derek leaned close and murmured in his ear.

“I thought I avoided the whole waiter-chic thing this time around,” Stiles answered mournfully, looking down at his suit. Inside he was revelling at the fact Derek had remembered such an offhanded comment he made almost two months ago.

Derek’s eyes skimmed down his body and then he made a ‘could go either way’ gesture, the same one Stiles had used earlier, only on Derek it was more enigmatic.

Stiles levelled a grin over his shoulder as he moved away from Derek.

He wasn’t sure how Derek kept getting better and better, but he did. Stiles was hopelessly smitten now, and had been from the start, but he was sure there was no way back from it now.

Actually, he’d been sure of that for a while too, he reflected, joining his boss.

“Stilinski,” Joseph said, his game-face on as he faced off against someone Stiles identified as being part of Central Park management. Ah, so this was to be a business conversation where Joseph tried to sell the firm. Stiles wasn’t sure why he was part of it. “This is the kid I was telling you about. Stilinski, this is Alexander Penn, Lead Architect for the park.”

“Sir,” Stiles said, offering his hand. “The park is a masterpiece. I jog through it almost every day and I always find something new to look at.”

Was that a little overboard on the compliments?
No, he decided, as Penn shook his hand with a polite smile, it was not.

Stiles was still new to this game, but he was learning. It was a lot like holding a conversation with Lydia and Jackson, part sincerity, part backhandedness, and never showing your true hand unless it needed revealing in an act of desperation.

“Ah, and there’s my protégé. The kid is two years out of his Masters and already he’s taking the landscape architecture field by storm with his work on the restoration of the Shakespeare Gardens. Bold choices, but I can’t find fault in the outcome or the historical accuracy. I let him take the reins on this one. Ambitious project.” Penn did not say this like it was entirely a good thing.

But he didn’t say it like it was a bad thing either, and Stiles tried to remind himself that one of the issues of ambition was funding.

It was easy to lose sight of the fact that the project needed good PR just as much as Anderson, Joseph & Roth needed the prestige.

“The firm is sending Stilinski back for his Masters part time next year,” Joseph said with the pomp of professional one-upmanship. “He has revolutionary ideas of how to use social media as a tool in the field, but he also has a solid grasp on the basic concept of PR work. His speeches are a work of art.”

That was seriously news to Stiles.

“Derek Hale,” Penn said as his protégé joined him. “This is Mr. Joseph from Anderson, Joseph & Roth and one of his assistants. We’re looking at the possibility of chronicling the process of restoration as a way of fostering interest in the actual work that goes into the park, and hopefully gaining some hefty donations in the process. Joseph was telling me that he can make your Chancellor Restoration into a household name before it is even completed.”

“Stilinski,” Joseph supplied. “My Junior Associate.”

Stiles automatically put out his hand for Derek, not entirely sure what the rules were for when you were officially introduced to the guy you kinda wanted to spend the rest of your life with by your boss.
As someone he might be working with in the future.

“Stiles and I have met, actually,” Derek said, taking Stiles’ hand.

“We live in the same apartment building,” Stiles blurted out at the same time Derek continued with “we’re friends.”

And oh. Shit. They were friends. “We’re like this,” Stiles said, illustrating by crossing his middle finger over his pointer finger. Then he realized it might be misinterpreted by some as one finger mounting the other finger. “Well, maybe more like this,” he said, putting both fingers together side by side. “But definitely not like this,” he finished, making the widest peace sign he could.

Joseph looked amused, used to Stiles’ antics, but Derek’s boss only looked confused.

Derek looked like he wished he never claimed friendship at all because he couldn’t say “who is this crazy person, I don’t know him” with any kind of sincerity and integrity.

“Stiles is a genius,” Joseph continued. “I picked him out of the pool of new recruits myself. You know the scandal with the pitcher of a certain New York team last autumn?”

“No,” Penn answered uncertainly. “Hale?”

“No sir, there was no scandal.”

“Exactly,” Joseph said smugly.

That was so patently untrue that Joseph was courting a defamation lawsuit, but Derek’s boss looked duly impressed.

“I am interested,” he told Joseph. “I’ll have to talk to Globbel about it.”
“Globbel has already met Stiles, sir,” Derek said. “Complained about him for about a week.”

“Did he?” Penn questioned Derek.

Stiles winced. Ouch, Joseph was going to kill him if that time he had burst in on Derek during lunch was going to come back and bite him in the ass now.

“Stiles was the one who didn’t immediately genuflect to Globbel’s trick of getting a free lunch. Gave him a business card instead and told him he was too important to deal with him unless Globbel made an appointment.”

Penn stared at Stiles.

Joseph stared at Stiles.

Derek smirked at Stiles.

Stiles tried not to look too bothered by this sequence of events while he had an internal freak-out.

“Good!” Penn said. “Globbel is an old codger. Submit a plan, Joseph.” Then he walked away.

“Kid, you’re gold,” Joseph said, slapping Stiles on the back as he walked in the opposite direction. “Have the plan on my desk by the end of the week.”

Stiles looked at Derek in shock. What had just happened? It looked like he had somehow just landed Anderson, Joseph & Roth the account they were looking for, that’s what happened.

And it was his?

Tentatively.
Maybe.

It sounded like it.

Holy shit, had he just been promoted?

“Derek,’ Stiles croaked. “Central Park!” Stiles exclaimed, shaking his head. “Central Park!” he clapped Derek on the shoulder, grinning and still shaking his head.

“Yes?” Derek questioned, seemingly confused. “I work here.”

“That’s my point!” Stiles exclaimed. “Central Park is... prestigious, man. It’s an international landmark and I’m freaking out a little in excitement at the idea of working on a PR strategy for this amazing renovation plan and you’re just... the one who planned it, holy shit Derek.”

“It was a team effort,” Derek growled, like the phrase was something he had been forced to learn and was uttered under pain of death.

“Sure, sure, I believe that,” Stiles answered sarcastically.

“It’s true.”

Stiles looked at him and reassessed. Derek actually believed this project wasn’t just his. Wow, he was brilliant and down to earth. Stiles was learning new things about Derek Hale by the minute. “You were introduced to us for a reason. Because you’re the top of your field.”

Derek shrugged, but there was a pleased expression on his face.

Stiles threw his hands in the air. He was infatuated with a motherfucking genius. He didn’t really see that coming. Sure, part of his brain had labelled Derek as smart, but this was ridiculously attractive and made Derek even more perfect. How could Stiles have any hope of attracting perfection?
“Don’t forget that you were in that conversation too,” Derek reminded him in a murmur.

Stiles didn’t know how to answer that with anything other than exaggerated claims of his own awesomeness, so he grabbed a handful of canapés off a passing tray and shoved them in his mouth. A smile played along Derek’s lips.

“I guess I’ll be seeing more of you soon,” he promised, walking away as Stiles attempted to chew on the mouthful of overcooked sawdust in his mouth.

Damn.

x.x.x.x.x.

The problem with working on the PR for a project like the Chancellor Restoration was the fact that it actually took a buttload of work. Stiles had been forced to temporarily reassign his accounts around the department as he planned and prodded and basically worked his ass off on the plan.

After three days he finally had something to show Joseph.

A week later it was under review with the big bosses.

“Brilliant,” Joseph said.

“Who are you again?” Anderson questioned.

“Go ahead with it,” Roth decided with a long-put upon sigh.

“We’ll support you a hundred percent,” Joseph promised. “Gentleman, welcome to the new face of Central Park.”

x.x.x.x.x.
“Your boyfriend is here,” Nancy said from the doorway, holding an iPad in her hand and a slightly worried expression on her face. “He looks... unhappy.”

Stiles wasn’t really worried. Derek always looked unhappy. “That might be Derek’s default expression,” he reassured her.

Then he realized he had just referred to Derek as his boyfriend while Derek was about three feet away. Stiles could see him through his office window now, glowering with extreme prejudice in Stiles’ direction.

Definitely not Derek’s default expression.

Nancy looked equally as uncertain.

Derek caught sight of Stiles looking at him, probably with an alarmed expression on his face (caused more by the whole ‘boyfriend’ thing than by whatever had a bee in Derek’s bonnet) and stalked into the office.

Had Derek somehow found out? About the boyfriend thing, that was. Because it wasn’t Stiles’ fault. It was actually Derek’s, if he really thought about it, because if Derek hadn’t been sleepwalking, Nancy never would have seen him, and then Stiles wouldn’t have been trapped into putting Derek’s name on the list of people with a reservation at Per Še in a month and a half.

“Derek!” Stiles exclaimed with false happiness.

“Central Park isn’t a face,” Derek snapped, throwing the magazine mock-up on Stiles’ desk. “It’s not my face.”

Oh, that.

That wasn’t personal. That was business, and Stiles actually knew what to say when it came to his profession.

“Sit down,” Stiles said calmly, gesturing for Nancy to close his door. He observed Derek across
the expanse of the desk. The side of him that was Derek’s friend told him that he should get up
and sit next to Derek to explain, but the side of him who was a working professional knew better.
Derek would not be the first person, nor the last, to question how Stiles did his job. “The necessary
outcome of this campaign was very clear,” he informed Derek. “First, money. You need donations
for this project to succeed the way you envision it. Donations. Sponsors. Maybe macdaddy
Trump’s backing. Second, human interest. The corner you’re working on has become a parcel of
land most people bypass on their way to the more interesting places to visit, so you need word of
mouth, you need people to want to walk by and check out the progress of the project.”

“So do your job! Show them the project,” Derek growled, gesturing towards the article he had
tossed on Stiles’ desk. “That is not the project.”

Stiles made an exaggerated face at Derek. “That’s where you’re wrong. Flowers are pretty, and
the garden will look gorgeous once you’re done, but right now it’s a lump of ground and I can’t sell
a lump of ground on the basis of what it will look like someday. People need something to connect
to. People need a face.”

“Landscape Architecture isn’t just about flowers.”

“I know that now,” Stiles said, “now that I read this article about you and your education and the
work you’ve done.”

Derek actually looked taken back. “I thought you wrote the article.”

“I did write the article,” Stiles chided gently. “I promised I would, and I did. What I mean is that
people who know nothing about the profession now do. Do you know what rich successful
businessmen like most as a tax break? The answer should be orphans or helping people impacted
by major storms, but the real answer is other successful businessmen, not as successful as they are,
obviously, not as rich, obviously, but enough that they can trust in where they place their money.
It’s some kind of narcissistic bull but look at the guy featured in this magazine. The magazine says
he’s a trustworthy, successful new graduate already making a name for himself. They can identify
with him.”

“Stiles...”

“Do you know who rich women give their money to? Charming, gorgeous young men. And
maybe flowers don’t hurt, there, depending on the woman. What hurts even less is your face.
Look at your face, you’re giving them the hint of bad boy women want and men want to be, but
you’re also an intellect. A visionary. An artist with a degree they can respect.”
Derek actually growled at him and stumbled to his feet.

“Sit down!” Stiles ordered again, surprised when Derek actually complied.

“This is bullshit and beneath the integrity of Central Park. It trusted you, but I should have known better,” Derek snorted. “You can’t see beyond the surface, can you?”

“Derek, we’re friends,” he started mildly. “As your friend, I understand what you’re telling me, but as the Public Relations professional in charge of the account with the organization you work for, do not tell me how to do my job. I’m very good at it, my superiors, who have not only been in the business for a very long time but are also considered among the top firms in the city, have looked over the plans and signed off on them. Your superiors, men who understand more about upholding the integrity of the Park as a whole and of your project specifically than I ever will, signed off on my plan. You can make all the waves you want on this. You can refuse to take part in the rest of the campaign despite it hinging on your cooperation. You can make this all about the flowers and have someone else with Anderson, Joseph & Roth take over the account, but you’ll only be sabotaging yourself as a professional and the success of the Chancellor Restoration Project.”

Derek glared at him from the other side of the desk, looking like he would like nothing more than to grab Stiles by the tie and slam his head against the glass top. Stiles was suddenly very glad he had decided to keep his position of authority as he stared Derek down.

“This will work,” Stiles said with surety. “We can go over all the steps of the plan again, if you’d like. I thought you understood your role as figurehead...”

“I’m not a figurehead,” Derek snarled.

Stiles sighed. No, he was just a stubborn poopy head. “Is that the choice you’re making?”

“A figurehead,” Derek said slowly, as though Stiles was a stupid child. “Is a leader with no real authority or responsibility. You’re asking me to be spokesperson and it’s a role I am not comfortable with or that I will ever thank you for forcing upon me.”

Stiles, well Stiles kind of loved intelligence, and having his word-choices corrected in such affronted tones by Derek left his brain scrambling to keep a blank face as he tried not to grin at
Derek’s sassiness, and 2. Give Derek lust-face. Because honestly, if Derek stood up in the next minute to do a gentleman’s businessman handshake, he’d pretty much be telegraphing his response to this entire conversation. These pants wouldn’t hide anything.

