an inside thing (don't worry about it)

by blueinkedbones

"This is all your fault," Stiles says, and means it, doesn’t realize how sharp and hot the rage is until he says it, lump lodged high in his throat, eyes stinging, this was the one thing that Stiles swore would never happen, this is his dad. “You invited her into our lives, you—”

"I’m sorry," Derek says, and Stiles can’t breathe, and the first punch comes like a gasp and the others like hyperventilating, Stiles’ arms moving too quickly, fists landing too hard, and Derek isn’t fighting back. Stiles’ eyes are burning and his heartbeat is thundering in his ears and his whole body is too small and he’s somewhere outside it and he needs—

He’s still hitting Derek when their mouths smash together, his fists still swinging like pendulums, but it sinks in as he drags his head back, breathes cool clear air that’s been missing for too long. Derek’s mouth tastes like metal and mint and salt, the world’s incessant static hum settles under Stiles’ skin, panic and fury cooling into purpose, focus, clarity, and Stiles pulls back, looks at him—

"Oh my god," Jeff says, and the whole scene shatters into Tyler and Dylan, still catching their breath, still just staring.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
"Stiles," Derek says. "Just hit me."

Stiles hits him, just once, catches him on the lip and stares at it, stares at him, at the wide-open look on his face, at his chest rising softly, falling softly, his mouth already healing, how was Stiles ever scared of him? Derek with his arms at his sides, straight-spined, so fucking steady, waiting for Stiles to beat the crap out of him, and Stiles—

Stiles doesn’t.

Stiles reaches up, careful, brushes the still-wet blood from Derek’s lip.

The moment freezes, all sound drops out, all air, all gravity, and Stiles—

“I’m not doing that,” Jeff says.

“I think it could be a really sweet scene,” Dylan says. His whole left side is, like, *soaking up* Tyler’s dejection. He doesn’t even have to turn around to feel it. It sucks.

“Derek’s already in a relationship,” Jeff says.

“Oh, is that what that is?” Tyler says.

“It doesn’t have to be—weird, or whatever,” Dylan reasons. “It can just be this really, like, sweet, brotherly—”

“Just this nice, touching moment,” Tyler says.

“I’ll think about it,” Jeff says.

"This is all your fault," Stiles says, and means it, doesn’t realize how sharp and hot the rage is until he says it, lump lodged high in his throat, eyes stinging, this was the one thing, the one thing that Stiles swore would never happen, this is his dad. “You invited her into our lives, you—"

"I know," Derek says, he sounds sorry, he should be fucking sorry, what he fucking—

"I’m sorry," Derek says, and Stiles can’t breathe, and the first punch comes like a gasp

and the others like hyperventilating, Stiles’ arms moving too quickly, fists landing too hard, and Derek isn’t fighting back, why isn’t he fucking *fighting back*? Stiles’ eyes are burning and his heartbeat is thundering in his ears and his whole body is too small and he’s somewhere outside it and he needs—

He needs Derek to hit him so hard he’s forced back inside himself, needs a blow thumping between his ribs like a second heartbeat, needs his cheek smarting, his lip raw and bleeding, his mouth chafing, he needs—

He’s still hitting Derek when their mouths smash together, his fists still swinging like pendulums, but it sinks in as he drags his head back, breathes cool clear air that’s been missing for too long.
Derek’s mouth tastes like metal and mint and salt, the world’s incessant static hum settles under Stiles’ skin, panic and fury cooling into purpose, focus, clarity, and Stiles pulls back, looks at him —

"Oh my god," Jeff says, and the whole scene shatters into Tyler and Dylan, still catching their breath, still just staring.

"Whoa," Dylan says.

"Whoa," Tyler echoes.

They both step back at once, break at once, try to throw it off at once, calm down.

"Okay, let’s reset and go again," the director says, and neither of them says, What if you use that take? but they’re both thinking it.

The scene doesn’t make it in.
it's never going to be like that again

They break up mid-September; it just makes sense. It’s not like this was ever sustainable, like it was ever even a real option. It was stupid, Dylan was stupid thinking it could work.

They don’t see each other for a while, they stop texting. It’s fine. This is being an adult, Dyl, this is real life. Suck it up and move on.

Tyler certainly seems to have. The way Ian goes on about it, he’s practically got a different girl every night. And whatever. Whatever. He can do what he wants, sleep with whoever he wants. It’s none of Dylan’s business.

It wasn’t ever, like, a serious option. Not really. It was a joke, this funny joke, it was bound to blow up in their faces eventually, become weird and awkward and—

But that’s the thing. That’s the thing.

It didn’t.

Season four is a little less intense than season three, but maybe that’s just the difference between twelve and twenty-four plus a movie. There are a lot more scenes with Posey this time, there’s a lot more comedy. Somehow Dylan manages to fuck up his knee doing six takes of a simple running scene, but it’s fine. He doesn’t destroy any props, he’s not bleeding, he’ll walk it off eventually. The last take was good, that’s all that matters, he doesn’t have to do it again.

He doesn’t text Tyler to bitch about it, just scans the sides for the next scene and hobbles off to his trailer when he sees it’s a chunk of Malia stuff. There’s a scene with Holland he should probably run through with her at least once, some great stuff with Posey tomorrow.

There’s nothing with Tyler. There’s never anything with Tyler. He’s shooting with JR, with Ian, with Jill; as far as Dylan goes, they might as well be on different shows.

It’s—fine. It’s whatever. This is the job, it’s a job. It’s not supposed to be, like, some kind of wish-granting, choose your own adventure shit. You’re not getting paid crazy amounts of money to screw around with your was-this-ever-even-really-a-thing ex, even if that’s what like the loudest, most dedicated section of fans want to see.

But dedicated doesn't mean ratings, apparently, or—whatever, it's whatever. Someone else is writing the show, Dylan's just doing his bit and trying not to suck at it or mortally wound himself. He can't control what he can't control. And he can't control Tyler, make him talk, so—so fine. All Dylan can do is his job, so he does his job.

He can see girls too, sleep around, do whatever.

Mostly he stays in his trailer until someone drags him out.

Mom wants to talk. Dylan has no idea what to say to her, about any of it. It just kind of disappeared, like an optical illusion. Blink and suddenly the picture is so obviously warped you must have been blind not to see it.
“He seemed to really like you,” Mom says.

“Guess he’s a better actor than you thought,” Dylan says. Mom’s face pinches, and Dylan backtracks. “I just—Can we just—not talk about this? How are you? How’s Dad?”

Mom's fine. Dad's fine. Everything's just awesome.

By the time he and Tyler actually have a scene, Dylan's so used to the grind he barely notices it. And then he's on set, and there he is, stupendously attractive just talking to Sprayberry, and Dylan can do this. He can be a normal human being for a couple of hours, or do an approximate imitation of one.

“Dylan,” Tyler says, his voice all warm and grinning and exactly like nothing has changed.

“Yo,” Dylan says, raising a couple of fingers in a vague wave before shoving them through his hair. “And lil' Dyl. Hey, buddy!”

“Hey!” Sprayberry says. His eyes still have that bright, shiny, *this is the most fun I've ever had* sheen. It’s kind of nauseating, in a sweet way. “Um, I was just saying, if I like, injure Tyler for real —”


“Yeah,” Sprayberry says, looking between them like he's watching something Dylan can't see. Dylan drops his hand from Tyler's side, slides closer to Sprayberry. This time even he catches the way Tyler frowns for a second before his mouth hitches into a smile again.

“So the scene,” Dylan says.

“The scene,” Tyler says agreeably. “Seems pretty straightforward.”

“Yep,” Dylan says.

“How've you been?” Tyler asks, instead of a question Dylan can actually answer, like the meaning of life, or what came before the Big Bang.

“Great,” Dylan lies. “So great. I can actually sleep most days now, so, you know, that’s a plus.”

Tyler's brow creases. “You weren't sleeping?”

“That's the job,” Dylan says. “Or something. I got so swamped with work I'm amazed my bed hasn't left me for someone else.”

It comes out weird and pointed, like some kind of accusation, which—Dylan did not want to do that at all. He laughs awkwardly, laughs harder. “Yeah, I don't even know. I think I like, permanently scrambled my brain with all the physical stuff for the movie.”

*The movie.* Like it's so big Dylan doesn't even have to name it. *Must be my movie, because it sure as hell isn't your movie*. He sounds like a jackass.

“I bet it'll look awesome, though,” Tyler says.

“Hope so,” Dylan says. “It's getting pushed back like a year so they can edit in my eightpack, so it
“That's not natural?” Tyler asks, raising an eyebrow. “I've been betrayed by the internet.”

“Photoshop,” Dylan agrees. “Just last week it had my mom convinced my eyes were gold.”

“They are kind of golden,” Tyler says, and—and now he's looking right into Dylan's eyes. Chances of survival are just freefalling to hell.

“Nope,” Dylan says, shaking his head. “Just brown.”

“Agree to disagree,” Tyler says amicably.

“Shit brown,” Dylan says.

“Beer bottle,” Tyler says.

Dylan laughs. “Is that better?”

“Like, a brown one,” Tyler says, ears pinking. “Obviously.”

“So—brown,” Dylan says, spreading his hands wide. “So, I win.”

“But the light bouncing off the glass makes it kind of—” Tyler shakes his head. “Forget it.”

“I think they look kind of hazel,” Sprayberry offers.

“Neat-o,” Dylan says.

Tyler never actually technically ended it. He just pulled away, and away, and away, until they were just texting about work, about the weather or something. It tapered off too easily, and then Dylan started scrolling through their texts and realized Tyler hadn't actually written a single thing that couldn't have been written by Posey or Holland in months. And when he finally had some free time, finally had a chance to see Tyler in person, they ate a bunch of pizza and played Mario Kart like it was open-heart surgery, and when Dylan dumped the controller in his lap and kissed him, Tyler pulled away and said, “I, uh, maybe we shouldn't—”

And Dylan said, “No, yeah, sure.”

So they're not.

And it's fine.

It's completely fucking fine.
Maybe the hardest part of being an actor is figuring out how to learn a script you want to throw against the wall. Dylan’s staring down at his sides like the lines’ll change if he keeps reading them, but two hours later it’s the same unflinching fucking—

Rape scene. Dylan has a rape scene.

Of course, Jeff isn’t calling it that. Malia’s feral on white wolfsbane, barely lucid, and Stiles finds her. Cups her jaw, tips his forehead to hers. There’s a line: You scared the crap out of me. Barely breathed against her temple.

She’s woozy, eyes half-lidded. She didn’t have to be—She could’ve been awake, she could’ve been up to it, but no—that’s not the direction Jeff wanted to go in. There’ll probably be some slow trance song playing over it, like Stiles is a hero. Like this is all so romantic. And then he’ll kiss her.

And keep kissing her. Then the scene fades out, goes to Scott, and comes back to them after, Malia in Stiles’ arms, his fingers in her hair.

And maybe it could be okay if Stiles wakes up, if he’s ever like, Oh my god, you were drugged, I’m a massive rotting turd, but Jeff wants Dylan hyping them. At interviews, conventions, name drop Malia! Talk about, what’s the name again, Stalia. How freaking psyched he is to be playing this, this half of a feminist power couple, isn’t it great?

And now all Dylan wants is to talk to Tyler the way they used to, go over the script the way they used to, play it out. Which is impossible, and dumber than dumb, and some drunk and bitter version of himself deleted Tyler’s number from his phone, so—whatever. Stare at the lines, learn the lines, say the fucking lines. Stop pretending to have a spine.

“You scared the crap out of me,” Dylan mutters, and thinks of doing every take achingly slow, of never actually kissing her at all. “You… you scared the crap out of me. Y—you scared the crap…”

It’s an epic waste of time. Dylan can prep for this scene for hours, but there’s no knowing how it’ll meld with what Shelley has in mind.

And Shelley… Shelley is great. Super sweet, super funny. It’s just that doing these scenes makes Dylan’s skin itch, which means he’s a cranky asshole who she can’t wait to get away from. So scheduling extra run-throughs is kinda impossible.

Dylan gives up, throws his script against the wall. It flutters back down incredibly anticlimactically.

There’s a boom mic hovering just out of frame, and Dylan is seriously considering leaping up and concussing himself rather than attempting one more second of this.
“Here’s a thought,” he offers, shoving a hand through his hair. “Maybe just skip the date rape altogether. Try one take with consent. Whadaya say.”

“It’s a sweet moment,” Jeff says, and some insane, self-harming part of Dylan says,

“No, a sweet moment was that scene Tyler Hoechlin pitched before he realized no one here gives a crap.”

He’s a little stunned at himself, but adrenaline carries him even further.

“What are we actually doing here, huh? Right, it’s a fun show, it’s not hurting anybody. Until it’s actually wrapping up rape like romance—I mean, does no one else here have a problem with that?”

“Everybody take ten,” Jeff says.

The crew scatters. Shelley tactfully steps sideways, don’t-mind-me style.

“Dylan,” Jeff says. "I've never seen you so out of it. What’s going on?"

“She’s stoned on white wolfsbane,” Dylan says, skipping I’m fine for maybe the first time in his life. “She’s totally out of it. Stiles can’t just—”

“This isn’t about Stiles,” Jeff says. “You’ve been moody for months. You wanna tell me why?”

“They had sex in a mental hospital,” Dylan says, heat crawling up his neck. “Stiles was possessed, and Malia was mentally—what, nine years old?”

“Malia’s sixteen,” Jeff says authoritatively. “She loves Stiles very much. They’re soul mates. She’s wanted him in every scene. I promise.”

“Yeah, well Stiles—”

“Stiles is thrilled to have such a hot girlfriend,” Jeff says. “He loves Malia very much. I’m sorry Tyler dumped you, Dylan, but I need—”

“What did you say?” Dylan’s face heats, his throat closing up.

“I’m sorry you’re having a hard time,” Jeff says, “but Stiles is not you. He loves his girlfriend, Malia Tate. And that’s the scene I need from you.”

“That’s not what—” Dylan says, but everyone’s coming back to set.

Apparently no one clued the fans in on the fact that Dylan and Tyler haven't worked together in months; they're still being requested as a duo by conventions. Side by side panel, talking about—what-ifs, and Sterek, and who makes Tyler laugh the most on set, and what character Dylan would play if he wasn't—it's a Halloween costume, where Tyler acts like Dylan ever impressed him, and Dylan pretends to be a normal person who can handle being jerked around like that.

Dylan is inhumanely anxious until he sees him, sees Tyler all warm-eyed, soft smile growing just looking right at him, and all Dylan wants is to—touch him again, breathe him in.

But he can’t, he remembers dully, five seconds too late. Puts his arm between them like a barrier, and Tyler’s hands still on his shoulders, drop like dead things. Tyler nods stiffly, steps back.
Dylan’s throat goes sour, chest tight, but it’s fine. It’s fine.

It has to be.

They take up the mics, and it’s so good to talk to Ty again, Dylan’s sick with regret for letting things go so long. They were friends before—they’re friends. It’s so fucking stupid to lose that.

Dylan curls his hand around the mic, knuckles bleached bloodless. Tyler’s fingers graze his, and Dylan is teaching a masterclass in cool right now, because he should be swallowing his own tongue.

He’s done, Dylan reminds himself. This is just—muscle memory. He’s sleeping with, like, actresses and supermodels now. You’re just some punk kid he sees as a—a little brother, or something.

It’s just too easy to see Ty’s eyes crinkle, his shoulders shake with laughter, feel these little touches, and think it means something. Dylan has to remember this is just how Tyler is with everybody. He does every convention he’s invited to. His eyes do that no matter who he’s looking at.

Maybe we shouldn’t—uh, Tyler said when Dylan tried to touch him, and no shit. He was probably already fucking gymnasts by then, didn't want to lead Dylan on.

Something catches in Dylan’s chest, drags him down into darkness.

Tyler’s hands find his shoulder, his arm, tapping and pulling back, tapping again. Dylan stares at him, tries to figure him out.

Maybe all Tyler wants is to be friends again. To start hanging out again, talking again.

And that’s—Dylan wants that too. So calm down, calm the fuck down.

But there’s some sharp acid swilling in Dylan’s gut, making it weirdly painful to breathe. And Dylan can’t look at Tyler’s face, he can’t—

He bites his lip, scratches at his eye, he’s not... He can’t do this. There’s all these people, and—

“Dylan,” Tyler’s saying, fingers curving over his shoulder, his neck. Dylan feels like throwing up. “Are you okay?”

“Fine,” Dylan says listlessly, eyes itching. “Don’t even—Don’t, don’t let it concern you.”

“What?” Tyler says, sounding stunned. “I don’t—What?”

And Dylan’s trembling, he’s so sick of this. Throat burning, eyes prickling.

“’s cool,” he says, but his voice sounds—wrong. “I don’t need—I mean, it doesn’t matter. I’m not a fucking—gorgeous blonde actress, right, there’s really—I mean, like, don’t waste your time.”

“Dylan,” Tyler says, and Dylan can hear the frown in his voice without even looking at him. “Let’s, let’s not do this here.”

“Or at all,” Dylan offers. “Whatever. Let’s just spend another nine months wondering what the fuck—” His voice catches, and his eyes light with tears, and it takes a few seconds before he can say, voice tight, “Yeah, let’s not.”

Somehow the panel goes on; somehow Dylan keeps breathing. He doesn’t look up, try to gauge the
look on Tyler’s face. He doubts he could stand it. He focuses on the crowd, powers through.

After the panel, Tyler’s fingers find his side, palm spreading over his shirt, but Dylan’s already ice cold, past reactions. Tyler leans in close, says, “I think we should talk. Privately.”

“Nah, I think we’re done talking,” Dylan says. “Why don’t you go talk to some supermodel. If you can stand limiting yourself to just one.”

“You keep saying that,” Tyler says. “Why do you—I don’t know any models.”

“Maybe you should get to know them,” Dylan suggests. This is dangerous territory, but he’s too prickly to care. “You know, before you sleep with them.”

Tyler rocks back, stunned. “Is that—You think I’m seeing somebody?”

“Just one?” Dylan asks. “No, nope. I think you found the buffet. The full smorgasbord.”

“I’m,” Tyler says, still sounding bewildered. “I haven’t—There was one date. Ian thought it would be—” He shakes his head. “I was miserable.”

“Yeah, that’s not what Ian says,” Dylan says tightly.

"God." Tyler lets out a sharp gust of breath. “What’d he say to you? I told him I didn’t—” He shakes his head, lips pursing. “There hasn’t been anybody.”

“Then what,” Dylan says. “I’m just too much of a spaz to, to bother—” His voice is humiliatingly brittle.

“You’re the one who can’t stand me touching you in public,” Tyler says. “You’re the one who said it was all just a funny joke. Fanservice.”

“No,” Dylan says, suddenly foggy-headed. “No, that wasn’t—I had to say that crap. Tyler doesn’t get it, okay? And I didn’t want things to be weird—”

“Well,” Tyler says, and swallows hard, head dropping suddenly, glaring at the floor.


“I tried to,” Tyler says defensively. “You just agreed. So.”

“I didn’t think it mattered what I wanted,” Dylan says. “You made up your mind.”

“No!” Tyler says, frustrated. “I didn’t! I didn’t want to—I just—it wasn’t a joke to me.”

“That’s not what it was,” Dylan says. “It’s just—some people don’t get it—”

“So explain it,” Tyler says. “Or don’t. Don’t—Just don’t,” he says, pleading. “It was never a joke to me.”

“So I screwed up,” Dylan says, clipped. “My bad.” Except it is, and now Dylan feels like a shithole, on top of being a self-sabotaging moron. It's just that he can't work the tension out of his voice.

But Tyler only sighs. Says, quiet, “I hate fighting with you.”

He slings his arm around Dylan’s shoulders. Dylan curls sideways on instinct, rubs his cheek into
the hollow of Tyler’s throat.

“We’re okay?” Dylan asks, scared as hell of the answer.

“More than,” Tyler says, all kinds of warm.
Dylan accidentally insults Tyler in some group interview, trips all over himself to fix it. And Tyler laughs, looks down at nothing and laughs, and that's how Dylan knows he's screwed; because the laughter about their ship, right, that's real and fucking infectious, but when Dylan runs his mouth it's the other kind, the kind that had Dylan's gut twisting like a dying fish, hands finding Hoech's shoulder, trying to fix it with touch alone.

Tyler's had his dick moments too, grabbing his hand in front of everyone last year, saying Who knows? With this show it's 50/50. In front of everyone, with no warning. But he didn't know, couldn't know why Dylan freaked out like he didn't in the hotel later, Nothing, man, it's nothing, I'm tired. Aren't you tired? Hoechlin at his side like a two hundred pound shiny-coated golden retriever, too eager and easy and accepting of all this crap. People like us together? Awesome, let's give the people what they want. Us, out there, exposed—

Except Tyler's just playing a part, slipping in and out, no sweat, and Dylan's working three levels of subterfuge trying to come off half as casual.

Tyler's a Sterek mastermind; that's what nobody else but Dylan seems to see. Jeff, he's, like, completely oblivious to this massive talent under his nose, and if he'd stop fawning over Dylan for three seconds, maybe he'd get that. Not that Dylan's ungrateful; he's freakin' stunned people aren't literally just, like, laughing in his face, but there's... There's this look Tyler gets before he remembers that he has to be fine, this flicker of—oh. Right.

And it makes Dylan want to punch something.

Instead he presses his palm to Tyler's shoulder, his arm, tries to—be Stiles, summon the Derek in him. Which should be the wackiest thing Dylan's ever thought, the most... but it isn't, somehow. Touch is the best thing Dylan has, or it's the first thing he can think to do, his fingers seeking out Tyler's bicep, settling. And Tyler settles too, gets past it, or seems to, just the smallest thrum of dejection all through him.