“That even for the money?” Stiles asked with a raise of an eyebrow.

“No, unlike some people, I don’t feel comfortable whoring myself out.” Derek sniped, a judgemental smirk settling on his face. Then his expression shuttered blank for a moment before turning into something apologetic. “I didn’t intend that as a personal attack.”

Stiles laughed. “Oh my god, no one is going to let that go, are they?” He shook his head at Derek, the intense atmosphere broken. He pressed his finger to the direct-dial to his assistant’s phone. “Nancy, could you bring Mr. Hale and me in some coffee? That good stuff you think I don’t know you horde.” She squawked at him, but he cut her off as he turned back to Derek. “I thought you understood the plan the last time we spoke. I’m serious about my offer to go over it again and now that you have a greater appreciation for your role, we can talk about what you’re comfortable with and not.”

God, their bitter, angry fight sex would be so good.

Once they started having sex.

Which might happen?

But maybe not, because there had been something in that argument that Stiles couldn’t put his finger on that went deeper than the job. It left a cold pit in Stiles’ stomach, one that even the best coffee couldn’t warm, and it didn’t ease until Derek gave him the very slightest hint of a smile when he went to leave.

x.x.x.x.

It was a long month at work, made easier once Derek conceded enough to Stiles’ PR plan to stop being hostile towards it.

In his personal life, the month went by quickly because Derek was hardly a part of Stiles’ life outside of work, and he wasn’t sure how he felt about that. At first the overlap pleased him
because it meant more time with Derek, learning things about Derek he might never have learned if they weren’t working together.

Then, he realized how much he wanted Derek just to himself. He wanted to be able to look at Derek without there being a desk and a computer between them. He wanted to stand beside Derek and tangle their fingers together. He wanted to wake up next to Derek.

The problem with that was Stiles had never had that kind of relationship with Derek, so he wasn’t sure why he felt like he missed seeing Derek outside of work.

It wasn’t really a surprise when Stiles stepped into the park for his morning jog and Derek came up behind him, almost out of nowhere. They stared at each other for a moment, and Stiles focused on Derek’s expression, the pleased little curve of his lips, and the challenging tilt of his head.

“Come on,” Derek said, pressing his fingers against Stiles’ elbow as Stiles pretended to do stretches in an attempt to blend in with the benches and get Derek to run by him so he could follow. “If you’re going to try to keep pace with me from thirty feet behind, you may as well run beside me.”

Uh, no. That kind of defeated the purpose of running behind Derek.

Behind Derek.

For Derek’s behind.

Not that Stiles even tried to be subtle about it anymore.

So Stiles allowed himself be dragged beside Derek, attempting to keep pace with Derek’s stupid long strides and his powerful muscles that made Stiles’ hammies look like silly string.

The first fifteen minutes was actually ok, but the more they ran, the more Derek pushed, and the more Derek pushed, the more it felt like Stiles was trying to run through crystallized molasses.

“Do you need to pause?” Derek asked, able to form words because he was an asshole.
“Ahhuh ahhuh,” Stiles wheezed, trying to catch his breath. It took thirty second before he even felt like he was drawing air into his lungs. “I’m done,” he breathed, making half-hearted shooing motions towards Derek. “Leave me in my final resting place.”

“You’re doing better than last year.”

Stiles made a horrifyingly embarrassing wheeze/gasp/fish-on-land guppy noise because what? Derek noticed him last year? That was the most mortifying thing ever. He hadn’t been trying to be subtle about it last year, either, but he hadn’t realized Derek had notice and remembered that Stiles was the guy who followed him around the park.

Well, shit.

“You made it half-way around my usual route, and my pace isn’t easy,” Derek said, clapping Stiles on the shoulder.

Holy frig, that was a compliment.

That was a bro-compliment.

That was a brompliment?

“You were going easy on me,” Stiles croaked, fumbling in his pockets for a few dollars. Derek was seriously going to kill him, because if jogging together was a thing they were doing now, Stiles would pretty much run until he dropped just to impress Derek.

That couldn’t be healthy.

Then again, maybe it would promote more physical fitness in Stiles’ life.

He did kind of want to subtly reinforce the idea that he could keep up with Derek physically.
“Do I look like the type of person who goes easy on anybody?” Derek asked, taking the few dollars from Stiles and exchanging it for a bottle of water from a nearby vendor. Stiles leaned back against one of the stone pillars and took a gulp of the water.

“I can keep up with you physically,” he blurted out.

Aw shit.

“…At least to the half way point. We’ll work on it,” Derek promised, stripping off his shirt in the hot July sun.

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

Abs.

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

Oh god, what was happening right now?
Stiles didn’t understand.

Derek’s shirt was off.

Defcon One.

He repeats: Derek’s shirt was off.

Oh my God, Stiles thought, eyes widening in disbelief as he glanced at Derek’s bare abs and chest and shoulders and biceps and everything and then hurriedly looked away and mouthed a few swear words towards the ground.

Really?

Really?

This was the guy he was infatuated with? He couldn’t have settled on someone who wasn’t so... everything? Like Ryan Gosling?

He had a moment of horror as he wondered how he was supposed to turn around and talk with Derek now that he was shirtless. In the end it was easy because he reminded himself that if Derek had any sort of attraction to him in return he would have shown signs by now, and it was easy to talk to Derek if Derek didn’t have any interest in Stiles.

Derek became just any guy, even if the thought caused a burning in Stiles’ esophagus that he was convinced was heartburn. Maybe he should ease up on the coffee consumption.

Talking was easy compared to silence.

“...Allison called and said ‘I’m running late’ really meaningfully. Scott completely forgot that the Argents were coming over and thought that Allison was pregnant and when she said “I’m running late” that they were experiencing a major crisis. Allison just wanted him to remember to put the
casserole in the oven. So Scott is freaking out, wondering how they were going to deal with a baby in this phase of their life when the Argents showed up,” Stiles said to Derek’s face, grinning widely as he told the story. “The Argents are ridiculously frightening, so Scott blurs the whole thing out to her dad, who is in the firearms retail business by the way, and by the time Allison got home there was no casserole and Allison’s father had locked himself in the bathroom with Scott. Scott still won’t tell me what happened. I suspect Fight Club.”

Derek snorted, taking a drink of his own water.

“Excuse me, how do we get to Madison Avenue?” a woman asked, eyes hovering somewhere around the low-sling of Derek’s pants. Behind her was a group of women equally as interested in Derek’s abs.

“Where, specifically?” Derek asked easily. “It runs almost the length of Manhattan.”

She giggled. “I’m not entirely sure.” Then she gestured towards her friends. “We’re just visiting and looking for some fun.”

Jesus, Stiles thought. Tourists. Forward tourists who were eyeing Derek like he was a slab of New York Grade beefcake. Derek hated that. Stiles hated that because Derek hated that. “Ladies, believe me, I know” Stiles said smoothly. Then his voice became hard. “His eyes are up here,” he lectured, gesturing to Derek’s face. “Yes, on the surface he’s a sarcastic and emotionally stunted pain in the ass who never apologizes for anything and has the abs of a god. But underneath he’s smarter than he is pretty and he doesn’t deserve to be objectified. I would think that if anyone understood what that feels like, it would be someone like you.”

“Stiles,” Derek started.

“I just wanted directions,” the woman told him with a chilly expression.

“You’re probably looking for the shopping area,” he answered curtly. “Go that way until you leave the park. Cross 5th Avenue and go another block in that direction.”

“Stiles,” Derek said again as Stiles crossed his arms over his chest challengingly and watched them leave, waving sarcastically behind them.
“Eugh,” Stiles said, slumping back against the pillar. “Can you believe that?”

Derek was staring at him. “I really can’t,” he said, shaking his head in disbelief. “I... Stiles.”

“What?” Stiles asked, looking carefully at Derek. He had this constipated expression on his face. “Oh shit, I... were you interested in her?”

Derek simply shook his head, like he really couldn’t understand Stiles. “No... I... no, not her.”

Stiles would never admit how relieved he was to hear that. Then it hit him what he had done, sticking up for Derek like some kind of jealous mother hen. “I’m... oh, sorry. It just made me so angry the way they were eyeing you like you were put on earth to lounge shirtless in their beds. I mean, you! You with the grumpy face and the stupid ridiculous obsession with organic mulch. You’re so much more than your abs, and if they could see that... actually, I’m glad they couldn’t. Really glad, because they don’t deserve you.”

And he was, he was suddenly fiercely glad that understanding what Derek was beneath the surface wasn’t displayed for everyone to see, sitting so prettily out on display.

He swallowed. “You deserve someone just as amazing as you are.”

“Get coffee with me?” Derek asked in a low, private voice that did things to Stiles’ insides and brought back the heartburn, because Derek was everything, and so casual about things that Stiles wanted so badly they could never be casual to him.

It wasn’t really heartburn, Stiles knew that.

“Sorry,” he said, taking out his phone and looking at the time. “I’m running so late I will literally need to run back home. Rain check, right?”

“Right,” Derek answered, and there was something complicated going on with his expression that Stiles couldn’t quite read.
New York City was in the middle of a heat wave when Stiles received the text from Laura. He had been standing in an aisle of an appliance store in the middle of the SoHo area debating the merits of spending $500 on a portable air conditioning unit for his bedroom.

He couldn’t buy a window unit for obvious reasons.

The issues that he could see were varied:

1. He would have to carry it uptown
2. After using it for a few weeks, he’d then need to find somewhere to store it for the remainder of the year, and Stiles’ storage space was called shoved-in-a-corner-of-his-living-room
3. Sometimes he cared about the environment. He recycled and didn’t drive a car in the city, at least. But there was a huge difference between caring about the environment and dying from heat stroke
4. He got through last year without one. Somehow. But then last year he was just able to pay rent and eat and he had actually spent a few nights rolling around on a bed of ice cubes to survive.

His arguments kind of sucked. They came down to the question ‘how lazy was he’? Stiles tried not to allow laziness to stop him from doing things that needed to be done, otherwise he would never do laundry and his toilet would have spent the last year and a half unscrubbed.

He was just settling into the idea that he was going to buy the unit, and fuck it all, because he woke up in a pool of sweat that morning, took a cold shower, went jogging before it was fully light out, showered again, grabbed the subway to visit Greenberg, and by the time he got to SoHo he needed another shower and that was hours ago. He would probably help the environment by not using as much water on showers, and that really left him with zero arguments against making the purchase.

He was actually kind of excited. He’d be able to sleep without throwing off all his sheets and weighing the risk of taking off his pyjamas versus the likelihood of Derek sleepwalking into his bedroom.

At this point in the heat wave, the fucks he gave about nudity were negligible.

He was waiting in line, wondering if he wanted to spend another $30 on a taxi when his phone vibrated in his pocket.
New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:

Heads up. I’m out of town until morning. Tomorrow would have been our sister’s birthday.

Laura had the unique ability to text with a combination of humour and directness that never had him squinting at the phone wondering at her meaning. This was cryptic for her, and for a second he frowned at the three minimalistic sentences, feeling empathetic at her inability to text him about something so personal.

Then he realized: Derek.

Derek would be alone and grief seemed to be the most common trigger to his sleepwalking.

Suddenly, he didn’t have time to figure out how to get his air conditioning unit back uptown. Macy’s closed at 8:30 PM on Sundays and he needed to grab a new sheet set because the washing machine in the basement had eaten his spare set and the sheets he was currently using had seen about two weeks of sweaty nights as he waited out a replacement washer. Management promised one Monday morning, but that certainly did NOT help his problem now. How could he have Derek in his bed when if he paid enough attention to the scent linens, he’d probably recoil?

He couldn’t. New sheets were a must, and they wouldn’t even be an extravagant purchase because he needed to buy new sheets anyway. He’d rather get them somewhere for 70% off the original price, like Overstock or something, but he wouldn’t be able to save money on replacing his pride if that were to become torn and ripped like his sheets were.

And he needed eggs. He couldn’t feed Derek breakfast without eggs.

There was no way he’d be able to carry the air conditioning unit into a department store, buy sheets, and then get eggs on top of it. Could he?

Well, he probably could, but it was at least 100 degrees in the shade and it actually came down to him not wanting to.

“Do you deliver?” he asked the cashier after realizing she was staring back at him with an impatient expression on her face.
I hear Laura is out of town. Want to hang? Stiles texted Derek.

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:

I think I’ll go to bed early. See you tomorrow.

Derek’s texts were a lot like Laura’s in that both of them distained any kind of text speak. He wasn’t sure how they coped before smartphones, because constructing real sentences was so much easier now that you didn’t have to press eight buttons and hope for the best to capitalize or insert an apostrophe. There was a reason txtspk became an almost acceptable form of communication.

The ‘see you tomorrow’ part gave him a pause until he remember, oh right. The next phase of the PR work Stiles was doing on Derek’s project started this week and he had a tour booked at 9 AM to see the behind the scenes aspect of Derek’s work.

For a moment Stiles thought that might be a waste of brand new sheets and then he remembered this hadn’t been about Stiles inviting Derek to spend the night but because Derek might sleepwalk into his bedroom. It was a little jarring to his system to remember that Derek didn’t exactly willingly sneak in through Stiles’ window.

He focused on work instead of thinking about it, listening to the sounds of Derek settling into bed, his bedframe scraping against the wall and reverberating until Stiles could hear it sitting in his own bed. He wondered if Derek could hear something similar as he sat back against the wall and thought of Stiles in return, but that thought lead down a road Stiles didn’t entirely want to explore just yet.

It was a little after midnight and Stiles was just settling into sleep when someone climbed in through his window. He turned to make sure it was Derek because he still had that bat beneath his bed, but this was the first time he actually had warning Derek might appear and all evidence pointed to this being another case of Derek’s sleepwalking.

Derek was staring at him.

Even in the dim light coming in from outside Stiles could tell that Derek was awake. There was
something about the way he was holding himself and the uncertain edge to his expression, like he
was a second away from deciding this was a terrible idea and he should flee.

Derek wasn’t sleepwalking this time.

Stiles watched him back, his heart beating rapidly in his chest. Part of it ached at how badly Derek
must need his company to do this, the vulnerability and uncertainty on Derek’s face actually
caused Stiles pain as he stared at Derek, wishing he could just stand an envelope Derek in his
arms. Derek needed him, and Stiles couldn’t ever turn that away, not from Derek.

Stiles groaned like he was saying ‘not this again’ and pulled aside the sheets on Derek’s side of the
bed, subtly watching what Derek would do from beneath the crook of his arm. Derek looked like
he was seriously considering bolting back up the fire escape. He waited for Derek to decide what
he was going to do, head racing with the implications of what was happening. He had so many
questions for Derek, questions he couldn’t ask if he was pretending Derek was sleepwalking and he
was closer to sleep than he actually was.

He wanted to know how bad Derek’s loneliness and grief were to chase him into Stiles’ bed. He
wanted to know if it was grief or if Derek was using that as a convenient excuse. He wanted to
make sure that Derek was coming to him, specifically, and not just any company.

Stiles could probably answer all those questions based on what he knew about Derek and what he
knew about grief himself, and it all formed into a picture that had Stiles in the center of it, in a role
he hadn’t entirely expected Derek to see him in.

He wasn’t surprised when Derek slid into bed next to him, the bed settling beneath Derek’s
weight.

Not really, not after he consciously made the effort to leave his own apartment and climb into
Stiles’. That decision couldn’t have been easy for Derek to make, and he must have been weighing
the urge against rational thought for the past three hours, since he had sent the text bidding Stiles
goodnight.

That Derek had made the decision to come here anyway, before or even despite the sleepwalking,
meant so much on so many levels that Stiles was having trouble separating all the strands of
significance. His brain couldn’t turn off trying to make sense of everything as he turned towards
Derek, fitting himself along Derek’s side in what he told himself was a pre-emptive strike against
becoming a cling monster.
Stiles wasn’t entirely sure what it meant to Derek, but he knew what it meant to him that Derek was came to him.

It meant everything.

Because Stiles was definitely lost to whatever this was, and there was no coming back from that.

x.x.x.x.

Stiles awoke really, really hot. He was spread over Derek again, his t-shirt uncomfortably rucked up beneath his arms, the excess material digging into his chest. Derek’s hand was a heavy weight against the skin of his back, the summer air coming in through the window uncomfortably stifling and doing nothing to cool either of them off. His sheets were long kicked off the bed, and somehow his arms had found the most comfortable way to drape over Derek without actually clinging.

It was too hot to gather the energy to cling. Stiles even knew that in his sleep.

He’d really made a mistake not finding a way to bring the air conditioning unit with him.

He gently extracted himself, unable to take his eyes off Derek. Derek in his bed was a beautiful sight, but Stiles didn’t think there could be anything more gorgeous than the way his eyelashes fluttered, half aware of his surroundings, casting long, dark fringed shadows against his cheekbones and displaying eyes that looked golden green in the morning sun. Derek’s mouth parted as he woke and looked up at Stiles, finding him sitting beside the bed, his wrinkled shirt still not entirely meeting his pajama bottoms.

Derek frowned, mouth pouting, and Stiles was lost against the urge to stretch back down beside him and take those lips as an invitation.

Instead, he stood and put a bit of distance between them.

“I’ll make breakfast if you’re interested,” Stiles said as Derek watched him through sleepy eyes. It was a bit charming to find out that Derek woke up incrementally, having moments of lucidity
before drifting back to sleep. He seemed to be fighting through it now as Stiles moved, eyes intent on him in a way that seriously tempted Stiles’ self control. “Pancakes, bacon, eggs. I might have bagels.”

“No danishes?” Derek asked as Stiles stripped out of his moist, wrinkled shirt and threw it into his laundry bin.

Stiles froze. “I could... get some,” he offered uncertainly. Derek had struck him as a bacon for breakfast kind of guy. Actually, Derek had struck him as a protein shake kind of guy, but Stiles wanted no part in that, so bacon had protein, right?

“Nooo,” Derek slurred. He had one eye open, watching Stiles, but his mouth was shoved into the pillow he was hugging and he looked like he was staying awake through sheer force of will. “Teasing. I’ve only seen you eat sweets for breakfast.”

“No sweets for breakfast today,” Stiles assured Derek, rummaging through his dresser for a clean t-shirt. He contemplated how sweet Derek would taste for breakfast before breaking off that train of thought, because clearly in this heat Derek would taste like salt and sweat and Stiles was not going down that road when Derek was already so tempting in his bed. “I’m going to take a quick shower first ok? I’m all hot and sticky and gross.”

Derek groaned and closed his eyes, turning over so his face was fully mashed in Stiles’ spare pillow.

Stiles figured that meant Derek was ok with that so long as he could get a bit more sleep.

“How do you like your eggs?” Stiles asked once he was out of the shower, a fresh pair of pajamas making him feel more human. He towelled off his hair half-heartedly, wondering if he was keeping Derek was going back to his own room by insisting on breakfast. Then he wondered if he cared.

He did not.

“Cooked!” Derek snarled back with all the bad temper of someone being kept from sleep.

That wasn’t an answer, was it? Stiles wondered. Maybe Derek just liked eggs in all forms and
didn’t have a preference.

Eggs were protein, weren’t they?

Maybe he preferred them raw in his protein shakes – four dozen, to help him get large.

Stiles was just finishing up a pan of scrambled eggs, bacon keeping warm in the oven next to a stack of pancakes he had started immediately after stumbling out of the bathroom. He had made the batter the night before, figuring that if Derek hadn’t stopped by on one of his sleepwalking adventures, Stiles could eat pancakes for a few days before he eventually got sick of them and ‘accidentally’ poured the rest of the batter down the sink. There was something about eating a stack across from someone in a breakfast spread that made pancakes more palatable to him.

Maybe it had something to do with the fact that pancakes had been something shared in his family. He and his mother ate them every Saturday morning after Stiles had spent a few hours watching morning cartoons and his mother had slept in. She timed it so that his father walked through the door just as the stack on the table started to cool and he’d pick up the top one and roll it up like a burrito before shoving it all in his mouth. Stiles’ mother would laugh and yell after his dad not to choke as he made his way upstairs and to bed after a long Friday night shift.

After her death, the only time he had pancakes was with Scott, and that had also been a shared meal. Pancakes just weren’t the same alone.

He wasn’t entirely sure why he had decided to make a batch for Derek.

He thought about this as he finished making enough breakfast for four people.

Derek staggered out of the bedroom, hair in complete disarray.

He was wearing an undershirt and a pair of lightweight pajama bottoms, and from the way the early morning light entered through the window behind him, Stiles was almost sure the bottoms were being rendered translucent. He craned his neck a bit to see, but Derek shuffled forward, his bare feet almost silent against the hardwood floor. He fell into the closest chair of the square card-table Stiles had, set with three mismatching chairs, each lovingly and/or hatefully restored with wood glue or a well-placed nail. A carpenter or fix-it man Stiles wasn’t, so when Derek sat on the most tenuously held together of the three, a chair with the legs broken off from old glue that he’d found after one of his morning runs, Stiles held his breath.
When Derek didn’t collapse to the floor, Stiles exhaled through his mouth, a long, relieved sigh that had Derek looking up at him through bleary eyes.

“You really aren’t a morning person, are you?” Stiles asked to cover the sound.

Derek made a vague gesture which could either be translated to ‘no I’m not’ or ‘give me my breakfast.’

Stiles put the plate down in front of him and grabbed the pot of coffee, which usually amounted to the only part Stiles’ morning meal, and poured each of them a mug.

“You didn’t seem surprised this morning,” Derek said as Stiles placed Derek’s mug in front of him, coffee just the way he liked it – black and bitter. “Thank you,” Derek said automatically. “It didn’t startle you to find me there?”

“No,” Stiles said honestly. It was a tricky question because he knew that Derek was awake the night before, hadn’t really been sleepwalking this time and had only used it as an excuse to come to Stiles. He also knew that since Derek had been awake, Derek was aware of how Stiles had invited him into his bed with very little resistance and that for Derek to bring it up, that meant he wanted to talk about something. “I knew you were in my bed this time, I hope you don’t mind.” Stiles quirked a bit of a grin. “I didn’t try very hard to discourage you. If it bothers you, the next time it happens I’ll really make a point of trying to wake you up.”

Derek shook his head. “It doesn’t bother me. I realize how uncomfortable this situation is and I just wanted to make sure that you’re not distressed by it.”

Stiles looked at Derek carefully. He still looked sleepy around the edges, but coherent enough at this point to have this conversation. The last thing Stiles wanted was for Derek to talk to him honestly about something and then for it to turn out to be because he was still half asleep. When Stiles was still half asleep he couldn’t even string a sentence together, so that didn’t seem to be what was happening here.

It just seemed like they were talking about this. Now. In their pajamas over a breakfast Stiles made because Derek crawled into his bed because he needed the comfort of another body the night before his sister’s birthday. Stiles wasn’t foolish enough to dismiss that, because Derek could find anyone to sleep with, and what was more, Derek was the type to suffer in silence rather than give into whims he could talk himself out of. Stiles saw Derek as the solitary hero type, whether that
was true or not, but he’d seen enough of Derek’s ethics during work hours and that seemed to be the case.

So the fact they were talking about this over breakfast? It was actually rather perfect.

“It’s no...” he was about to tell Derek it was no hardship, but the puns and innuendoes that he was opening himself up to there were a bit too easy for Stiles’ liking. “That is to say that no matter what the reason, or the day, or the occasion, waking up next to you will never be a bad thing.”

Derek stared intently back at Stiles, a measuring look. He looked like he was trying to figure something out, possibly whether Stiles knew Derek hadn’t been sleeping, but Stiles wasn’t going to give that away. There was a chance Derek needed the illusion he had gotten away with it, and there were certain things Stiles wouldn’t spoil.

Not now.

Not while sitting across from Derek over breakfast, sneaking glances at him as he shoved a mouthful of pancakes into his mouth and wondering how anybody had the right to be so perfect.

“Well,” Derek mused, taking a sip of his coffee, his eyes amused above the rim of the cup cradled in his hands. The slogan was turned towards Stiles and he almost choked, because it hadn’t been his intention to proposition Derek over his morning cuppa. “When I suggested we get coffee, I didn’t expect it to taste like this.”

There was nothing wrong with the coffee, it just wasn’t the expensive kind Stiles had been plying Derek with at the office. Derek was considered a VIP client to Stiles, not because the Central Park account was so terribly important to Anderson, Joseph and Roth but because it was Derek. “Eat your breakfast,” Stiles chided, hiding a grin. “And no complaining about my coffee or I’ll make sure you don’t get to duck into a coffee shop on the way to work this morning.”

Derek raised an eyebrow as if to say ‘I would like to see you try to stop me’ but he took a bite of his breakfast and ignored the coffee.

It wasn’t until Derek left to take a shower and change, crawling back through Stiles’ bedroom window, that Stiles had time to reflect on what was happening.
He wasn’t exactly sure what was happening. A part of him thought he should be freaking out a little, because when you woke up next to someone and then cooked them breakfast, there were certain unspoken relationship cues that were implicitly stated through the actions.

Certain cues like: you’re in a relationship.

It didn’t seem strange to him to be leaving dishes in his sink to soak before pulling on a pair work pants and a polo shirt, ignoring the inherent Jackson-esque doucheyness, because he was about to spend the morning walking through Central Park and then the afternoon in the office, and there weren’t many pieces in his wardrobe that would be comfortable for both.

*Meet you downstairs*, he texted Derek, because he realized that even after all that they never really said where they would meet.