Dylan writes by thinking out loud, spit-balling and seeing what sticks, and Hoech'll match his frenzied energy, no problem, but his best scenes come after he goes quiet, when he's tentative about it. He'll let himself get excited in the telling, though, his eyes lighting up, gestures growing more and more animated; they both get amped up, just thinking about it.

And then Jeff says, I'm not doing that. Two lines in, and Tyler didn't even get to the best part yet, but he's already resetting.

No, listen, Dylan says, and Jeff listens, and then he writes four episodes where Derek doesn't say a word.

After the convention, Tyler's a magnet at Dylan’s side, so relieved it hurts Dylan to look directly at him. The constant arm around him is a weight, or, like a, like a burden, like a test or something. Dylan can't help freaking out a little bit, wondering what they look like, if it's totally obvious to everybody.

He shouldn't mind, right? Shouldn't give a fuck what people think. But it's hardwired in him to
obsess over it, try to—stay, like, publicly neutral. Not make any statements, you know? Not be that

guy. That, that token guy who—Because everyone assumes Hoechlin's the one fucking him, in this
scenario. That Dylan's the girl, or the bitch, even if that's not how it is, like, at all. He's seen the
drawings, okay, Colton is kinda a monster at finding that shit. And that's...

That freaks Dylan the fuck out, to be honest. Seeing that, seeing himself like that. Makes it almost
hard to let Ty touch him at all, or, near him at all. And then when Posey asks about it, and Dylan
can practically see the wheels turning in his head...

Because that's what Dylan used to think, you know? That this guy was insanely good looking,
would probably break his girlfriend in half if he wasn't careful. And he and Posey, they used to
laugh about that. How Jeff had to chain him up to contain that much, like, violent sexuality. Season
one, it was the most hilarious thing to them. And then there was the pool scene, and Dylan pretty
much stopped breathing the pain was so bad, and Tyler grabbed his hand underwater.

After that, it just became more and more obvious. How Dylan wanted to be—more, despite how
completely delusional that felt sometimes. Thinking about those jokes with Posey, and just, looking
at the guy, are you serious?

But Tyler'd grabbed his hand, and there was—for press, they were press buddies. Because Tyler'd
been doing press since he was literally eight, and Dylan was a nervous wreck who said stupid crap
like, literally all the time. So doing press together, they looked out for each other, jumped in if the
other one was floundering. Or just backed each other up, just—literally, Tyler appeared behind
Dylan like a smoke monster and put his hands on Dylan's shoulders, at which point Dylan
promptly forgot anything he'd ever coherently thought for like a second and a half; then Dylan
found Tyler's shoulder and tried to take a nap on it, despite the camera and mic like six inches
away.

And Dylan got used to it, touching Ty all the time, and forgot that was only their little press deal.
And just—kept doing it, all the time.

And didn't let stupid things like falling in love with him get in the way.

But now...

Now there's this story out there, this rumor, and pretty much anything Dylan wants to do plays right
into it. There's him, and there's his massive fifty foot fucking shadow, and he can't twitch a muscle
or that giant him will destroy Japan or something. Will just spiral out of control, unstoppable.

Dylan, he really needs that control. Needs his own life to still be his. Not some character, not...

Tyler's arm is warm around his shoulders, and Dylan is starting to sweat.
camera don't lie

Apparently Dylan’s allergic to something in the fake black blood he was supposed to vomit down his shirt. Good news is they got a good shot out of it, real tears in Dylan’s eyes, real panic when he realized he couldn’t breathe. Method acting. Dylan’s a method actor. That’s called dedication.

Tyler’s the biggest sap ever about it, it’s the sweetest thing. He’s shooting in, like, Prague somewhere, but on Facetime he’s all wide-eyed and concerned, like, Derek-level of tragedy, trying to reach through the phone and feel Dylan’s forehead or something, put a hand on his arm. And Dylan, he’s not made of stone, okay, he can't have Tyler Dereking at him without needing to fix it.

“Hey, can I tell you something?” he says.

“Of course,” Tyler says, serious. His eyes are doing that super intense focused thing that tends to make Dylan go stupid and massively embarrass himself, usually on camera for infinite replay value. Just a Vine of his humiliations looping over and over in his head, but also actually on Vine. And Tumblr.

“Spoiler warning,” Dylan says, as an afterthought.

Tyler blinks at him, and—when did blinking become attractive? Dylan is so broken.

“The—Not Game of Thrones,” Tyler hedges.

“No, no,” Dylan says hurriedly. He’s not a monster, c’mon.

“Then—” Tyler’s brows scrunch together. It’s stupidly adorable. Dylan wants to punch himself in the face.

“Teen Wolf,” Dylan says. “La lycanthrope del teen-o. Season—whatever this is.”

“Eight,” Tyler says, which is definitely wrong, but Dylan is pretty sure he’s been purposefully getting it wrong for at least a couple of years now.

“So, Stiles dies,” Dylan says.

Tyler rears back, looking like someone just stole his puppy and socked him in the stomach. “What?”

“In the—the season finale,” Dylan tells him. “He begs Scott to make him a werewolf so he can—His dad’s captured, and, like, tortured. and he’s helpless, and he’s sick of it, so he begs Scott to bite him, and, you know—black blood blues.”

“Your contract’s for another two years,” Tyler says slowly, like he’s trying to decode a complicated string of emojis. “Did you wanna leave?”

“What? No! I don’t know,” Dylan says, shoving a hand through his hair. “I mean, it’s—it’ll free me up for other stuff. Right? Whatever. It’s not worth—It is what it is.”

“You’re the best part of the show,” Tyler says, frowning, and Dylan kind of whites out from self-conscious embarrassment for a second.

“Yeah, I don’t know,” he says when he can speak again. “I kind of—I got too used to Jeff giving a
Dylan shakes his head, says, “No, I’m this—this entitled brat who doesn’t know when to shut up on set. I ripped his writing on set, Tyler. In front of Shelley and him and the whole freaking crew. I just—I don’t know. I was single, everything was shit. And he gave away your scene, and Stiles turned into this oblivious date rapist—and my whole inner filtration system just—shut down.”

“Talk to him,” Tyler says. “If you don’t wanna leave. Maybe he just figures that was you—asking for an out. He wouldn’t just kill Stiles.” His voice is quiet, but he says kill Stiles like it’s heresy.

“I got fired,” Dylan says. It’s the first time he’s actually said it. Acknowledged it. Posey tried to talk about it and Dylan brushed him off with some inane bullshit distraction until he gave in and stopped trying. “Like—bridges were burned. I screwed myself.”

“You had a bad day,” Tyler says reasonably. Like a dad comforting his five year old, but also like the five year old. That sure is a weird thought to have about your boyfriend, but there it is. Dylan O’Brien, weirdo prodigy.

“You’re taking one down,” Dylan chooses to say, rather than outing himself as the least dateable person on earth. “You sing a sad song just to turn it around.”

Tyler nearly puts his back out laughing.

The first non-workday after Teen Wolf is—well, Dylan only throws up twice, but the ache in his gut stays and stays. Stiles is over. Dylan’s longest-running job is over. Spending hours screwing around with his best friend and picking up a paycheck for it—over.

Dylan bets Stiles’ death kicks off Scott’s darkest storyline yet. Tyler’ll have a real chance to shine, now. That’s good. That’s really good. He deserves it. Scott’s never really been a complicated character. This’ll finally give him something to play with. Grief, and guilt, and loneliness, and finding strength again somehow, because that’s what Scott is about. Maybe he’ll go to college, try to live a normal life, until some mystery monster starts attacking people there and Scott has to step in, be the hero he doesn’t dare let himself think he is. Or is that too obvious? Maybe he’ll become the new Derek, saving people who don’t trust him, who leave him for dead, and then coming in through Stiles’ window, standing in his room and just soaking in his mistakes, his failures, those last horrible moments.

Dylan’s got some theories, is the point. Some ideas, just percolating. He texts them to Posey offhandedly, feels kind of stupid a little later in the day. Posey’s still shooting with Arden, with Holland, with Sprayberry. Next season probably won’t mention Stiles at all. It’s not like anyone else who left got a lot of story lines based on them. It’s like Derek never existed, like Isaac was sent to live on a really nice farm, don’t worry. No, you can’t go visit him.

And whatever, whatever. It’s just a weird thing, keeping this guy in your head since you were eighteen, and rooting for him, really feeling for him, and seeing him just die. What kind of ending is that? He should be going off to college, you know, working through the traumas he’s been through, carving out a life for himself. He’s a good guy, he deserves a happy ending. Deserves something. To see his mom, at least, to have her convince him it wasn’t his fault or his responsibility to save her. And fuck, none of this is real or relevant to Dylan's life anymore, but here it is, rattling around in his head like a One Direction chorus.
does it ever bother you, Dylan texts Tyler. how derek’s story ended?

Did it really end? Tyler replies. I think he’d go back home to help Scott & the pack after stiles dies, Dylan sends.

Kate came back, Tyler says. Peter. Why not Stiles? Maybe Peter brings him back and derek doesn’t know if he can trust zombie stiles or not, Dylan types.

But he does, Tyler replies. and he feels responsible for how things turned out and stiles feels defeated/powerless, Dylan taps out.

Derek could teach him to fight, Tyler offers. Train him 1-on-1. They could be a team

And yeah, yeah, that’s—Dylan can see that, definitely. See it so clear he feels a sharp little pang at how he never got the chance to play the scene. Block it out with Tyler, do all his own stunts like Tyler tries to, and then shoot it, lose himself in the character, feel everything. Stiles has such a dramatic, traumatic life, he feels things on, like, a deeper level. That kiss scene that got cut? That was insane. Like, electric, like—almost too much chemistry. Like, just straddling the line between tripping and overdosing.

What Dylan has with Tyler, it’s different. Sterek is different people. The worst anxieties Dylan’s had are social. Tyler’s never lost anyone. It’s not the same desperation, or the same fear, or—it’s a big thing for them, feeling safe with somebody. It’s a big thing for everyone, trusting someone with their real feelings, but for Stiles, for Derek, it’s literally about safety. Dylan once read this thing, there’s some chemical that’s triggered by near-death experiences, this, like, euphoria, and if someone’s with you through it, if someone saves you, or you save them—like, that just amps up everything you already feel to eleven. And Dylan, he doesn’t have that in his actual life—Thank God, right, he’s not constantly literally running for his life—so he can only ever get to that through Stiles. And now that’s just permanently over. The scripts he gets now, right, even when they’re, like, super funny, or look really epic, the guys he’s playing are so transparent you practically can’t see them at all. There’s, like, no deeper level, nothing under the surface. If they’re mad they’ll probably just say, you know, "I’m really mad right now!" And, like, what inflection do you give that to make it anything more than what it is?

Which all sounds like a bunch of entitled actor crap, doesn’t it. There are probably thousands of actors his age who would kill for what he’s getting handed to him. It’s crazy that he ever forgets that. He’s just been spoiled with Stiles right out of the gate, with getting to play a guy on all these different levels, getting to riff on things, getting his ideas actually considered. He got so used to it he got pissed when all Tyler or Posey ever got was rejection for all their ideas. He forgot how fucking lucky he was.