**New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:**

*Coffee then Park.*

His coffee wasn’t really that bad! Stiles thought indignantly. Only it kind of was. There was a reason he tended to buy something on the way to work, and it struck him suddenly that today ‘on the way to work’ meant on the way to work with Derek.

On the way to work with Derek after spending the night together.

What was his life that that seemed so... right?

x.x.x.x.

The morning was supposed to be a work date, but as they walked around the park, Derek showing Stiles the various buildings he worked in and the projects that were a work in progress, it didn’t feel like a work date. It felt like a day between the two of them where Derek introduced Stiles to his life, and they joked about work, and meeting in the park, and the time Stiles disturbed a flock of ducks which then all flew into a tour group of tourists (Stiles hadn’t been aware Derek had noticed)(he’d actually kind of hoped Derek hadn’t)(though it explained why Derek had paused jogging and braced his hands on his knees, because Derek never actually got winded). Between chatting, Stiles would take a picture or two for his instagram queue and Derek would insist that no one would even care if he was in them.
“You got donations, didn’t you?” Stiles asked thornily after the third time Derek gave him an eyebrow of judgement when he suggested Derek pick up an object, stand by an object, or to not scowl at an object.

Derek scowled.

“Directly after that article of you came out.” Stiles snapped a picture.

Derek glared in a frosty manner.

Work it Derek. The camera loves you.

“Just like I said you would.”

“Yes,” Derek gritted out.

“So tell me I’m good at my job,” Stiles teased. “I need some positive reinforcement. Tell me I was right. Go on, say it.”

“The Park received donations,” Derek conceded. “That doesn’t mean your plan was faultless.”

“You keep thinking that,” Stiles told him as he snapped a picture of Derek, the morning sun shining behind him, with a sarcastic tilt of his eyebrow. The people following the campaign for the sole purpose of Derek’s face would love it. “Now, I need to speak with your kiddy pool. The junior associates or the interns or whatever. I’ll give them a brief training on how to use the accounts I set up so I can review their pictures and tweets before they get posted and then I think we’re good to go.”

Derek nodded, gesturing for Stiles to follow him into one of the buildings behind them. “We have a room set up like you requested. They’ll be ready for you in twelve minutes.”

“Great!” Stiles grinned enthusiastically, rubbing his hands together. “I love corrupting young
minds to the ways of Tumblr.”

“At least half of them are older than you are.”

Stiles waggled his fingers at him. “Genius knows no age,” he said. “Just look at us.”

“Right,” Derek responded dubiously, looking Stiles over in a way that had him biting back a sly grin and an ‘accidental’ brush with Derek’s ass. “Genius.”

“Lunch after?” Stiles offered.

“Obviously.” Derek definitely looked cranky. He’d been looking that way since Stiles brought up the idea of a Twitter account and then said ‘oh yeah, pout for daddy’ while taking a picture with his phone. At least he still wanted to spend time with Stiles after that. Stiles took that as the most positive sign all morning. “I’ll be supervising the equipment set up for the digging this afternoon.”

“Cheer up,” Stiles said, reaching over to tug at the collar of Derek’s shirt. “I mean that. There are going to be tons of pictures of you this afternoon as your staff test out the apps I’m teaching them to use. If you scowl too much I’m going to have to give you a nickname like Dreary Hale or Derek Discontent when I tag you in them.”

“You’re evil.” Derek told him as Stiles turned away from him in order to enter the room.

“That’s unproven!” Stiles called back over his shoulder with a wink.

x.x.x.x.

Stiles took a moment to observe Derek as he directed his work crew with a careful eye. It wasn’t something he could take a picture of, or even put into words, but he admired the casual sense of command Derek gave off. It wasn’t just giving orders, it was the way his work crew paid deference to his opinions without needing Derek to hold their hand. It was the way Derek kept track of everyone and everything, all while pouring over the blueprints on his tablet. It was the way Derek said “Craig, two feet to the left” while working directly with someone else, the pause in the conversation not detracting from what he was saying.
It was the way Derek was in his element, comfortable and powerful in a way Stiles hadn’t seen from him outside of jogging.

Derek was always gorgeous, but here he was amazing in a way that was completely understated.

Stiles didn’t bother taking a picture, because there was no way to capture what he was seeing, even using the Sutro or Kalvin filters.

Derek looked up and saw him watching from the sidewalk, and despite seeing him only an hour ago, he gave Stiles a small wave and handed off his tablet to one of his coworkers, casually sauntering over to where Stiles was standing. His shirt pulled across his shoulders, and his casual slacks were tailored perfectly around his thighs as he walked, but it wasn’t Derek’s body that had Stiles’ attention.

It was the slight smile on Derek’s face as he moved forward, as though he was glad to see Stiles in return.

It was the way Stiles was aware of his heart beating in his chest, of the way he was smiling at Derek without reason or concern.

It was the way he wanted to reach forward and curl his fingers around Derek’s wrist and pull him forward into a kiss, as though that was a natural and expected thing for him to do in response to Derek walking towards him looking happier to see Stiles than he had any right being considering they spent about twelve hours with each other now.

Oh.

Oh.

Stiles felt a chill and tingle move through his body that had nothing to do with worry or stress or angst at this budding relationship, and everything to do with anticipation, because he realized something very important.

There was nothing for him to be anxious about.
Nothing important enough to negate the things he had to look forward to.

“Hungry?” Stiles asked.

“I could eat,” Derek told him, coming to stand beside Stiles at the blockade separating the part of the Park in the midst of landscaping from places safe to walk. He leaned against it next to Stiles, their shoulders brushing, and slipped his sunglasses off so that his eyes crinkled with humour as he hooked them into the front of his v-neck collar. “But I had a good breakfast.”

“What do you recommend?” Stiles asked, leaning into Derek’s space. “I made breakfast, it’s your turn to choose.”

It didn’t really cross his mind what people might think if they overheard that. Mostly because it was difficult to remember that he and Derek weren’t in a relationship where mentioning the fact that they ate breakfast together was an acceptable practice.

Derek took a moment to think about it. “Come on, I have an idea,” he finally said, tugging on Stiles’ arm.

x.x.x.x.x.x.

Stiles may or may not be gaping.

“What?” Derek muttered, mouth full of hotdog.

“Nothing,” Stiles grinned. “You just didn’t strike me as a questionable meat from a corner cart kind of guy.”

“I have facets,” Derek answered.

“Of course, you’re a brilliant cut diamond of facets. Brilliantly cut. Though,” Stiles mused, hiking up his shirt and staring mournfully down at his stomach. “Maybe if I ate more street
You’re fine,” Derek assured him, looking slightly uneasy as Stiles eyed the ridges of his stomach muscles, visible beneath his shirt in the noon-day sun. “Do not pull up my shirt to compare!” he warned.

Stiles hadn’t even considered it.

At least not seriously.

“Fine,” he huffed, feigning being put out by not getting to look at Derek’s abs. He smoothed his own shirt back down and shoveled half the hotdog into his mouth. “You have to admit,” he said around the mouthful of food. “This has been a pretty good day.”

Derek was staring at him like he had a few suggestions of things Stiles could replace that hotdog with and Stiles almost choked in response because they were standing in the middle of the park and he was perfectly willing to do all those things if Derek made the slightest move. He had to drink the rest of his can of soda to wash down the hotdog, because it stuck in his mouth with the need to just grab Derek and his complete inability to do so right now.

There was a daycare of children walking by and Stiles was seriously considering whether they would notice if he got on his knees.

That really couldn’t happen.

“Derek,” Stiles murmured, leaning closer.

He wanted...

He wanted so badly.

“It’s been a good day,” Derek affirmed.
“Yeah,” Stiles grinned. Then he moved slightly back out of Derek’s space. “I should get back to the office. I’ll get behind if I put it off any longer.”

Derek tugged at a belt loop, drawing Stiles back towards him. Stiles moved easily, his heart slamming in his chest, because of course that was what the empty and yet brimming sensation welling beneath his breastbone and the twitchy feelings in his limbs were – lack of physical contact.

Specifically, a kiss.

“Let me take that from you,” Derek said, taking the empty Pepsi bottle from Stiles’ hands. For one strange moment Stiles thought Derek did it so they could properly kiss, but then he realised that left Derek’s hands full, and that was a weird thing to do to necessitate their lips meeting. “There’s a recycling bin up a bit,” Derek gestured over his shoulder, back towards the area his project was located in. “That belongs to the park. So far it has generated enough to money from bottle deposits to fund another recycling bin.”

There was that humour again. Stiles knew how to deal with that. He was used to shoving down disappointment and hiding it with sarcasm. “Anything to do my part,” he answered giving Derek a smile and shoving his hands in his pockets so he didn’t reach out to reciprocate the belt loop grabbing. His would result in slamming them together, lips, chest, hips, almost violently with desperation.

He actually wasn’t sure how Derek was resisting.

Derek smirked back, slipping his sunglasses out of the “v” of his shirt and putting them on. The result was devastatingly attractive. He took a step backwards.

Stiles echoed the movement until they were more than a span apart and he should be able to breathe again, but he couldn’t. Though it wasn’t true physically, it felt like the distance between them was the furthest it had been in the last twelve hours and he itched to close that distance. He gave Derek a jaunty wave and an ironic smirk before spinning and heading back downtown.

But he couldn’t breathe through the disappointment and the physical and mental need to be close to Derek, to secure this thing between them and never let go. He couldn’t breathe for the loss of Derek’s presence and the knowledge, the surety, that this was leading somewhere.
He was falling in love with Derek Hale...

... a man who might just be the most romantically obtuse idiot in New York City.

x.x.x.x.x.x.

In the end, it was nearly as difficult as Stiles made it out in his head. He simply picked up the phone after sitting in his office for half the afternoon without getting any actual work done. Derek answered almost immediately.

“Supper tonight?” Stiles asked, phone pinched between his ear and his shoulder. “Make it a three in one deal?”

“I can’t. Plans with Laura. It’s a... family thing,” Derek started. “My sister... not Laura. She would have been... it’s a family thing.”

“Yeah,” Stiles agreed. He understood ‘family things.’ He and his father shared some ‘family things’ of their own. “Ok, some other time? Sometime soon?”

“Sometime soon,” Derek affirmed.

“It’s a date,” Stiles said. “I mean that literally,” he clarified. “I am making my intentions known.”

“I got that,” Derek said with amusement. “But I appreciate the clarification.”

It made his afternoon lighter, and he had no idea why he hadn’t done that sooner, because Derek’s response made it so easy, and hadn’t Stiles known? Hadn’t he known Derek wouldn’t say no since the moment he saw Derek standing in his bedroom, willingly, the night before?

It made eating supper alone easy. As was the idea of sleeping alone, because part of him knew that he was entering a phase where that would be a novelty.

He and Derek weren’t just two strangers who decided to go on a date. They were actually starting
something.

New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:
Derek holding my hand: No matter what happens, these days will just be between the two of us.

New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:
Derek: I won’t leave you to mourn alone

New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:
Me: ARE YOU DYING??

New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:
Derek looking really awkward: no. Stiles and I are going to...

New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:
Derek looking angry: Are you texting him?

New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:
Derek looking furious: Don’t text that to him!

New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:
Derek’s eyebrows are defying nature: Laura stop texting Stiles!

New text from B*tch in Apartment 504:
Congratulations

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:
Don’t listen to Laura.

Stiles sent back:
A relationship with me isn’t a death sentence.
At least not until I blow your mind out.

Dinner Friday @ 8.
It was in self defense. Probably.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Stiles has a panic attack in this chapter caused by a miscalculation on Scott's part (that can be read as manipulative behaviour). If descriptions of panic attacks or mentions of death bother you, skip to the half-way point.

No one actually dies, guys.

*Date Night! 72 hrs and counting*, Stiles texted Derek, smiling as he tossed his phone on his bed and stripped off his shirt on Tuesday night.

A few minutes later, Derek texted back.

*New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:*

*I know, I was there when you asked me.*

x.x.x.x.x.

*Date Night! 44 hrs and counting*, Stiles texted Derek from the elevator at work, closing the office late due to an emergency on Wednesday. He wasn’t sure Derek would still be awake as he splurged on a cab, but by the time he stumbled into his apartment, tired and ready for bed and wondering if he should do the unprecedented and take Friday afternoon off just to relax, Derek responded.

*New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:*

*2 days isn’t that long, Stiles. Stop trying to make it sound like forever.*

That’s where Derek was wrong. “You’re wrong, you know!” he yelled towards the ceiling in his bedroom, but of course Derek couldn’t hear him, so he went back to texting. *You’re wrong. I work 50 hours average a week. Waiting 43 consecutive hrs for Friday!! isn’t much at all.*

*I’ll sleep through most of it.*
Guess what! Stiles texted Derek, standing in line at the small family-run pizza place three blocks out of the way on his walk home, wiping rain off his face. There was some kind of universal law somewhere that said if you got soaked, you deserved pizza. Stiles was pretty sure.