And he got fired for being a dick on set, tearing down the script on set. That’s insane. His eighteen year old self would probably grab his shoulders and shake him till he was sick.

The regret train pauses briefly while Dylan is sick again.

Or Scott could train him, Tyler texts. Then he actually might win a fight sometimes

No, no. That’s not—Scott wouldn’t get it. He couldn’t bring Stiles back from his total life fatigue, he wouldn’t get it. He’s too used to succeeding.

And Dylan can’t think how to text that, how to—and he really needs to hear Tyler’s voice right
Stupid, he’s the most stupid—Tyler switches from wide-open and happy to level five concerned when he sees Dylan’s dumb sick-pale face, his sweaty hair.

“Dylan!” he’d said, just before, smiling warm, but now it’s gone. Now it’s just a soft, “What’s going on?”

“I think I ate some bad sushi,” Dylan lies, and then, avoiding Tyler’s gaze, “and uh, you know, I’m kinda... an idiot who sabotaged myself and the only thing I’m good at. So, there’s that.”

“You’re good at lots of things,” Tyler says, and a scoff bubbles up in Dylan’s throat and chokes him. “You are. You could have a whole career just doing stand-up. Or getting back with your band.”

The band, God. Dylan wouldn’t even know where to begin restarting those relationships. He feels like a completely different person.

“But you don’t need a fallback,” Tyler says. “You’re one of the most talented actors I know. That’s not over.”

“What if it is,” Dylan says dully. “What if—if it’s you and baseball, if I made a choice and that’s it.”

“I left the show too,” Tyler says, generously not addressing that low blow. “I’m not Jeff’s favorite person either. I’m still working.”

“You didn’t get fired,” Dylan says.

“Didn’t I?” Tyler challenges. “I wasn’t playing Derek anymore. Jeff stopped writing for him. You think he wanted me around?”

“I wanted you around,” Dylan says. “Your ideas. He should’ve—”

And there Dylan goes again, so used to having won the lottery that he’s lobbying for everyone else to win it too. As if writing isn’t hard enough without the whole cast turning co-writer.

“We should write something,” Dylan decides suddenly. “Together.”

“Put it on YouTube?” Tyler suggests. Dylan face-palms, cheeks flaming.

“No,” he says, trying to remember how normal human beings speak. “Actually try to get it made. Like Good Will Hunting or something. A real movie.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says, nodding. “Yeah, okay.”

“You were saying you wanted to write anyway,” Dylan says.

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “We can—yeah. Yeah, definitely.” He’s getting excited, slowly, Dylan can see it; it’s making him want to kiss him, or just put an arm around him, lean close.

“I wanna see you,” Dylan says, something thick in his throat. “Like—not through a phone.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “I have—You wanna see Vienna?”

“If you’re there,” Dylan says, like he’s in The Notebook or something.
Tyler blushes bright.
“You're really back with him?” Brittany says. Tyler swallows a small sigh. She's got him sprawled on her couch, his guard down, thinking about nothing more than how much of a workout it'll take to combat the meal he just had, but of course she was planning this since she called, said, “I feel like I never see you,” and his gut twisted in a knot.

Her Twitter feed must've lit up with those JustJared pictures of him and Dylan in the airport: Dylan's pillow tucked under Tyler's arm while Dylan signs the edge of someone's in-flight magazine. Dylan leaning close to take it, and this one shot that looks like they're about to kiss.

But they weren't. They don't do that kind of thing in front of cameras, or fans. Or anyone. Dylan's not ready to be that guy.

“I never wanted to break up with him,” Tyler reasons. Just the thought of it makes his stomach clench a little bit. “The whole thing was a misunderstanding.”

“So you're just his dirty little secret,” Brittany says. Tyler rubs his eyes and wonders what it feels like to have a sort-of ex who doesn't think she's your therapist. “You deserve better than that.”

“I don't deserve anything,” Tyler says, scratching at his beard. “He's not ready.”

“You're ready,” Brittany says, like that's all that matters. “You've got more to lose than he does. He's already established himself as an actor.”

Tyler raises his eyebrows, tries not to let that sting.

“He carried a major action franchise,” Brittany says, not even a little defensive. “That's the lie, right? Gay guys can't play heroes? Well he already made millions at it. He's got nothing to prove anymore.”

“That's not why,” Tyler says. He sits up straight, tries to snap into interview mode. He can do this. “And it doesn't—I don't care.”

“You told me you were gonna talk to him about it,” Brittany says. “You sat on this couch, and drank my wine, and told me you were gonna stand up for yourself.”

“I was under the influence,” Tyler says. Brittany rolls her eyes. “Your influence,” Tyler says, only a little crabbily. “And then I had the most miserable year of my life.”

“So what, you're back to being a doormat?” Brittany challenges.

“I'm happy,” Tyler says. Shouldn't that be enough? Dylan's enough, what they have is enough. More than enough. You ask for too much, you lose what you have. Who needs that?

“I think you're lying to yourself,” Brittany says. “I think you're letting him turn you into a liar because you're scared of what he'll do if you don't follow his rules. That's not a healthy relationship.”

“You dated a heroin addict,” Tyler feels the need to point out. He really feels like he got her there,
nods just a little to himself, until she says,

“Recovering heroin addict.”

“Yeah, now,” Tyler says, trying to gain back a little leverage in this conversation. “Because he's 'following your rules.'”

“Yeah, and maybe you should try having some,” Brittany says. “Like, actually say how you're feeling for once. It's pretty revolutionary.”

“Really,” Tyler says flatly. He's done, he's just done trying to explain himself to her. “You're accusing me of being fake—”

“Right now,” Brittany says. “What would you say, right now, if you were asked about him in an interview.”

“That he's always there,” Tyler says, then, ears heating, “What do you want me to say. It's nobody else's business what I—”

“That's not your line,” Brittany says. “That's never been your line. That's his.”

“I don't need you to like him,” Tyler says. Just for this, Tyler is going to steal all of her wine. Put a ransom note on Instagram.

“No, I like him,” Brittany says. “He's smart, and funny, and super cute. Adorable. But he can't just barricade you back in the closet with him. You really wanna be thirty and still living a lie?”

Tyler has no plans to freak out about turning twenty-eight. He's got a good life. A job he loves, friends on every continent, money to travel; he's healthy, in good shape; his family's healthy. He's dating the guy he's in love with, the guy who, despite almost a year of thinking otherwise, loves him too. He's got nothing to complain about.

He's writing a movie with Dylan O'Brien. Who else gets to say that?

Not that he's gotten a lot done in that direction. He has some ideas, a couple of thoughts in his Notes app, a handful of texts to Dylan, nothing serious. He's not tied down to any theme yet; he just wants it to be something he can be proud of. And it will be, with Dylan attached, but he doesn't—that shouldn't be why. He needs to bring something to it, something only he could've brought to it.

He's just drawing a blank on what exactly that looks like.

Two weeks back from their trip, Dylan makes the last round of auditions for the leading man in Terminal, based on the best-selling novel about just-separated high school sweethearts who find out their son only has a few months left to live. It's expected to make blockbuster returns on an indie budget; Felicity Jones is already signed on as the mother, Jacob Tremblay as the son. Dylan's never been more nervous.

“This is it,” he says. Tyler can hear him pacing, never a good sign. “This is the one. This guy, he's a thousand things at once, and it all fits together.”

“It sounds incredible,” Tyler says. It does. He read the book when Dylan went out for the first
audition, cried so hard he used it to get there shooting the darkest scene in Harvest. Which is—yeah, it's a horror movie. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't give it your best.

“Can I—” Dylan stops pacing. “It's stupid, I just thought—”

“What,” Tyler says. It's never stupid. Dylan's the first one to dismiss his ideas, or play them down. Tyler honestly doesn't get how he can doubt himself like that. Doesn't get why he'd ever need Tyler reassuring him about what feels like the most obvious thing in the world.

“I mean, you'd have to play the mom,” Dylan says, half-laughing, and Tyler says, “You want me to read with you?”

“If you—I mean, if it's not—” Dylan stops. “You mind?”

“Are you kidding?” Tyler says. Does he mind. It's like Dylan doesn't know him at all.

“I don't have the full script,” Dylan says, apologetic, like Tyler's gonna take back his offer. “I just—I really want this one.”

Two hours later, Tyler's on a plane.

They're changing the title of Tyler's baseball movie again, pushing it back again. That's always a red flag, a sign the studio isn't really behind it like they used to be.

“They pushed back Maze Runner,” Dylan points out, but that wasn't—that's different. That needed to be perfect, needed special effects, and—Tyler's movie isn't anything like that.

All that really means is Tyler's got some more free time than he anticipated. Can't complain about that. Dylan's seriously on edge prepping for Terminal, but it's good to be near him. It's really good to read with him; feels like they used to, but—more.

“You're a lifesaver,” Dylan says, after, touches his arm and draws him in, and Tyler doesn't know what he did in a past life to be this lucky.

Tyler comes this close to flubbing the name of his own movie at the, yeah, the premiere of his own movie. It's fine; there's no major media coverage, he's not sure anyone noticed. He comes back strong, talking about what this movie means to him, about being part of a team, and how weird it is when you suddenly—aren't. Pulls back, doesn't get too personal, just enough to satisfy the woman interviewing him. There's—he doesn't think about it a lot, tries not to think about it a lot. He made a good choice, has no complaints how things turned out, but there's still something there, sometimes—some nostalgia, maybe, some... something almost sad, without ever really getting there. Acting was always the more solid option, the one he knew he could do for a long time. And he's not gonna lose it all on an injury, or a couple of bad games, and...

And he doesn't have to hide anything. Which—It was never the main reason on the list, but it was on the list. Maybe the world's finally ready for someone like him in baseball, but he's never been one to make waves. There are other people, smarter people, who know the history and the language like Dylan knows Mets stats. Tyler's not—he doesn't like debating politics, or religion; his motto is live and let live. Colton's got all kinds of strong opinions, and Tyler respects that, he does. It's just not who he is.
He was never gonna be the first one out, but he wasn't looking forward to hiding, either. Brittany knows that, she knows—she was the first one who knew anything about it. She's always been protective of him, but after that—Tyler drunk and more lost than he usually lets himself be, frozen deciding—it's like she became his personal gay activist. And he's lucky to have had that, that support; there are plenty of people who don't. He's not oblivious to that. It's just—a little much, sometimes.

“Maybe I'd become a baseball player,” Dylan joked in some interview—what would you do if you weren't acting. “I don't know. I'd be a director, like my dad.” And maybe it's something like that, not wanting to amputate your options. Not feel like you're suddenly backed into a corner in peoples' perceptions. This role in Terminal, Dylan's desperate to play it because Micah's a thousand things at once. He just doesn't wanna get put in his own special category.