He’d scoped out every pizza in a 5 block radius of his apartment (it felt like) when he first moved to New York, searching for the mythed New York pizza. He’d found it on his ninth attempt, and he was marginally sure pizza didn’t get better than this (and ok, Google reviews might have informed that decision somewhat).

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:

Date Night! 24 hrs and counting?

Derek was the best. Seriously, Stiles hadn’t even been thinking of their countdown, and if he wanted to get nitpicky it was more like 26 hours, but it was the thought that counted. Derek was probably a closet romantic. There were going to be good things in Stiles’ future.

No, but someone’s enthusiastic XD I’m getting the best pizza in NYC for supper.

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:

Lombardi’s?

No, never been. I should have specified ‘within walking distance’

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:

Heathen. And you call yourself a New Yorker. Sounds like the makings of a future date.

You just called me a heathen, do you think there will be future dates?

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:
You chased after me for a year. I think you’ll go get pizza with me.

So true. Your confidence is attractive and I like the way you obviously informed your pizza choices off ZAGAT.

The true story was that his affection for Derek might someday rival his love for New York City pizza.

Stiles had gone to bed with his window open and his air conditioning unit turned off. It had poured rain all day Thursday, and he enjoyed waking to the fresh-rain breeze coming in through his window, the scent of ozone, New York City, and bagels filling his nose in the morning. He relished the sensation of the summer heat wave finally giving him a break from artificially chilled air or waking up sweaty. It felt good. It felt like a day of promise.

It was a good day, for more than one reason, and he awoke with a smile on his face, burrowing his face into his pillow as he reached for his phone, because he couldn’t think of a better way to start his Friday morning that texting Derek.

Good morning, see you tonight.

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:

Oh, is it Friday already? I wouldn’t have guessed.

Wear something nice.

New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:

All my clothes are nice.

Considering Stiles nearly went into heart palpitations – early onset lust-induced heart arrhythmia or whatever – when he came across Derek in a thin white undershirt, washed so often that he may as well not be wearing a shirt at all, and a pair of shorts the other day while checking his mail, he considered the validity of that statement versus his definition of nice.

Nothing slinky. You do own the best jeans. He texted back, because he wasn’t sure he could take
the pressure of sitting across from Derek if he was wearing one of his tight t-shirts, the kind that outlined every muscle and made Stiles want to mouth at it until it was completely transparent. This was a first date and Stiles was fully prepared not to make a complete ass of himself by drooling over the incredibly attractive man sitting with him.

**New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:**

*Are you dictating my clothing choices? Just for that, I'll wear my lowest cut shirt.*

*Oh man, one with a deep V? Like, those European deep V neck shirts that go half way down your chest and show off chest hair? Yes, please!*

**New text from Man Who Lives On Top Of Me:**

*Will you wear your leather pants?*

*Peeling me out of them is not as sexy as it sounds. Time to start the day.*

Stiles grinned and finally levered himself out of bed, more or less aware of the mental image he had just left Derek with. He wasn’t just looking forward to the date because it was *a date with Derek*, he was also looking forward to breaking the accidental fast he was on when it came to seeing Derek in person.

Stiles was just slipping his shirt on, appreciating the fact that casual Fridays at the office allowed band shirts or popular culture graphics so long as they could be tied into one of Anderson, Joseph & Roth’s client base.

And Stiles was awesome at playing the degrees of separation game. Forget Kevin Bacon, he could find a way to connect at least 5 of his shirts back to *Anderson, Joseph & Roth.*

Wearing clothing that actually complimented his traditional style tastes – he was almost literally replicating his eleventh grade self – made the day seem even brighter, and he wasn’t sure how it could get any better.

The phone rang and Stiles dove across his bed to grab it, still buzzing with his flirtation with Derek. The call display told him it was Scott on the other end, which was almost as good. He wasn’t about to date Scott, but he hadn’t talked to his best friend in a few days, and it was like icing on the cake of an already excellent morning.
“Hold on, I’m putting you on speaker phone,” he said instead of hello, fumbling with his phone to stick it in the speakerphone dock he used to chat with Allison when they were gaming. Once it was firmly in place, he moved back towards his closet, debating which blazer would make his band shirt professional enough for the office. “What’s up Scott?”

“Have you been on Facebook yet today?” Scott asked.

“No, why?” Stiles asked, dragging a blazer off a hanger with a shrug. “Are there wild pictures of you celebrating the first day of your final month of your internship with your intern buddies? You’d think a bunch of budding lawyers would know better than to put things on Facebook or would at least learn how to use the privacy settings, but noooooo.”

Scott was silent for a beat. “Stiles,” he started seriously.

“Don’t worry about it, dude. You know our bromance is legendary and nothing will come between our brohood, even if there are pictures of you doing a keg stand with someone else. You lucky asshole, still in college while the rest of us are in the work force playing at being adults. Maybe I should go back and do a Masters degree. Have you even gone to bed yet? It’s what? Four in the morning there?”


Stiles straightened. The last time he heard that tone from Scott, Scott had borrowed the jeep and got in a minor fender bender. Stiles had been more concerned with Scott’s concussion than the state of his jeep, but it was the same tone. The tone that told Stiles that Scott had something very serious to tell him, and Stiles wouldn’t like it one bit.

“What is it?” Stiles questioned, a bit harsher than he intended.

“Your dad,” Scott started. “There are pictures online of the ambulance. And the blood. Oh god, Stiles, your dad was shot.”

The blazer dropped out of Stiles’ hands.
“My dad was shot?” Stiles echoed, jumping straight through disbelief and right into terror.

He was vaguely aware of Scott’s voice calling his name, yelling for him over the speakerphone as Stiles’ entire body went cold and started to tremble. He couldn’t seem to be able to draw air into his lungs, and he had an almost violent need to escape, to crawl out of his skin and to shut down his mind. He clawed at his scalp as he tumbled to the floor next to his closet, gasping and twitching as he tried to breathe.

There was a huge difference between being frightened or panicked and experiencing a panic attack. He hadn’t had a true panic attack in almost a decade, but recognising the symptoms didn’t do anything to stop the overwhelming anxiety that suddenly crippled him. He’d first experienced them when his mother died and his trigger had always been losing his father, not his mother’s death like so many of the adults in his life believed. The idea of his father dying as well as his mother had triggered his panic disorder, and for a full year after her death, even the slightest hint of his father’s mortality threatened to squeeze the air right from his lungs.

It was one of the reasons he nagged his father about his health, proactively fighting against that vise of panic along with ensuring his father stayed with him for as long as Stiles could put off inevitable heart problems. As a child, newly thrust into the world of having a single parent, he would have wrapped his father in a bubble and stored him under his bed if he could.

“Stiles?”

“Stiles?”

“STILES?”

“Panic attack,” Stiles managed to force out, his voice choked. The attack hadn’t yet reached the critical crest yet, and he was helpless against riding the rollercoaster to the top. It felt like someone was sitting on his chest, reaching around and squeezing his ribs so hard inhaled air had nowhere to go, each moment the vise became tighter and tighter and tighter. He was trembling from the rush of adrenalin and fear response, but his limbs felt heavy and wooden, running so, so cold.

“Oh my god Stiles, breathe!”

“Stiles breathe!”
It was becoming more and more impossible to hear what Scott was saying, to concentrate on anything. Being told to breathe was not the same as being able to breathe or even being able to try.

“Not helping,” he croaked.

“Your dad’s fine!” Scott yelled at him. “He’s getting stitched up. Oh my god, Stiles, he’s alive, he’s ok!”

Stiles fell, losing all grasp on his surroundings, unable to hear Scott’s words or understand them as true. His vision went black and all he could think was his father was dead.

Dead.

Dead.

And he was alone.

Until he couldn’t think of anything.

Stiles managed to turn himself over so he was staring at the ceiling and some of the pressure on his chest eased. He was vaguely aware of someone talking to Scott, and a small part of him recognised the voice as Derek’s.

He had no idea how long he spent on the floor, images of his father’s death impossible to put from his mind, no matter how many times Scott repeated that the bullet wound hadn’t been serious. He could hear Scott’s words, but he couldn’t register the meaning behind him.

People were talking in the background, voices that droned like the adults in Charlie Brown, as Stiles slowly started to come down from his panic, becoming slightly more aware of his surroundings and less absolutely blinded by the reaction.

“Stiles?”
“Don’t touch him, he lashes out if someone tries to help him.”

“What do I do?”

“He likes the company, just don’t touch him. He likes to know he’s not alone.”

“What happened?”

“I didn’t know he’d react like this. His dad’s fine - a few stitches, but Stiles can’t even hear it right now.”

Slowly, Stiles noticed movement. A shape moving through his bedroom. Then he recognized Derek, and part of his mind latched on to Derek as a coping mechanism, following Derek’s progress without really understanding it.

His dad was ok. Wasn’t that what Scott said? It would be ok.

He repeated that in his head as his heart slowed and the ache in his lungs eased until he was able to drag himself into a sitting position.

Derek stared at him, seated on the floor with his back against Stiles’ bed as Stiles leaned against door of his closet. The first thing he noticed was the look of concern on Derek’s face, expression tight and vague.

“I was worried about you,” Derek offered, noticing the way Stiles was staring at him. “You’ll go to Beacon Hills and visit your dad,” Derek said. “Your friend says he’s alive.”

Stiles nodded automatically, but something about Derek’s words helped shake something loose from the complete tensed and constricted state of his muscles.

“He also said not to touch you, and I’m sorry if that was wrong. It seemed… unconscionable to leave you like that,” Derek eased himself into a standing position, mouth curling into an expression of self-reproach. “We have to leave now, if you feel up to it.”
Stiles finally focused on Derek. “Derek?” he croaked in a dull voice, breath easing into his lungs easily for the first time in a while.

“I’ve found you a 9 hour flight that leaves in a little over two hours. If you don’t make that one, there is an eight hour flight that leaves in three. I suspect the layover in San Francisco waits for the same flight,” Derek grabbed at him, hauling him to his feet. “Traffic on a Friday,” Derek said, shaking his head. “We’ll get you on the subway and you can take the train out to JFK.”

Stiles nodded. He was able to follow the general idea behind Derek’s words: home. Stiles was going home.

“How about a change of clothes?”

Stiles shook his head.

“Ok, I have your passport. You have your wallet?”

Stiles nodded. Derek reached out and touched him, patting down his pockets. Stiles was just coming back into his head enough that he knew that his normal reaction to this would be with a smirk and a half-sarcastic, half-genuine come on, but he wasn’t recovered enough to make himself care to do it. The silence was more telling than anything else.

Derek frowned when Stiles just stood there. He brought his hand up, touching Stiles’ jaw as he studied his eyes. “You don’t have your wallet. Where do you usually keep it, Stiles?”

Stiles frowned at him. He usually kept it on his dresser and he gestured in that direction. Derek looked over, moving aside some of the clutter Stiles had piling up. Stiles focused on Derek’s movements, still tracking him with his eyes. Derek left the bedroom and Stiles automatically moved forward, following Derek into the living room and stood there staring at him as Derek rummaged through papers on Stiles’ coffee table, holding up Stiles’ wallet triumphantly.

“Credit cards?” Derek asked.

“Yeah,” he said, voice dry and cracked.
Derek didn’t take that at face value, already flipping open the leather to look inside. “Ok, your driver’s license, credit cards. Do you have your phone?”

Stiles patted down his pockets, looking helplessly around his living room. “It’s… uh… I was talking to Scott, so it’s,” he gestured towards his bedroom, suddenly wanting nothing more than to avoid that room for the rest of eternity.

“Ok,” Derek nodded, disappearing back into the bedroom. Stiles stared after him, shuffling over to the doorway so he could watch through the door as Derek took care of things in his bedroom, grabbing his phone out of the speakers and tucking the charger into the leather shoulder bag Stiles used to carry his work around in. “Come on,” he said, grabbing Stiles by the elbow and dragging him out of the apartment. “I’ll get you to the airport,” he promised in the elevator. “If you want to go, I mean,” he finished uncertainly.

“Yeah,” Stiles nodded with a bit more consciousness than his other reactions thus far. He was feeling slightly less closed in now that they were out of his apartment, the four walls no longer feeling like a trap, but Stiles knew it had nothing to do with the apartment. He was feeling less claustrophobic of being trapped in New York City. It was a huge city, but also an entire country away from his father and where he needed to be, and every step he took forward towards the airport was another step closer he was towards being able to breathe.

Derek stayed with him, a constant presence against his side while navigating the subway system, until Stiles felt more or less competent on his own feet, his panic attack symptoms mellowing down to an awareness on the periphery of his mind of the slightly off-kilter tightness in his chest and a buzzing anxiety hangover in his head.

Derek stayed with him through it all, as though making up for the helplessness he felt while Stiles was wheezing on the floor by doing everything he could to help Stiles now.

“Thank you,” Stiles finally breathed, holding on to his boarding pass with one hand and feeling a bit more of the helplessness ease from his tense muscles. He could feel exhaustion pulling across his eyes, the stinging sensation of over taxing his system. It was lot like what he experienced after an all-nighter at work or play, but all condensed into a 30 minute timeframe.

Around them the airport was buzzing, and Stiles found himself standing in front of the proper gate without any effort of his own. He was becoming more and more aware of how difficult it would have been to navigate his way to this point on his own. Impossible, really, in the state he was in.
“Thank you,” Stiles repeated, reaching out with his free hand a squeezing Derek’s hand. “I’m sorry for...”

“No,” Derek stopped him, with a look that was both inscrutable and honest. “No, don’t apologize for something you have no control over.”

Derek’s expression was intent and direct, and Stiles realized that maybe Derek knew a bit about that due to his sleepwalking. “Yeah. Yeah, I have to go.”

x.x.x.x.

His flight across country was long, punctuated by a constant jiggle of Stiles’ leg that annoyed the heck out of his seatmate but that he couldn’t stop. His last prescription for anti-anxiety meds had been filled a decade ago, and he ended up making due with a packet of Dramamine he picked up in the airport shop area, hoping it would help make him drowsy enough to make it through the flight. Unfortunately, all it did was give him a sense of paranoia and anxiety, a restlessness he couldn’t really shake from his limbs that had nothing to do with the cramped quarters of a small tube in the air and everything to do with how long the flight would last. He spent every minute staring at his iPad, attempting to read or play a game to pass the time, but just getting frustrated by the fact he looked at the countdown he had set every three minutes, sure that there would have been a change more drastic than that since the last time he checked.

To say the flight wasn’t easy was an understatement, and he emerged feeling wrung out and exhausted, every muscle in his body tense, and with the gnawing and overwhelming certainty that while he was in the air something terrible had happened and his father had died. He even, at one point, tried to use the in-flight phone to call home, but his credit card shook in his hands and he tried three different PIN numbers before giving up.

He could feel that sense of panic welling in his chest again, kept back only by the idea that he was 70% done his journey and he had an entire hour between flights to contact his dad. Part of him thought that knowing for sure, one way or the other, would be better than being suspended in some kind of stasis, because his father was not Schrodinger’s cat.

The moment he arrived in the airport he collapsed into the first chair he saw inside the waiting area for his connecting flight, his phone already clutched in his sweaty hands. His heart was beating quickly in nervousness, and he could visibly see the tremors as he told SIRI who to call.

It was almost anticlimactic when the phone dialed his father and the phone rang once before his dad picked up casually with a “hey Stiles, what’s up.”
“Dad!” Stiles exclaimed, almost collapsing to the floor in relief. “Oh my god.”

“Stiles, I’ve been calling you all morning. Is something wrong?”


“So you’ve heard,” his dad sounded resigned, like keeping something from Stiles was difficult in a normal situation, but he thought the fact Stiles lived 3000 miles away and still had spies to be the bane of his existence. “If you had your phone on I would’ve made sure you heard it from me first. I’m fine, son. Rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated.”

“Don’t joke!” Stiles said emphatically, almost yelling, and causing the couple sitting across from him to jump. This was not what he expected at all, and part of him was relieved, of course he was relieved, but another part of him fueled all his terror into fury and there was no one to take it out on but his father. Stiles had to pause for a moment and remind himself to bite his tongue, because his father was still injured in ways Stiles couldn’t see over the phone, and was probably putting on a front, and Stiles yelling at him for being so casual about something like that was the last thing his dad needed. “Scott told me this morning right after it happened, and if you had been able at the time, I know you would have told me first, so don’t try to make this into a small thing. You were brought to the hospital in an ambulance dad! Were you even able to call me? Were you even conscious?”

“I’m not the one who turned my phone off while at work,” his dad sounded amused, turning this back on him in very typical Stilinski fashion.

“At work,” Stiles sputtered. “Do you think I could have worked today? Do you really think… I’m in San Francisco! I was flying across the country, dad, and airplanes have this little rule about cell phones.”

“Why?” his dad sounded genuinely confused at this, like the idea of Stiles dropping everything and flying across the country was a baffling concept.

“Why? Because you were shot!”
“I’m fine. It’s a wasted trip.”

“Bull, dad! Ambulance. Hospital.”

“It’s just a small fleshwound.”

“Oh my god,” Stiles exclaimed, visions of gaping holes covering 30% of his father’s body flicking through his mind like the world’s least fun montage. Well, if Stiles was in more of a mood to think up these things and not trying to shove down a renewed sense of panic, he would probably be able to come up with worse montages. A montage of Sexually Transmitted Infections maybe?

Because who used to word “fleshwound?”

People hiding the fact they were seriously injured, that’s who.

“Just… rest, ok dad? I’m going to be home in a few hours and I’ll take care of everything. Everything. Don’t worry about the hospital bill or getting set up at home or food or anything. I’ll take care of it.” I’ll take care of you, he wanted to say, but he thought that might be best left unspoken.

“Ok, son,” his dad said with obvious amusement. “Just what did Scott tell you anyway?”

“I’ve got to go,” Stiles said as his boarding information was broadcasted and he was prompted to approach the gates to board the plane. “I’ll see you soon.”

Scott met him at the airport once his connecting flight from San Francisco arrived in the more northern regions of California about an hour later. It was only a four hour drive from San Francisco to Beacon Hills, and about 45 minutes from the airport to Beacon Hills, but Derek had still managed to cut about an hour off of Stiles’ travel time, and he would be eternally grateful to him for setting the trip up while Stiles was flopping around on the floor like a landed fish. The closer he got to his father, the easier it got to breathe, and Stiles became aware of how difficult even organizing a flight would have been in the state he was in when Derek found him.
Stiles was kind of stubborn and known for doing what needed to get done. He knew he could have gotten to the airport, somehow, and maybe having something useful to focus on would have helped clear his mind, but it wouldn’t have been easy.

The drive home from the airport was silent because even Scott, especially Scott, knew how reticent Stiles could get after experiencing a panic attack.

Stiles could be a very talkative person, filling in silences (sometimes for his own peace of mind, but more often than not to help distract the other person) when he felt they were needed. Stiles could also be quiet and serious.

There was a difference between deliberate silence and how he was acting now, though. For the entire 45 minutes, he only exchanged a few words with Scott, despite the fact he hadn’t seen his best friend since a short trip home during the holidays, more than 6 months before:

“How’s your dad?”

“Shot. You know more than I do.”

“But not badly, right? I mean, it wasn’t bad. It looked much worse on that Facebook posting. I contacted Devon... remember him from school? Well he was the one who posted the pics on Facebook and when I told him you learned that your dad had been shot from one of his pics he felt really bad about it. Really horrible.”

“Devon was an asshole,” Stiles remembered.

“Yeah well he should have felt really fucking horrible, ok? I pointed that out to him. He should have been aware of that and thought of the consequences of his actions beforehand, ok? Who does that? Who just posts pictures of accidents and tragedies and shootings of cops on the internet where everybody can see them before the family can even be notified? Even journalists have ethics, man, there are laws, but this... this is just anybody, anyone off the street can post anything they want. That’s bullshit man. Totally bullshit.”

Usually this was the kind of surprisingly educated debate that he and Scott could engage in now that they were both adults of the ‘learned’ variety.
Stiles looked over at Scott, noticing how his jaw flexed with anger and he peered intensely through his windshield, channeling all that impotent rage into passing the truck in front of them.

“So I suited up and told him that if he didn’t take the pictures down I would file an injunction against him and legally force him to take them down.”

“You’re not a lawyer.”

“I’m not a lawyer yet. I still have another year to go, but I know enough to be able to stop assholes from posting pictures of... police investigations, for fuck’s sake... all over the internet.”

Stiles didn’t even think to point out that Scott had dropped the “f-bomb” twice in a single conversation. Either Scott was furious, so furious even his (more or less) even temper was giving way to anger, or he and Allison had been marathoning Dexter again and had picked up Debra Morgan’s habits. It happened once before in their undergrad years, and Scott had sounded hilariously like a foul-mouthed bunny rabbit for about a week.

Allison had sounded terrifyingly accurate, like the one thing that stopped her from coming across as a truly badass and frightening anti-hero was her innocent demeanor, and now that she was embracing some filthy language the rest of her BAMF self would follow.

Stiles had loved it.

“How are you?” Scott asked after Stiles had been silent for a while.

Stiles shrugged.

Scott let it go for about five minutes. “No, seriously, Stiles,” he said with earnest concern. “I know you haven’t had a panic attack for years and this one was really bad. Added on top of your dad getting shot makes me know you’re not ok, no matter how much you put me off. So how are you holding up, really?”

“I’m not sure,” Stiles told him.
“Derek seemed nice. Was this another sleepwalking night or is something up with the two of you?”

Stiles shrugged again.

“Anyway, it was good he was there,” Scott finished.

“Yeah,” Stiles finally answered, his eyes looking out the window. He felt like he was constantly controlling his breathing, constantly aware of how tense his muscles were, but he couldn’t relax yet, couldn’t give Scott 100% of his attention until he knew for sure that his dad was ok, dread sitting heavily in the pit of his stomach as the Welcome to Beacon Hills sign appeared and they drove past it, car heading for the center of town.

That wasn’t right.

“Drop me off at the hospital,” Stiles said, the first direct sentence he spoke to Scott all afternoon. “I don’t need to go home.”

“Your dad’s at home,” Scott said with confusion.

“He discharged himself?” Stiles asked incredulously, suddenly furious at his father for being so unconcerned about his health.

“Stiles...” Scott started, taking the moment they were stopped at a red light to look over at him. “How bad do you think this... never mind, you’ll see in a few minutes.” He turned the car onto the familiar street Stiles had driven down almost every day for the first eighteen years of his life.

They came to a stop outside Stiles’ house and the first thing Stiles noted was his dad outside in a short-sleeve shirt watering plants that looked a week overdue for some rain.

“Dad!” Stiles exclaimed, diving out of the passenger seat before Scott had come to a complete stop. He had his arms around his father before he could really think about his dad’s injury, something about seeing him alive and well translating in Stiles’ mind as overwhelming relief. “I’m sorry,” he said with a laugh, not pulling back and if anything tightening his hold on his dad. “Am I hurting you? I’m sorry.”
“It’s good to see you too son,” his dad said with fondness and just the slightest hint of familiar exasperation at Stiles’ antics. “It’s good to know what your reaction time in getting across country is. Eleven hours, can’t you do better?”

Stiles snorted and finally let go, not surprised to find that the corners of his eyes were heavy with unshed tears, his sight wavering with the liquid. Banter was familiar. It was something he could do. “Not unless I teleport. You’re the one who settled into the middle of nowhere northern California.”

“But I wasn’t the one who accepted a job on the Atlantic Coast.”

“But I wasn’t the one who let himself get shot. Let’s see,” Stiles urged, bracing himself. He knew his father wasn’t dead. He knew his father was standing, but honestly Stiles wouldn’t be surprised if his dad watered the plants with a hole through his guts. His dad was like an action hero.

His dad pushed back his tshirt sleeve to show a white bandage that was about three inches long and an inch wide. Stiles had seen larger bandages the time he fell off his bike and skinned his knee. He stared for a moment, unable to compute this wound with the visions of manly scars of honour circling through his head. “Uh...” Stiles said, poking the bandage.

“Yes Stiles, that’s it,” his dad cut him off. “That’s what you flew 3000 miles over.”

His brain almost had to do a total reboot to absorb that information. He rebounded quickly, because if there was one thing about Stiles, he knew how to switch thought processes in real time, so no one would witness the uncertainties he felt in his quieter moments. He’d obsess over it later, but for now he put on a confident face and smirked at his dad. “Well since I’m here I may as well make sure you’re eating healthy. How’s your caffeine cleanse going? Do you want me to make you some of that amazing energy juice you have us on? It makes me super pumped every morning and you need to keep your energy up!”

His dad looked like his world was a world of regrets, and he wished he had stepped a little bit more into the path of the bullet so he didn’t have to deal with Stiles’ brand of channeling concern in the face of his father’s health. “It’s good to have you home, son,” he said, pushing the garden hose into Stiles’ hands. “I’m feeling tired. I think it’s time for a nap.”

Sure it was.
“Do you want me to fluff your pillow for you!” Stiles yelled as his father escaped into the house.

“See?” Scott asked.

Stiles was exhausted, stumbling into his childhood bedroom and catching a look at the time on his old alarm clock. It was almost 8 PM and there was somewhere he should be. Watching Supernatural, maybe? It was almost 11 in New York and he definitely missed the episode there, but he could probably pick it up in Beacon Hills if he managed to keep his eyes open for another two hours.

Panic attacks always left him exhausted and he hadn’t managed much of a nap on the plane, too overwrought to do much more than stare out the window.