Tyler, he can understand that. He doesn't wanna hijack that. He doesn't—it kills him to see Dylan miserable, sick with anxiety. That's the last thing he wants to do.

You can't always get what you want, and that's fine. Tyler already has all he could ask for.

Tyler's just back from the gym when Dylan calls. FaceTime, he gets to see Dylan's face; he accepts before he even realizes he's doing it.

Dylan lets out a gust of relief, closes his eyes. Then he opens them wide again, croaks, “I'm freaking out.”

“You're gonna be amazing,” Tyler says, and doesn't even feel stupid about it. He used to, used to think—are you serious? You have to know that already. You can't honestly see and hear everything I'm seeing and hearing and still think you're doing a terrible job. This, this is manipulative.

But it isn't. Dylan really doesn't let it sink in, the compliments, the constant praise he's showered with, he thinks it's a joke. Or completely out of touch, or empty flattery.

“Yeah, no,” Dylan says. There are tears in his eyes; Tyler's gut clenches. “So I uh, I just ran out of the audition room? Because I'm like—I'm just sucking today. No,” he says, before Tyler can open his mouth. “You didn't see their faces. Like, 'who is this guy again? How the fuck did he even make it into consideration?'”

“I can guarantee that's not what they were thinking,” Tyler says, and Dylan lets out a stomach-twisting sound and says, “Fuck, you're so nice.”

“I'm not being nice,” Tyler says, annoyed. “I read with you. You were amazing.”

“Yeah, then,” Dylan says. “With you.”

“So it's just—nerves,” Tyler tries. “Why don't you just go back in, try—”

“No, I can't,” Dylan says. “I'm—Oh my god, I wanna kill myself.”

“Dylan,” Tyler says, carefully not alarmed. He's not—he says things like that, it just means—he's freaking out, getting mad at himself. “I'm—I'm in town, I'll come pick you up.”

Clearly Tyler is on a mission from God: there's only the thinnest layer of traffic. What should be an hour's drive on any normal day takes less than fifteen minutes. He finds easy parking, too; life is full of miracles. He calls Dylan back on his way to the door, finds him hunched on the back stairs, just breathing, eases a hand on his shoulder.

“Shit,” Dylan says, near-jumping out of his skin, but his whole body sags when he sees Tyler. “Shit, shit, fucking shit. What am I—Why did I think I could do this?”

“Don't,” Tyler says, sitting by him. “This is crazy. You're incredible. You're the only one who doesn't get that.”

“I'm a fucking headcase,” Dylan says.

“You're...” Tyler says, and can't resist. “You're insecure,” he says, fighting not to smirk. “Don't know what for.”

“Oh my god, really?” Dylan says, punching him lightly on the shoulder. “I hate you.”

“Weird way of showing it,” Tyler says, and leans into the contact.

Chapter End Notes

♫ baby you light up my world like nobody else ♪
world, shut your mouth

“What? No way,” Dylan says, when his agent tells him that actually, he didn't blow it until he ran out of the room.

“They liked what they saw,” Susan says. “They're just concerned about being able to depend on you.”


“I know what you thought,” Susan says. There’s no judgment there. It’s just a matter of fact to her that Dylan’s an unreliable spaz. “But it doesn't matter. This happened with Teen Wolf too, remember? You didn't like your first take, but you were honest with them, and they gave you another shot.”

“Yeah, that was—” Dylan says, mortified. “I was a little punk kid, I didn't know anything. I never even considered, like, what their time was worth.”

Even Tyler gets exasperated, like, stop undermining yourself all the time. But Susan's unflappable.

“You took a chance,” she says, too patiently. “It got you your most substantial job yet. Maybe there's something to learn from that.”

“Right,” Dylan says, latching on to Tyler’s arm before he fully steps into his apartment. Tyler’s eyebrows jump, but he lets Dylan lead him to his laptop, sit him down on the couch. “So.”

“So,” Tyler says, a little bemused grin playing around his lips. Dylan scrapes his hand down his face, says, “I can't even look at you, man,” and plops down next to him, kisses his dumb impossibly attractive mouth. “No, no,” he says, eventually, pulling away, shoving his fingers through his hair. “What I was—I was gonna say, I'm not giving up on Terminal.”

“That's great,” Tyler says warmly. “They're gonna love you.”

“No, that's just it,” Dylan says, flipping the laptop open and adjusting the camera. “I'm not doing it alone.”

They get it in one take, do a second for security. Tyler really commits, every time, the camera and the pressure just completely falling away when Dylan plays off him. It's not even distracting that Tyler's the mom. He really taps into something there, this impossible vulnerability and strength at the same time. This really bittersweet, subtle regret of everything that happened going the way that it did, and what could have been, and this sense of finality that shakes something in Dylan loose, has the tears coming without half the run-up it usually takes.

After, it's a few minutes before Dylan can get himself together, and this quiet sense of loss sticks around even when Tyler's right there, laughing at some offhand, half-serious comment of Dylan's like it's the funniest thing in the world. Dylan looks at him for a microsecond before he laughs back, before he thinks, Yeah, I guess that was kind of funny, actually. Dylan would get such a massive head if the only feedback he listened to was Tyler's. Then he'd be even more unbearable, this wunderkind actor buying into his own press, it's ridiculous.
It's not like Dylan doesn't know he's funny: he can be funny. Or pull off a good dramatic scene, or whatever it is. He's not doing this job because he thinks he's crap at it and he's trying to humiliate himself. It's just that he's—Susan's right, he's unreliable. It's just that sometimes he can hit all his marks, really disappear into a character, or charm a room full of strangers with some rapid-fire banter, and sometimes he's just off, out of it, and can't find that sweet spot, can't believe his own acting. He knows when he sucks, okay, he knows what it feels like when a scene isn't working as well as it could. If he wasn't critical, he'd just be phoning it in, and that's not the career he wants to have. Even if the movie bombs, if the only people who see it are Dylan and the director, or it dies on the cutting room floor, he still wants his performance to be the best he can do. That audition, he knows he wasn't terrible. It wasn't cringingly bad. But it wasn't this, how it was with Tyler, how it should've been. It was just okay, and that's not anywhere near good enough.

But he shouldn't have run. Dylan knows that that was a bad move. And it's not like he can just go back and try again; it's way too late for that. They're not gonna wanna hear from him anymore.

Dylan swore he was done making YouTube videos years ago, and he is. They're little jokey things he did as a kid, things that get more and more embarrassing every time some serious actor mentions them, like that dopey little kid humping a Christmas tree is what Stanley Tucci thinks of when he thinks “Dylan O'Brien.” But they're also the only reason Dylan even got Stiles in the first place, so... maybe this isn't the craziest idea Dylan's ever had.

The studio's not gonna listen to Dylan on his own, but—he's read stories, ballsy moves actors and writers made, releasing stuff on their own, and working up such a big buzz the studio can't ignore it. Look at, look at Deadpool, right now. That test clip blew up, and now Ryan Reynolds is getting a chance to play a costumed guy who doesn't suck. If he would've gone to the studio and, like, knocked politely on the door? That never would've happened.

Dylan honestly doesn't remember his YouTube password anymore, and he hasn't checked that email address since, like, 2009. It's a little bit daunting. Honestly, all of this is probably a can of worms he's been smart to avoid as much as possible until now. He doesn't need to read the comments on a sketch he wrote, if you could even call it that, when he was practically pre-pubescent. That's just feeding the worst parts of your brain enough ammo to put you permanently out of commission. What? No, I don't need to look anyone in the eye ever again. Why do you ask?

But Dylan wouldn't have any of this if he was too chickenshit to take a risk. Right? That's just what he has to remember, and focus on. This project, this character, and really getting to dive into someone's life again, without getting on his knees in front of Jeff Davis and fucking blowing him.

And this video, these two takes with Tyler, Dylan knows those are good. Production value isn't exactly up there, but that's not the point. It's a read-through, not a trailer. If Dylan posts this, sends this off into the abyss of the internet, he'll have no regrets about it, whatever happens.

“Ready to be a YouTube star?” he asks Tyler, when he finally recovers his password and logs in. He's ridiculously nervous, fingers tingling numb.

“I don't know,” Tyler says, fighting to keep a straight face. “Any advice?”

“Don't look back,” Dylan says, and sends the video out into the world.

The problem with trying to figure out if your insane risk is picking up the right type of buzz without actually daring to look at the notifications is that it's impossible. It's just not possible. And Dylan, he has impulse control issues, like how he's fidgeting so bad Tyler's vibrating next to him.
On second thought, this was a terrible, insane idea, and he's gonna get sued for everything he's got and more for leaking entire major scenes of Terminal on a whim. People have been fired after scripts were dug out of their *trash*, much less... And that doesn't even make sense. Shouldn't it be “much more”? And fuck, what if Dylan just detonated his whole career? What if he did, shit, and what if Tyler being in it destroys his life too? Holy crap, Dylan's a monster. He's just, he just completely—

“I didn't have to say yes,” Tyler says, palms warm and steady over Dylan's jittering shoulder, his ribs. “I took the risk with you. I'm not worried.”

Dylan thumps his head back against the couch, closes his eyes, and moans. He's gonna be responsible for ruining Tyler's life. The guy chose acting over baseball even though he really fucking *loves* baseball, which can only mean he really, really fucking loves acting. And Dylan's gonna get him blacklisted. This is literally the worst decision Dylan's ever made, like, in any life he ever may have lived.

“I'm not worried,” Tyler says soothingly. “Being blacklisted with you? There are worse things.”

“How do you *function,*” Dylan mutters. How is Tyler Hoechlin even a real *person,* how do you even comprehend the ability of such a person to *exist.*

“What's that even mean?” Tyler asks, laughing, but there's a little frown at the end of it, brows drawing together, and Dylan rushes to say, “Just—How are you so *chill,*” scratching the back of his neck, wishing he'd never said anything. “Like, nothing fazes you. Ever.”

“I don't know if that's true,” Tyler says, and Dylan waves his hands a little frantically, tries to wave his stupid comment away.

“No, no, I'm saying, it's cool,” Dylan says. “Like—admirable.”

“I'm a real person,” Tyler says. “I'm not—Just because I don't think about everything that bothers me until I'm actually sick over it doesn't mean I'm faking.”

“I didn't say that,” Dylan says desperately.

“Brittany thinks I'm living a lie,” Tyler says, almost to himself. “I'm not living a lie. It isn't lying to try to be happy.”

“Tyler,” Dylan says, stomach twisting. “That's not—It was just this stupid, this offhand—”

“But you meant it,” Tyler says. “Didn't you?”

“Not like you're taking it,” Dylan says. “Not—Dude, why do you think I love you? If I think it's just some, some persona. I don’t.”

Tyler looks at him so intently a flush creeps up Dylan's skin.


“Could've told me,” Tyler says quietly.

“I could've—You really didn't know,” Dylan says, skeptical. “We talked about this. I've been
obsessed with you forever.”

“Yeah, with my—” Tyler's ears are pink. “My physique.”

“Shut up, that letter was hilarious,” Dylan says. “That's not—We've had actual conversations.”