Then he remembered: his date with Derek was at 8.

He had his phone out and was dialing before he had a chance to think about it, feeling guilty over the fact he hadn’t thought about it until now, despite verifying that his father was ok hours ago. He’d texted Derek a short message after his final flight had touched down to let him know that he arrived, but beyond that there had been no contact and today was supposed to be important to them.

There’s been a countdown and everything.

He hadn’t felt up to contacting anyone, even ignoring Greenberg’s concerned text that proved that Devon hadn’t taken the pictures down at all, but he shouldn’t have included Derek in the communication blackout.

“Stiles? Is everything ok?” Derek answered immediately.

“It’s 8 here and I just remembered about our date.”
Derek snorted. “That’s not even an issue, Stiles, of course we’ll reschedule if you still want to.”

“Of course,” Stiles answered incredulously. If he still wanted to? What was that? “Why wouldn’t I? If anything, I want to date you more now, dude.”

“How’s your dad?” Derek changed the subject.

“He’s fine, but then you knew that because Scott told you. I was the one who needed the affirmation. I needed to come home, I wouldn’t have accepted anything less, and I wouldn’t have gotten here as quickly if you hadn’t made it possible...”

“You thanked me already,” Derek responded, obviously uncomfortable with the direction of this conversation.

“Yes, but I wanted to make sure you knew that I’m aware now of how much you helped. If you hadn’t been there I wouldn’t have gotten myself together so quickly.”

Derek paused, silent for a full moment, the lack of noise echoing across the span of the country. “That’s all?” he asked, and if he didn’t sound so uncertain, as though there should be something more for Stiles to say, Stiles would have called him on his attitude. As it was, Derek seemed like he was waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“Is there something?” Stiles asked.

“No!” Derek answered, but he sounded relieved rather than certain.

“Goodnight, Derek.” Stiles said with amusement and a hint of fondness.

“Goodnight, Stiles.”

The thing was, of course there was something. Something rather huge that Stiles was conveniently ignoring while actually conversing with Derek but that niggled in the back of his head now that he wasn’t as consumed with thoughts of his father, who was sleeping down the hall. He wasn’t even sleeping the sleep of the injured or the drugged, he was sleeping because he had been on shift all
evening only to be shot towards the end of his shift, and then spent the day trying to get in contact
with Stiles and dealing with getting stitched up. The fact that his father didn’t even need
prescription painkillers eased a little more of the post-panic attack tension that was still clinging to
him. It was less easy to wash off than the scent of airplanes, recycled air, and nervous sweats had
been. It wasn’t as easy to shower away the sensation of panic within him.

The obvious question was: how had Derek known Stiles was in trouble?

The obvious answer was: because both their windows were open and Derek was able to hear Stiles
from his bedroom.

x.x.x.x.x.

“Let’s see the war wound!” Stiles cajoled over breakfast the next morning. His father sighed,
greatly aggrieved by this, probably because he was dressed, work-shirt neatly ironed, and pulling it
off his shoulder might ruin the straight, professional lines. Stiles did not care.

He whistled once his dad complied, knowing Stiles well enough not to fight him on that. “Wow
dad, look at that thing.”

His father levelled him with an unimpressed look.

Stiles stared at the wound on his dad’s arm, which was about an inch long. He’d taken the
bandage off, and Stiles could count the stitches. All 6 of them. “Wow dad, are you sure you got
enough time off for that?” he asked flatly.

“I told you you didn’t have to come,” John said. “I told you it was only a flesh wound.”

“I thought you were being all Monty Python, stiff upper lip, British on me,” Stiles answered,
pointing at the stitches. “That isn’t a flesh wound. That’s a scratch.”

“Well spotted,” his dad said, grabbing his jacket. “I’m going in for my shift.”

“Sit down!” Stiles demanded, pushing on his dad’s shoulder. “You’ve been shot, and I travelled
3000 miles to make sure you’re comfortable,” Stiles said with a gleam in his eye. “So I’m going to make sure you’re comfortable.”

“I wasn’t shot!” his dad denied like the big denier he was. Stiles could see the panic in his eyes, and the side of him that was just a tiny bit evil, the same side of him that went a bit overboard on the diet tips sometimes just to torture his father, grinned back in a doting-son manner. If anything, his father did not look comforted. “It was a ricochet! The bullet sent back a piece of wood and it went into my arm!”

“Why are you on all these pain killers then?” Stiles asked, shaking the bottle of prescription pills on the kitchen counter.

“They’re antibiotics!” His dad said desperately.

Stiles made a soothing sound. “Your heart, dad. You’re getting worked up. That can’t be good for recovering from blood loss. So you just sit there,” he said, pushing his father onto the couch. “I’ll be right back. If I hear you moving, there will be hell to pay!”

“I wasn’t shot!” his dad called after him as Stiles marched up the stairs.

“I wasn’t shot!” his dad denied as Stiles shoved all the spare blankets from the upstairs linen closet over his dad. It was an armful of winter duvets and fleecy throws. “I’m not running a fever, Stiles!”

“I brought you a change of bandages.” Stiles said seriously, placing a box of glow-in-the-dark Spongebob bandaids on the coffee table. “It is very important to keep these kinds of wounds clean and well-cared for. No strenuous activity or you might pull a stitch.”

“I wasn’t shot,” his father said hopefully, trying to push at the mountain of blankets heaped over him. Stiles figured that if he could use his arm enough to get free, then he was mobile enough to go to work. He was the best son ever, devising such a comprehensive test.

“We need to get your iron levels up. SIRI,” he addressed his iPhone. “What are some iron rich foods?”

“Stiles, the top 10 Iron-Rich Foods are:
Red meat

Egg yolks

Dark, leafy greens (spinach, collards)

Dried fruit (prunes, raisins)

Iron-enriched cereals and grains (check the labels)

Mollusks (oysters, clams, scallops)

Turkey or chicken giblets

Beans, lentils, chick peas and soybeans

Liver

Artichokes”

“Thanks SIR!” Stiles chirped. “Did you hear that dad? I can make you a spinach salad with artichokes and some beans and little chunks of liver, how does that sound? Or maybe some cereal with prunes and egg yolk! Or I can make an omelet with chicken giblets. What’s a giblet, dad?”

Stiles could hear the sound of half a dozen blankets falling to the floor and his dad hurrying towards the front door. “Good to see you, son,” his dad yelled from the doorway.

“You too, dad! Even if you were shot!”

“I wasn’t shot!” his dad yelled, slamming the door behind him.

And the best part? His dad had habitually grabbed the travel mug Stiles had set by the door. The one that didn’t contain one ounce of coffee.

Revenge was a dish best served cold and smelling like mildew-y grass.

x.x.x.x.x.

“You’re an asshole,” Stiles said, bursting through the McArgent back door and right into the kitchen, where Scott was sitting squeezing lemons for fresh lemonade like the boy scout he was. It actually baffled Stiles how anyone could make lemonade from scratch. “I am on to you, Scott
McCaaargent.” He said sternly, almost forgetting to use Scott’s portmanteau (and legally changed) last name.

Scott actually had the grace to look embarrassed.

Up to that point, Stiles had been more or less assuming this was a huge misunderstanding, but as Scott ducked his head and gave him a sheepish grin, all lopsided mouth and the patent puppy dog eyes, Stiles knew that it was deliberate. “You made it sound like my dad was dying!”

“We haven’t seen you in almost a year,” Scott pointed out.

“I had a panic attack! I’m still recovering from it!”

“That was unexpected,” Scott said with a pained expression. “But how was I supposed to know? You stopped having them more than a decade ago!”

“But still…” Stiles pressed.

“But still, Stiles, we haven’t seen you in almost a year. You were only home for a few days at Christmas and even your dad hoped you would take time off this summer now that your job isn’t new and you’re established enough to cash in on your vacation time. He asked me. He asked me, Stiles, whether I knew when you were taking the time to come and visit, as though the fact you hadn’t yet baffled him. He stopped me and questioned me on the street like some kind of criminal.”

“You’re guilting me.”

“Yes, I’m guilting you. Why don’t you come home anymore? It’s not like you were doing anything important this weekend anyway, now that you’re here you should just relax and spend time with us, right darling?” he asked as Allison came into the room, scrubbing at damp hair as she grabbed a glass of the lemonade Scott made and took a sip.

“Always the best after a long run, thanks,” she said, clinking her glass against the pitcher as she gave Scott a soft look. “What am I agreeing to?”
“Stiles wouldn’t have been doing anything this weekend anyway, visiting home isn’t exactly ruining his weekend now that he knows his dad is fine.”

“I think Stiles is the only one who can answer that,” Allison answered with a grin, looking at him directly.

“Well,” Stiles deliberated, making a production of thinking about it. “I would have gone for a jog this morning in Central Park with Derek, which probably would have been awesome because we would have had our first date last night at 8.”

“Oh,” Scott wilted.

“Ouch,” Allison winced. “But also congratulations. I was getting tired of hearing you pine over someone who’s so into you it’s not even funny.”

Stiles felt his face break into a grin. One that was probably overly goofy and lovesick.

Allison smiled back. “Oh, that’s so great,” she said, pulling him into a hug before sitting next to him. “Now I hate to bring things back to seriousness, but have they figured out yet who shot the sheriff?”

“I think that was Bob Marley originally, but the most popular version is Eric Clapton.” Stiles gave a self-satisfied smile, pleased he’d been able to get the joke out with his usual level of feigned unconcern and sarcasm.

Allison, bless her sweet heart, simply nodded. “Good, you’re joking about it. I’ll get you some coffee, but don’t take that as a declaration of love,” Allison said. She laughed as she got up and poured water into their cheap coffee maker. “I know you think coffee is the universal language of romantic interest, but I swear this mug just says ‘I care for you as a friend.’”

It hit Stiles all at once as Allison grinned at him, stuck in a tableau as she stood over the coffee maker and Scott smiled up at her like she said something brilliant and precious. In that moment he felt the air completely leave his lungs, like something had slammed into his diaphragm, almost like the worst moments of his panic attack hitting all at once as his brain buzzed, everything blurring for a fraction of a moment before sharpening with a clarity he hadn’t known because he hadn’t been able to put all the information together until that second.
“OH MY GOD,” Stiles said meaningfully, suddenly sure of this one thing. He made a face as the realization solidified into a tangible conclusion. “Oh shit. Derek can hear me from his bedroom. He heard me having a panic attack and Scott yelling and that’s why he…” Stiles cut off, flailing as he pushed aside that train of thought. “Last year. He heard the conversation. With the coffee. The coffee conversation, Allison. The conversation about Godly Jogger and the coffee.”

Allison caught on to where Stiles was going with this, because coffee grinds scattered out of her hand, raining down on the marble countertop as Scott looked between the two of them in confusion.

“The coffee conversat…” Scott started to ask.

“Do you think so?” Allison asked. “I’m going to be the voice of reason and say that just because he can hear things from his bedroom, that doesn’t mean he has.”

“No, but he did!” Stiles exclaimed, jumping to his feet and pacing through their small kitchen. “Because do you know what happened three days later? Godly Jogger approached me in the park. I remember because when I called you about it, you said ‘and what did you say you were going to do three days ago?’ in a judgmental tone because I already failed on my new proactive management of my love life.”

“Oh, that’s right. And you answered that you couldn’t ask someone out who was so flawless, because people that beautiful so rarely have personalities, and I quote ‘I work with a lot of models, ok? And they look down at me like I’m the scum of the earth. It’s impossible that I’d have something in common with someone with all the complexity of a cardboard cutout.’”

“I had such a terrible day at work that day,” Stiles pulled at his hair. “Do you think he heard that too?”

“What coffee conversation?” Scott finally managed to insert.

“The conversation where Allison and I were on speaker phone and we were talking about my lack of a love life and I was coasting off a really epic win from our gaming date and I told her that the next time Godly Jogger was in my orbit in the park, I would ask him out for coffee, and when Allison made fun of coffee as being unimaginative, I told her coffee was the universal language of romantic interest.” Stiles paused, chewing on his lip as he thought. “And then the next time I was in the park, Derek approached me and stood next to me long enough for me to make a fool of myself and oh my god, oh my god he DID do it on purpose, that explains so much.”
“That’s creepy and invasive is what that is,” Scott pointed out, hastily adding “but also really romantic” when Allison narrowed her eyes at him.

But Stiles wasn’t paying attention to that because he was too busy reanalyzing every conversation he’d ever had with Derek. “I have to go back,” he said. “I have to talk to him.”

Scott’s face fell. “But…”

“Sit down,” Allison said impatiently, pushing Stiles back into his chair. “Stop trying to fly across the country on a whim. Your ticket back is for tomorrow afternoon, so you can stay in Beacon Hills until tomorrow afternoon. Derek’s not going anywhere, the two of you are together now, pretty much a year after he gave you a chance and you stupidly botched it, so another twenty-four hours where you relax and play video games with your best friend isn’t going to make much of a difference.”

“He must really like you,” Scott realized out loud. “He’s probably been pining as much as you have.”

“No one deserves that,” Allison agreed.

“Clearly the two of you are perfect for each other,” Scott finished with a grin, like he really thought that was a sign of soulmatehood. “You go together like peanut butter and… peanut butter, oh.”

“Similar people work together too,” Allison pointed out. “Because you have things in common.”

“Yeah, you’re both idiots about your love lives,” Scott finished, and Allison subtly (very unsubtly) reached over and gave him a high five. Obviously Scott really missed him if he was using Allison as a replacement bro. Just like Stiles really missed Scott because he was using Allison as a replacement bro. Or maybe they all just knew each other for so long they were now like the same person, which was a frightening thought.

Only, Scott hadn’t yet learned Allison’s video gaming skills.

“Thanks, guys,” Stiles responded sarcastically. “But I really should go talk to Derek.”
“Look what you’re doing to Scott,” Allison said, pointing towards her husband. Immediately Scott schooled his expression into his most pathetic and earnest disappointed face.

“You’re such a faker,” Stiles grumbled, but he already knew he lost.

In the end, he was glad he didn’t run half-cocked back across the country after Derek because it gave him time to think. More importantly, it gave him time to treat his dad to a steak supper – actual iron rich food that his dad could appreciate – and spend the evening at home in a pair of ratty old sweatpants that didn’t make his move out east and a tub of chicken wings that were probably worse for his dad’s health than the steak had been.

Scott was right, he didn’t get home nearly as often as he should. There were two Stiles who existed. First, the guy who grew up in Beacon Hills and considered it home. He always felt like returning was like a cozy comforter wrapping around him, soft and worn and familiar. His father was there, his best friends were there, and when he was in Beacon Hills it was hard to imagine anywhere felt as comfortable.

Then he returned to New York City and felt the same sensation of belonging. It wasn’t as warm and cozy, in fact it was slightly frightening, but it was also exciting and new and his future instead of the past.

He realized on the plane, suspended between the both of them, that there was no way to reconcile both of his lives. Real life wasn’t a story where everything fell into place, where everyone ended up happy in the end. Most times, it took effort and investment to achieve any sort of happiness, and sometimes important sacrifices were made, such as the overall time he spent in Beacon Hills.

x.x.x.x.

Stiles climbed through Derek’s bedroom window, cursing softly as his foot caught on the ledge and he almost went sprawling into the room. He regained his footing, but Derek was already alert, staring at him in the soft light from the street outside. Derek’s floor was only one level higher than his, but Derek got a bit more light pollution from the businesses the next street over, the shadows between their apartment building and the building next door not blocking as much as they did on the fourth floor. Stiles could see the shape of Derek’s face perfectly, his eyes wide and blinking at him, and his mouth turned down in confusion and discontent at being woken.
“I brought you a coffee,” Stiles said, gesturing with the cup he almost spilled all over Derek’s bedroom floor a moment ago.

“It’s 2 in the morning,” Derek groaned. “It’s too early for coffee.” Derek gave him an accusing glance, like he thought Stiles was up to something, and if it depended on coffee and not sleep, Derek wanted no part in it. To illustrate this, he turned over and snuggled back into his thin sheet, daring Stiles to continue with half-lidded eyes.

“That’s fine,” Stiles said. “The coffee is mostly symbolic anyway.”

Derek narrowed his eyes at him.

“Because some idiot once said that coffee is the universal sign of romantic interest and then ignored the fundamental law behind that statement, which is to notice when someone is using coffee as a sign of romantic interest.”

Stiles was kind of proud of himself for getting that sentence out without sounding too sarcastic. He had spent the trip home trying to think of the perfect way to let Derek know that he knew now what had been going on with him the entire time they circled around each other, that he was aware of how deliberate some of Derek’s movements had been, no matter how casual they seemed.

Derek froze, and Stiles considered himself a decent authority on Derek’s body language now – obviously not at the level of fluency that would speak to him being an expert, but he definitely wasn’t in the beginner remedial class anymore – that he could tell the difference between Derek at rest on his bed and Derek deliberately tensing.

“You heard my conversation that day?” Stiles pressed on, ignoring the signs Derek was giving off that he didn’t want to talk about this now. They had to talk about it sometime, and Stiles was convinced they should do it now, because obviously one of the major problems they had was communication. “And your response was the first time we met in the park? You wanted me to ask you out?”

“Yes,” Derek responded, sitting up and scrubbing his face with his hands. His palm rasped against the perpetual five o’clock shadow covering his jawline, an audible sound that Stiles almost missed beneath the more obvious noises on the New York streets.

“Crap,” Stiles said, placing the coffee on top of Derek’s dresser. “All this time we could have
“Come to bed,” Derek groaned, pulling back the sheet to allow Stiles to crawl in beside him. “I can’t have an important conversation after sleeping for three hours. I’ll mess it up.”

Stiles thought that maybe they should talk about it. There were things he wanted to learn and things he wanted to say. There were jokes he could make about questioning which of them were following the other, but it had been a long flight and an even longer weekend, and Derek’s bed looked incredibly inviting. Derek himself looked even more so, and Stiles crossed the room, stripping out of his clothing as he went until he was slipping into the cool side of the bed next to Derek in his boxers.

It should be weird, but this wasn’t the first time they had ended up in bed together. It wasn’t the first time they had even ended up in bed together on purpose, but it was the first time Stiles had gone to Derek, and he thought that might be important.

Not really to him, but to Derek.

“I used to think about it,” Derek admitted softly into the night, as though it was easier to express the thoughts while lying in the dark. “What would have happened if you did ask.”

“What did you think about?” Stiles asked, curling towards Derek and the feeling of intimacy of the conversation. It was so much better like this, confessing things across the space of a few inches, their sides sliding together at a right angle as Stiles leaned into Derek. It made Stiles feel like he could confess anything.

“That we’d do this. Sneak into each other’s bedrooms in the middle of the night. I made the trip down to your bedroom a hundred times in my mind. I could have done it in my sleep.”

In the dark Derek’s eyes were sleep-softened and gentle, hand a heated brand as it trailed slowly around the curve of Stiles’ side, drawing him forward. Stiles leaned up the last inch, kissing Derek slowly, taking the time to savor the first contact of their lips together.

It didn’t last forever, but nothing does, and it only made Stiles aware of how late it was and his levels of exhaustion when both of them pulled back slightly, unwilling to deepen the kiss beyond a quick acknowledgement.
Stiles awoke to the sound of Derek in the shower and he had a moment of regret that he didn’t get to experience waking up beside Derek for the first time since they decided to try dating. Then he got a good look at the time and realized how late it was. Considering Derek’s almost pathological need to run through Central Park and do whatever other exercises that were part of his schedule (because there was no way he got biceps like that from just running), the way Derek indulgently allowed himself to sleep until the last possible moment was incredibly endearing.

He slid out of bed, experiencing a momentary twinge of awkwardness as he looked around Derek’s room for his clothes. He spotted his pants kicked part-way beneath the bed, not where he left them, and he had a mental picture of Derek stumbling over them as he moved towards the bathroom. It made him grin at the way imaginary-Derek tripped, grumbling and cursing beneath his breath as he kicked the pants out of his way, trying not to wake Stiles.

Stiles leaned down to grab the pants, his fingers closing around the material, and his eye got distracted by something pink and fuzzy poking out from beneath the bed. He leaned further in and grinned at the sight of his slippers, lined up and ready to wear, if the weather wasn’t too hot for slippers. The temperature might have broken from the hundreds, but it was still in the high seventies/low eighties. That was like saying someone propped open the door of the sauna for a moment – it was still hot as sweaty balls, but there was some relief in comparison.

So definitely not slipper weather, and yet, there they were, still visible in Derek’s otherwise uncluttered bedroom.

Derek was so ridiculously into him, Stiles decided. It was obvious to him now, like one of those ‘hidden animal’ pictures where if you crossed your eyes a certain way, you could see the leopard. Only, what Stiles could see now was that Derek was just as stupidly into Stiles as Stiles was stupidly into Derek and they were stupid for not acting on it sooner.

He couldn’t help but reach for the slippers after he pulled on his pants, looking down and seeing the floppy ears back where they belonged after almost a year of cold feet.

The shower stopped running, and there was nothing Stiles wanted more than to be there when Derek emerged in a towel, hopefully with steam billowing behind him like a scene right out of some kind of romantic novel or really quality special effect porn. Unfortunately, he really needed to get downstairs and ready for his own day.

Was it rude to sleep and bail? Would Derek be disappointed to find Stiles no longer asleep in his
bed? Probably. Who wouldn’t be?

Stiles probably needed to leave Derek a note on his pillow.

If Derek was the kind of guy sentimental enough to leave Stiles’ slippers beneath his bed, he would probably secretly love a note on his pillow.

Only… Derek had about three pens on his desk and not a single one of them wanted to write. He just kept getting streaky blotches and then nothing, no matter how impatiently he circled the pen on the piece of paper in front of him until it almost tore.

Why the heck didn’t Derek have a working pen in his room? Stiles huffed crossly, tossing down his latest failed attempt. He stubbornly wanted to leave Derek a note now that the idea was in his head, work be damned, and he was being foiled by pens. Derek was an architect, surely he had some kind of writing implement somewhere.

Stiles threw open the bedroom door and recognized his mistake immediately as Laura looked up sharply at him from over her breakfast. Her eyes bugged out in surprise, and she made a vague choking sound, bringing her hand up to shield the frilly white collar of the shirt she was wearing.

It looked expensive. It would be a shame to dribble all over it.

“A pen?” he asked.

She gestured towards a cup holder sitting beside the phone at the very end of their kitchen counter. After swallowing carefully, she smirked at him, back in control. “You move fast. Leaving my brother a morning after note so you don’t have to face him in person?” she asked, bringing her cup of coffee up to her mouth with a smug expression.

Any other time he would go on the defensive and deny her accusation, even if there was partial truth to it. He was leaving Derek a note. He was trying to get out of the apartment quickly. Even if the rest of it wasn’t true, Laura took a kind of pride in making him falter, but Stiles was onto her, and he had already exposed a weakness today, so he schooled his expression into something that said he was vaguely insulated and pouted at her.

“I resent that. I’ll have you know that…” Stiles drew out the sentence, waiting until she took a
healthy drink of her coffee, eyeing him like a predator, before he finished with: “…Derek’s a lady.”

Laura choked, coffee spraying everywhere. She flailed, slapping a hand over her mouth to stop more from leaking out, eyes wide and condemning.

Oh, she was totally getting him back for that.

Stiles could hear Derek open the bathroom door behind him, and he turned, pen in hand, to take in the sight. He was a little disappointed to find that Derek had changed back into his pajamas. He’s seen Derek in pajamas before. It was time to see Derek in a towel.

But Derek was at least a step ahead of Stiles in that, because there was no way Stiles wanted to see Derek in a towel in front of Laura.

Derek looked over Stiles’ shoulder, taking in the sight of his sister coughing as she tried to do damage control on her shirt.

He gave Stiles a wicked grin of approval, drawing closer to him.

“Morning breath,” Stiles pointed out, able to taste the scent of Derek’s toothpaste from an inch away. He couldn’t ruin that level of morning freshness with the taste of day old coffee fuzz. “Really bad.”

In response Derek tilted his head to the left, resting his cheek against Stiles’ shoulder as he pressed his mouth against Stiles’ neck. Stiles thought it was less a sign of affection, and more Derek trying not to laugh out loud at his sister. Stiles could feel Derek watching Laura with amusement, his mouth curling as Laura cursed, and he drew his arms around Derek’s back, leaning into him for a moment and feeling the warmth of his body, damp from the shower and smelling of soap and freshly scrubbed skin.

“I’m going to have to change now, jackass,” Laura huffed. “You owe me dry cleaning.”

“Worth it,” Derek mumbled, lips against the side of Stiles’ neck as he continued to hide his smile. Now, it was more like they were just holding each other, and Stiles mentally said screw it to all his responsibilities and sighed, relaxing against Derek.
It had taken them a year to get to this point and Stiles wasn’t letting go a moment before he had to.

“So worth it,” Stiles agreed, smiling.

Derek stepped back out of his space. “You’re going to be late for work.”

“Yes,” Stiles agreed, still grinning at Derek. “Also worth it.”

Derek narrowed his eyes at Stiles' feet. "Those are mine."

Stiles laughed, but didn't argue.

End Notes

I love crack-y AU's, don't you? I just can't get the picture of creeper!Derek doing creepy things in his sleep out of my head. I snickered for a good five minutes when I came up with the idea, so I hope you'll enjoy it equally as much.

I really love hearing what specific part you loved, or laughed at, the most.

Works inspired by this: [Sleep]Walking After You [Podfic] by rubidium

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