“When?” Tyler says.

“In my head, apparently,” Dylan says. He lets out a little exasperated huff. “It's not like—You didn't say it to me either.”

“I thought you were afraid of it,” Tyler says. “This being—real. Being that guy.” He swallows a little thickly, says, “I didn't wanna—pressure you into—”

“What, being happy?” Dylan says.

“Would you be?” Tyler says. “With people knowing, or, or thinking they knew.”

“Screw people,” Dylan says tightly. He's watching Tyler's throat, how his swallows are all wrong, like he's choking on something. It makes Dylan feel like he's drowning, like he's the worst person in the world. “I don't... Whatever, it doesn't matter. You can teach me not to care.”

“I told Brittany I'm happy,” Tyler says. “How things are. I wasn't lying. You don't need...”

“Yeah, shut up,” Dylan says, grabbing at his phone and tapping through to Twitter.

Tyler stares at him. Swallows again, and Dylan finds what he's looking for, sends off a response, and shoves the phone into Tyler's hands.

“I don't—What is this?”

“Just read it,” Dylan says, and watches him, watches Tyler's eyes widen after a long, tense second.

“You didn't have to do that,” Tyler says, sounding stunned.

“I don't like being a liar either,” Dylan says, and takes his hand. “Hope you're camera-ready.”

crying over sterek @Pandabar316: @dylanobrien Spotted @TylerHoechlin playing the wifey in your @TerminalTheMovie audition video. Art imitating life?

Dylan O'Brien @dylanobrien: @Pandabar316 If you dismiss out the marriage, child, divorce and gender—yes :)}
“You were joking,” Susan says. “Playing along. Trying to make the buzz around your video bigger.”

“Um, no,” Dylan says. “What?”

“It was clever,” Susan says. “I monitor your Twitter, but I can't see your replies unless I'm looking for them. So that yes spread to Tumblr, and from there back to Twitter, where it trended. Hashtag #sterekbecausehobrien.”

“That doesn't even sound like real words,” Dylan points out. Susan sighs.

“This isn't just your career we're talking about. Tyler's manager agrees—”

“You talked to Tyler's manager?” Dylan asks, a little, like—outraged. “This isn't a PR thing.”

“Everything is a PR thing,” Susan says. “Your clothes, your hair—”

“Your pose, your stare, the things you think,” Dylan suggests. “Your underwear.”

“That's funny,” Susan says. “But it's also true. Everything you do makes an impression. And that impression decides the kinds of roles you get, and how frequently.”

“Funny, and I thought that was about talent,” Dylan says. “So what. Dump him, declare myself asexual—”

“God, no,” Susan says. “It was a joke. You were joking. Giving the fans what they—”

“Or I could just shit in his mouth,” Dylan suggests. “Say, 'this is what you deserve. Who's my little bitch? My secret, dirty little bitch.' How's that.”

“Dylan,” Susan says, refusing to rise to the bait.

“You know, I already tried the lying thing,” Dylan says, weirdly on edge. “I'm kind of over it.”

“So don't lie,” Susan says. “Just—don't advertise it, either.”

“Cross the street when I see a camera,” Dylan says, nodding. “'Who, him? I don't know him.' Or, or shove him into oncoming traffic, what, who was that guy? Almost put his arm around me, what an asshole.”

“You're friends,” Susan says calmly. “You're a tactile person. He's a tactile person.” She stops, says, “Tyler Posey is a tactile person.”

“Operation: Grab Tyler's Ass,” Dylan confirms. “Got it.”

“I'm not asking you to do anything that makes you uncomfortable,” Susan says. “I've seen the two of you. You won't be lying.”

“Why even wait for a camera,” Dylan agrees. “We should just make a sex tape. Cut out the middle man. We'll call it—” He puts his hands together, brackets them into a title card, and pulls away. “No Homo.”
“Sooner or later,” Susan says, after a silence so long Dylan almost thinks the call dropped out, “you're going to realize how lucky you are in this moment. Right now? You still have a choice.”

And here's the thing, here's the thing: she's right.

Just not the way she means to be.

Here's something Dylan should've done a thousand years ago: taken Tyler on a date. There's this really small pop-up screening of Amélie, practically private, and popcorn with extra butter, because torturing Tyler about his diet will never stop being hilarious. Tyler watches the movie really intently, and Dylan watches Tyler; he's already seen the movie a couple of times, but Tyler'd never even heard of it, and he's a freaking masterpiece of a person, okay, Dylan does not need to justify staring at him. No, not—not literally staring, no; Dylan's blinking at all the regular intervals, coming back to the screen every so often, or flicking popcorn at Tyler's ridiculously serious face, which also doubles as an excellent test of his illogical fondness for everything Dylan, because his head whips around, but as soon as he identifies the culprit his shoulders go easy again, and he laughs, leans into Dylan's space, and Dylan did not sign up to feel this many things. His shriveled little introvert heart can only handle so much sweetness at once before it just—explodes, like an over-blown balloon.

Then he takes Tyler to dinner, what, like he's an adult. Tyler orders in French, (just to screw with him, all straight-faced and nonchalant, like Dylan doesn't see exactly what he's doing. Tyler is such a smug asshole sometimes. Dylan is so on to him) and Dylan attempts to decode the hidden meanings of the wine list, like—there's gotta be a formula, he could totally figure it out given a little more time. That's what he should have been doing today: Googling this restaurant, and familiarizing himself with everything beforehand. That was the plan, but then artfully messing up his hair ate up too much time, and then he realized he had no actual date clothes? Like, old t-shirts, no, some fucking—awards show suit, definitely no, Scott's black-blood soaked red hoodie Dylan accidentally stole from set by forgetting to take it off-slash-ever return it, probably not, but on second thought: maybe. Dylan doesn't have a clue about fashion. Maybe it'd be, like, making a statement.

He panicked, called Colton, who just smirked at him for an endless amount of time and then picked three things out of Dylan's closet that he didn't even know were in there, like it was the most obvious thing in the world, and not a blatant display of black magic, are you serious. Dylan spent most of his life being a little kid, and then a teenage boy, and then an actor: he's never really gotten the hang of dressing himself. There always seems to be someone standing around with a stack of suggestions, and Dylan just goes, “Yeah, yeah yeah yeah, that's nice,” and then someone else puts the exact right amount of gel in his hair while he falls asleep in front of the mirror, so when he tries to replicate it at home, he ends up squinting at his reflection with sticky hands and guessing.

Meanwhile, Tyler's beard looks like it was precisely chiseled by freaking Michelangelo. Dylan gives up, he really does.

Tyler's hand reaches out across the table, fingers brushing Dylan's knuckles, his wrist, and Dylan's nicely tipsy, close to tears for no reason at all, something weird and out of control bubbling in his gut, up his throat, impossible to swallow down.

Because this is—so fucking nice, every part of it. Tyler is so fucking nice. And perfect, and Dylan's a crazy person, who thought he didn't want this. Who thought—sure, let's just—hide you in a corner somewhere, no one has to know our business, and Tyler was like, If—if that's what you want, yeah. Yeah, okay.
And Dylan was like, what, he's just a brotherly, just this sweet, like, mentor, like a, like a father figure to me—no butt-fucking, you know? I just wanna clarify: this butt goes untouched. Right, Ty? Right. Cool, fun talk. Always a pleasure to lie directly to your face. What a hilarious fucking joke that would be, me and him—me and him? Ha! I'm laughing, this is mirth-inducing. Humor, we are producing top-quality humor right here.

And Tyler was like, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, it's worth it. Dating this asshole when any sane person would do a better job not shoving a massive gag order dick down his throat, totally worth it. Because—because Dylan's funny, sometimes. So, you know—worth it. No regrets.

It's not lying, trying to be happy, but that doesn't mean Tyler wasn't fucking miserable.

And Dylan did that.

Terrific.

They're just walking now, Tyler's fingers knit through Dylan's but slipping away, and Dylan lurches, looks at him, and it takes a minute to register the arm around him instead, and this, this—Getting drunk was not the plan. Getting drunk, that's like, grounds for dismissal, right there. Objection, sustained, what are you doing. You're going to mess this up, it's frankly incredible you haven't messed this up beyond any hope of recovery just by virtue of existing in your natural state.

“I like this,” Tyler says, like he's on an entirely different date with someone who isn't aggressively sabotaging everything. He's looking at the blue bruised sky, the glaring streetlights, the crawling LA traffic, and seeing some kind of Instagram photo. Maybe Dylan looks different to him too: lit up, soft and glowing. What a weird fucking thought.

“I like you,” Tyler says. “Being with you.”

Like it's that simple, like that's the only thing in his head right now: Dylan, and fondness. Dylan can't even do that high.

“How do you, like,” Dylan says, and he'll probably regret this when he's sober, but, “focus. On—” He shakes his head, laughs a beat, nervous.

“On?” Tyler says.

“How do you,” Dylan says, and then he blurts out, “happy, try to be—How does it work.” And that's not—that's not even English. “I mean, just being happy. Without getting distracted, you know?”

“I don't know,” Tyler says, considering this. “Like—now? What would I be distracted by?”

“Um,” Dylan says, stumped, and then he says, “self loathing, mostly. With just like a side of random minutiae-fed anxiety.”

“Now?” Tyler says, and his arm hooks closer around Dylan's shoulders. “What's going on?”

“No,” Dylan says, feeling the concerned gaze like a touch. “No, it's not—I mean, welcome to my head, I guess. Just, on any given day.” And what, what is this even turning into? Dylan O'Brien therapy hour, that's romantic. Good job.

“Self-loathing,” Tyler says, and Dylan wants to punch himself in the face. “I don't—I don't think I could find anything to, to loathe about you if my life depended on it.”
“Thing is,” Dylan says, voice coming out weird and unsteady, “I think that kinda says more about you than me.” This gross sharp wet breath, and this wasn’t—None of this was the plan.

“Really,” Tyler says. “Lemme just—I'll just call in some backup, if you don't mind.”

“Backup,” Dylan says, anxiety shooting up to eleven. “That's—What are you doing?”

“Held at gunpoint,” Tyler pretends to read off his phone. “'Need three reasons to loathe Dylan and they'll let me go.' Let's see what the people think.”

“Don't you dare,” Dylan says fervently.

Tyler looks at him, pockets his phone. “I wouldn't,” he says. “I'm just—making a point.”

“Is the point, I can totally make Dylan shit himself?” Dylan asks. “Because, if so—Congratulations.”

“I'm serious,” Tyler says. “People love you. They're not all in denial, or missing something.”

“People don't know me,” Dylan says, unimpressed. “Who even are people. And this isn't, like, a logic thing. I know that.”

“It isn't,” Tyler says.

“Mostly,” Dylan says. “Probably. Whatever, this isn't—You don't need to set up an, an intervention. I'm not looking at methods, I'm fine.”

“Methods,” Tyler says.

Dylan makes a vague noose-yanking gesture, rolls his eyes. “Okay? Awesome. Glad we had this talk.” He lets out a huff, scrubs his hand over his face. “Really set a mood, you know. I bet you've never been more aroused.”

“Dylan,” Tyler says, exasperated, but he's smiling despite himself, like he can't help it, like he's just so fucking charmed by Dylan, all the time.

Well, Dylan'll take this out, absolutely.

“You are, aren't you,” he says, mock-accusingly. “I really hit on something there. Emotional intimacy gets you in the mood.”

“You're ridiculous,” Tyler says, but he's not laughing.

It's weird, not working: like, unnerving. Dylan doesn't know what to do with himself. This time last year Dylan's schedule was so jam-packed he was falling asleep in the shower. Now he's in his empty apartment, marathoning Transparent, hair an ungelled mess, pants optional. Which isn't entirely terrible. It's a good show, and it's cool to actually have time to watch something he isn't in, something where his performance isn't a factor. It's just that two episodes from now he'll have to find another show, or start counting his eyelashes for fun, because Tyler's off shooting the role of Hot Something, always an underrated performance, and Posey's busy with Teen Wolf, and also, Dylan accidentally started blowing him off after his grand death scene-slash-panic attack, and now he doesn't know how to stop.

He doesn't want a pity party, and he doesn't want to be around Posey if he's gonna be moody and
weird, and, like, passive-aggressive without even meaning to. Posey doesn't need that kind of negativity. Last time they got high Dylan was freshly dumped and completely nihilistic in the worst way, and Dylan's not looking to replicate the experience. Hoechlin's so chill, he can handle anything Dylan throws at him, but Posey, Posey's—suggestible. And he's got bigger stuff than Dylan ever did to fixate on, if he's gonna fixate on something. Dylan, he's an asshole, but he's not that much of an asshole. Some people are just better off not thinking. Dylan'd be the first to check that box, if he could. He's not tipping anyone else into his head space if he can avoid it.

He's rewatching what on Netflix when he gets a text from Alex Saxon, which just says,

_Congratulations, man_

For a few seconds he doesn't even know what he's looking at, and then he's still pretty sure he doesn't know what he's looking at, even with the second text, the third:

_You're gonna be great_

_Stiles is awesome_

Even with his heart suddenly pounding out of control. He hesitates, texts back, _whaat??_

_Micah, Alex replies. It was you or me right? Well it's not me_

Which—that's insane, that means Dylan's last-ditch YouTube audition risk actually _worked_.

_you'll get the next one_, he texts with fumbling fingers. He can't, he still can't completely believe it. Aside from anything else, he knows for a fact that Alex did better than he did in the chemistry test with Felicity.

_Definitely_, Alex sends back, and Dylan feels kind of bad for a minute. Alex is a good guy, easy to hang with, and he wanted this as bad as Dylan does. They're both MTV kids, both playing the most likeable guy on their shows—well, Dylan used to, anyway. Way back at that first audition, recognizing each other, they'd promised to be cool whoever got it.

Well, Dylan's cool. He's so cool, he feels like he might throw up a little, or cry. Not entirely real, not sure what even to do with himself, except he needs to look at that script—No, he needs to read the book again—No, he needs to call Tyler, have a nervous breakdown in front of him, needs to fucking—blow him, for how this turned out, for being the reason for how this turned out.

_guess what_, he texts.

_hey guess whattt_

_yoooooo_

_pick up your phooooooooone_

“Dylan,” Tyler says, and Dylan's so amped up, the look on Tyler's face doesn't really sink in.

“Guess who's about to play a guy who loses his chiiiiild,” Dylan jokes, and promptly realizes he is not Bo Burnam, and shock humor is terrible, when Tyler doesn't even crack a smile. “I think I'm going to pass out,” Dylan confesses. “Ignore me, I'm like, naturally high right now.”

Tyler just kind of looks—confused.

“Susan called you?” he says, and for a moment Dylan remembers Susan's talk, and wants to call her
up, like, make up a dance called I Was Right, You Were Wrong (The Not-Hiding-My-Boyfriend Song). YouTube, he'll be a YouTube kid again, it'll be worth it.

Then it dawns on him that Tyler still—doesn't look happy. Like, he looks like Derek, frowning and with his brows coming together for a little brow pow-wow.


“No, it's just—” Tyler's never looked so out of it. “Susan said you got it?”

“Alex,” Dylan says, and when that doesn't change Tyler's face one bit, he adds, “Saxon. The other top two dude. They're not going with him.”

Some of the confusion sweeps away, and then Tyler just looks—bummed. Which, why—this is the dream, this is, like, all the weight off Dylan's back, finally, all his anxiety gone—most of his anxiety—some of his anxiety gone. Whatever, it's still incredible.


And, Dylan knows this. Downside of following fans: occasionally, you will get weird private messages that make you really uncomfortable.

But—no, that's not Tyler's embarrassed face. His ears aren't even a little bit pink. Dylan's way off on this.

“Emma saw the video,” Tyler says.


“She thinks, ah,” Tyler says, uncomfortably. “She wants to meet me.”

“You,” Dylan says, and Tyler tenses, and Dylan didn't—that wasn't—What? “Cool,” he tries, tries to be. “Like, because—”

“For the role,” Tyler says, a little stiffly. “She wants me to play Micah.”
“Makes sense,” Dylan decides. “Yeah, yeah yeah yeah. I mean, you stole scenes from Tom Hanks. No shit you stole them from me.”

In Dylan's head, in the split second of vetting before the words spill out of his mouth, it's a compliment.

Tyler blinks at him, and then his mouth smiles ahead of the rest of his face, and he says, “She said she doesn't wanna make the movie without me.”

Dylan whistles, impressed.

It's not supposed to sound sarcastic.

Tyler's smile flatlines. “I,” he says. Glaring down at something off camera—the floor, or his sneakers. “I didn't know this was gonna—”

“No, I know,” Dylan says, face hot, hands cold. “What, like you need me for a career boost.”

Tyler flinches, and really, Dylan just needs to stop talking, stop trying to be cool when he obviously can't sell it.

“You don't, I'm saying,” Dylan says, against all instincts. “You have like, what, four movies in production right now? The, the spy one, right, and then, uh, Hot Something, then the one with all the gore, you texted me that picture from the makeup chair, and then the, oh! The baseball one, that one seems really cool.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “That about sums it up.” His jaw is doing a Derek thing.

Faraway, underwater, Dylan's gut is in knots looking at him, but none of it is really registering over the sour taste in his mouth.


“My agent'll drop me if I don't,” Tyler says, and for a second he's pleading, eyes wide, horribly exposed, Dylan's stomach swooping—

“Good,” Dylan says, and nods, and he means, Yeah, fine, do it, but Tyler's eyes go huge and then shutter and then—Tyler's hand fills the screen, and he's gone.

That's not what I meant, Dylan should text Tyler like, immediately, but he doesn't.

It's—Dylan has a problem, sometimes, with resentfulness. Not even a problem, he's not—it's never really affected his life before, so he never really made an effort to tamp down on it.

Justin Bieber, for example. Guy just seems like a tool. Like, even before he cheated on Selena, Dylan had that one nailed: he's just, like, the worst. And sure, that realization just so happened to coincide with him seeing the girl of Dylan's pre-pubescent dreams, but that doesn't make it wrong. They can break up, claim to be friends, Justin can go to church and do this apology tour, but Dylan isn't buying it. Selena Gomez herself couldn't change his mind.
And that's fine, because Dylan's never gonna get any facetime with the dude anyway. It's not like he's gonna be in the next cubicle over, or behind the camera telling Dylan what to do. Dylan's never had to swallow down his feelings, or, like, fake fondness, pretend everything's cool between them.

Not that this feels anything like that. It's just that Dylan can't see himself relaxing with Bieber, chilling out and just hanging. Even if it's petty, even if he's being an emotional five year old. Even if he wanted to be an adult about it, he can't shake the edge in his voice, the way everything comes out weird and pointed.

And that's—now, Dylan needs to get over that instinct, like, right now. Before he does something really stupid, before this shitty, petty side of his completely sets the most secure part of his life on fire.

It's just that there's this hollow feeling in his gut, this buzz under his skin, this endless rumbling in his head, this was his chance. Dylan's last chance to resuscitate his flagging career, to get things back on track after bomb after movie bomb, after getting fired from a fucking MTV show that might just be the most notable part of his IMDB page, forever. That this really might be his life now: sitting in front of his laptop, watching House of Cards because Hoechlin has opinions he refuses to share for fear of spoiling Dylan in the off chance he ever got into this incredibly boring Scandal-without-any-actual-scandals show. Also, blatant dog murder, that's fun for the whole family. When in doubt: dog murder. Dylan doesn't watch TV to watch acts of terrorism, okay, that's not a selling point. Cover Dylan in puppies and he's the happiest dude he'll ever manage to be. This? This is the least fun a viewing experience could possibly be.

Now, now see this: A wild Dylan in captivity. Isolated, pining for his mate, he writes endless amounts of passive-aggressive texts he doesn't dare send, and deletes them, and then writes a million empty apologies, and then tries to get into Game of Thrones again despite the rape and all the general Why would anyone ever watch this-ness of it all. Despondent, he marathons Crazy Ex-Girlfriend and then every YouTube video on Rachel Bloom's channel, and questions if he ever was a YouTube star at all. He was just messing around, just—his whole career was him just messing around.

And now it's over.

Because you can't come back from that. From getting fired, and running out of a major audition, and then risking it all as some last-ditch effort to work up some fan-pushed petition or something, and everyone coming back from it like, “Nah, we're good. Your boyfriend's really hot though, what's his number?”

And the fact is—the fact is, Dylan's not some, some delusional optimist, okay. He knows what happens now. Tyler blows up as Micah, wins an Oscar or enough acclaim that he's avalanched with brilliant scripts, and forgets all about bitter loser Dylan O'Barely Funny in about ten seconds. Meanwhile, Dylan gets a new cat for every Academy Award nom or snub, and is eventually found half-eaten in his apartment when the neighbors start to smell something. Pan in on his laptop screen, Netflix pop-up mocking, Are you still watching “My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic”? Freeze, fade out.

And—and you know what, fine. Just-moving-to-California Dylan would be satisfied with that, with ever getting that far. It's more than he ever could've believed for himself. So—so just suck it up, Dylan. You got lucky, you got spoiled, now it's over. Get over yourself. One-year-in-California Dylan would be stunned to still be alive, right now. So, congratulations. You hit a home run, now the game's over, you can't just stand around the empty pitch like you own the place. Just take your
ring, sign some fangirl's DVDs, and figure out what the rest of your life looks like. Text your stupidly perfect boyfriend and enjoy these five seconds where he still remembers your name.

take the job, he texts Tyler.

hey

heyy

take the jobbbbbbbb

do iiiiiiiiiit

blow their socks off

and shoes

unless their feet stink

shoes on socks off

i'm glad we've resolved this

<3<3

that's not two hearts by the way

it's two butts

because i FUCKIN' love you

do it do it do it

or face my eternal wrath >:{

that's evil mustache dylan btw

very very intimidating

ps sorry for being a passive aggressive jealous dick :( 

There, that should do it.

Dylan really doesn't know how he ever talked to anyone before texting was a thing.

… Tyler messages back.

For an age and a half, just “…”

Then Tyler calls him.

Which, no, no. Noh, oh oh oh, no.

Being supportive and goofy by text? Yeah, maybe Dylan can do that. But actually convincing Ty he's okay, like, face-to-face? Danger. Red alert, will not work. Will, in fact, be hella
counterproductive, because regardless of what Dylan knows, and wants, and is trying desperately to convey, it turns out that when it comes to real life feelings, Dylan is an incredibly shitty actor.

fun fact: he texts. if i picked up facetime now, you'd get to watch me take a shit
i mean i don't know
maybe that's something you're into
we've never really gone deep kinks-wise
fyi watched human centipede in my formative years and don't feel that incredibly scarred by it?
like who knows, maybe that's where i got my irrational fear of needles
but overall, i'm open to suggestions

Tyler doesn't answer.

It's fine; it's fine. It's just that Dylan is either developing stomach cancer or so stressed he's getting a gut ulcer. Which—hey, his brain interjects, remember when you told the whole teenage world you have herpes on the cast commentary of the Teen Wolf pilot? Humiliating, am I right? Okay, back to what you were thinkin' about. We now return to our regularly scheduled programming. PS: Kill yourself.

It's none of those things, he knows: the truth is, he's pregnant. The truth is he's not pregnant, he's cramping, he's losing the baby. The problem with all that is, without Tyler next to him, head thrown back, shoulders shaking, none of that feels remotely funny.

You know what helps with cramps? Masturbation. Gettin' handsy with your... man...dsy. You know who boners remind Dylan of? Here's a hint: Jeff Davis once wrote him a scene where he did nothing but gasp and shiver shirtless, just to justify a year of half-starving him while also taping his feet to a treadmill and his palms to those weights that can totally snap your spine if they slip out of your sweaty hands. You know, the kind of workout where you need to have another guy as backup so you don't get your ribcage crushed. Did Dylan ever do that kind of workout? No, he ate Doritos and laughed, and also spit that taste of bogus “chocolate” protein shake into the sink, because he has the empathy of a common house fly.

Those are sure to be some of Tyler's fondest Dylan memories before any recollection of a Dylan whatsoever completely fades from his head like the family in that Back To The Future photo.

Tyler, he thought if he put that much effort into getting in shape for the role, there'd be, you know, a role at the end of it. An actual storyline, some—character growth.

How fucking depressing is that?

And that's why Dylan can't—can't ever be bitter at him for this. It's been a looooong freaking time coming, Dylan knows that. And if it was any other movie, any other role, Dylan would be the first one throwing Tyler a party about it.

And he still wants to, he still wants to be a, a proud papa about it. To make up a celebration dance, to take Ty out to dinner again, to run lines with him, all of it.
It's just that every time he tries, his mouth just spills vitriol, just makes things worse and worse.

So he's got rules: no face-to-face interaction. No vocals, no anything. Just very, very careful texting, and privately swimming in his own dejection, not infecting anyone else. He's, he's under official quarantine until he can get his shit together, stop caring so freaking much.

And as soon as he's got the role down, as soon as he can do a good impression of a more mature human being, he can get back to civilization. So: training starts now, Dyl. It's your own time you're wasting, c'mon now.

“I'm a tool,” Dylan tries. Makes a face. “I'm a fucking tool,” he tells himself, tells the Tyler in his head. “Ignore, like, my face, and the way my voice sounds, and whatever stupid thing I said, what I meant was...”

No, nope, nothing even slightly believable.

That's fine. That's just awesome.

Dylan just can't talk to another human being until he gets a freaking lobotomy, that's all.
best pickup lines, go: hey baby, you're so pretty

On Tyler's phone, there's still that message, verified and clear. He's only double checked, oh, maybe a couple dozen times.

Emma Donoghue  @EmmaDonoghue

Good morning! A friend showed me your video with Dylan, and I had to contact you to tell you how moved I am by your interpretation of my words. I was brought to tears by the amount of insight you expressed in such subtle gestures. Felicity is wonderful and I wouldn't dream of trying to try to replace her, but we still haven't found our Micah and I'm ready to fight for you. Turning your heart and soul over to a studio is always difficult—like sending your child to university!—so I insist on having final say on casting, and after seeing your take I have complete faith in your ability to bring Micah to life. I'd like to meet you and talk a little about Micah and your interest in this project.

It's just so unreal. This doesn't happen to Tyler, this hasn't had a chance of happening since—

Tyler fell off the radar as a serious actor before he hit puberty. He's accepted that. There's nothing wrong with the job he does now, the roles he plays. It's good work, satisfying work; everything means something to someone. Even a horror movie Tyler might be embarrassed by sometimes helped someone through something. Derek definitely meant something to huge groups of people. Tyler's not gonna let some elitist Hollywood award system stop him appreciating that.

Of course he wants the big roles, the movies that mean something to him. To be a Johnny Depp or a Joaquin Phoenix or a Heath Ledger? Tyler'd have to be crazy not to want that. He just—didn't think it would ever happen. And was fine with that.

But now...

He'd answered Dylan's call feeling guilty, half-ready to turn it down. To offer to turn it down, to take time to consider.

But—“My agent'll drop me if I don't,” he said, tried to—plead with Dylan, make him understand.

And Dylan said, “Good.”

And hours later Tyler can't—can't let go of that. He wasn't expecting Dylan to be happy for him, he wasn't expecting—maybe a quiet, “Congratulations,” some wallowing, and Tyler would've—helped him through it, offered not to take it, and Dylan would've said, “What, are you crazy? You have to, man, you can't do that to yourself.”

And Tyler would make it up to him, find him something better, or they could write something...

But that's not what happened. And that's not what's gonna happen.

Dylan's making it a choice.

Him, and a dozen straight-to-DVDs, Tyler running through a forest with his shirt off, buckets of fake-blood coagulating on his skin, clinging to his abs—zoom in here, get a good shot—wipe him down and reset, go again, more sweat this time.

Or a chance to be in movies Tyler'd actually pay to see if he heard about them. To be the guy who
looks past the lens and takes you over, makes you forget you're watching a movie and not just *feeling* something.

Tyler's seen this choice once before, was paralyzed by it, terrified of making the wrong one. Of choosing and spending the rest of his life stuck reliving that moment, that moment he threw everything away.

It's a good job, a reliable job. It's the man he loves, who he'd take a bullet for without blinking.

So why's every bone in his body screaming to go the other way?

Brittany's got promo for *Pitch Perfect 3: Aca-Pocalypse* for two weeks; Tyler's got reshoots and ADR. They can't make their schedules sync up. It's fine; Tyler can practically hear Brittany's voice in his head. She never liked Dylan, as much as she denied it, as much as she played nice so well Dylan wanted to hang out sometime, do something for her charity, maybe. She thought he was too jokey, that he couldn't take anything seriously. That Tyler takes everything seriously, which—that's not true. Tyler's got jokes, he can joke. He's sarcastic—people just don't hear it. He's...

But maybe that's the point, he thinks, ears heating so India pulls back from the makeup chair assessingly and asks, “You okay?”

“Fine,” Tyler says—blandly, he thinks, but her lips purse.

“You're quiet today,” she says. Searches in her tray of adhesives. “Haven't mentioned Dylan once.”

One day Tyler will figure out how to blush on command, and how to keep from blushing. This is not something Johnny Depp ever had to deal with. You can be twenty-seven, six-one, bench 290 and look like it, but if your ears go red under pressure, you kinda have to resign yourself to every woman on Earth trying to mother you.

It's fine. Concern is—it's nice, sometimes. It could be a lot worse, there's plenty worse—racial profiling, or having an extremely punchable face, which Dylan claims is definitely a thing.

“He's fine,” Tyler says.

India says nothing.

“He,” Tyler says, then thinks better of it. “He—I got a job.”

She's really examining the different prosthetics now, maybe not listening to him at all.

“Or off—Offered a job,” Tyler amends. “That uh—I don't know if I'll...”

“Porn?” India asks, and Tyler chokes on nothing.

“Wha—no. No, I'm—No. Thank God. No,” he adds again, starting to laugh. “No, not that.”

“I've done porn,” India says, noncommittally, and Tyler says, a couple nods later, “I'm not—It's not—People seem to like it,” like an idiot. His face is flaming, and he can't facepalm or he'll ruin all her work.

“It's just a job,” India says. “Go to work, get through the bullshit, pick up the paycheck, go home. It's about as demoralizing as any 9 to 5.”
“Ah,” Tyler says intelligently.

“You've been acting for a while,” India says. “You've never had a profoundly shitty moment? Where you felt gross and used and just wanted to get out of there? But you couldn't. Cameras were rolling, scene was still playing, so you just stayed there and took it. You don't have to tell me,” she says, as the closed-down, interview-ready Tyler swallows up the rest of him. “I've talked to plenty of actors on their worst work day. Someone's gotta fix the makeup after the meltdown. So I can promise you—it's really not that different.”

“I'm fine,” Tyler says, and hears the tense note in his voice, and apologizes. “It's not—it's nothing like that. It's the opposite.”

“Good news,” India says. “And he's jealous.”

“It was an accident,” Tyler says in a rush. “I never meant to—It was his audition, I was just—”


“I should,” Tyler says, and hates how uncertain he sounds. “Shouldn't I?”

“The boy's a saint,” India says dramatically. Tyler rolls his eyes.

“I should,” he says, again. “I just—can't.”

“You're human,” India says. “And you earned it as much as he would've. He'll get over it.”

“I don't know,” Tyler says. “This—He really wasn't expecting—”

“He'll get over it,” India promises. “And you'll never forgive him if you turn it down because he was pouting.”

“That's not—” Tyler says, a little defensively. “He really wants this. It's not just a job to him.”

“Is it ever?” India asks.

“He's not answering my calls,” Tyler says. “And then he texts, with some stupid excuse, and he won't—it's like he can't even look at me.”

There's a sudden lump in Tyler's throat, that pinching pain in his sinuses that comes just before—He glares down at his knees, tries to force himself dry-eyed.

“Honey,” India says. She's finally found the prosthetic, a long, savage cut she starts applying to his cheek. “Does he love you?”

“I,” Tyler says, and regrets it. India's fingers are gentle where they smear the makeup back into place. “Yeah,” Tyler decides. He's not—he knows that much.

“Then you'll get past this,” India says. “Don't worry about it.”

Tyler's phone heats up his pocket like a smoking gun, that message daring him to make a move, pick a side, respond.
These kinds of offers don't wait around. Authors don't like being your fifth priority.

*I really appreciate it,* he almost writes, but his fingers stick to the keyboard, muscles too tense to twitch into the right positions.

They move of their own accord, find Dylan's last text. Some joke, some long string of nothing, and usually it would be funny, would be the most funny fucking thing Tyler's seen all day. But now it's just what Dylan does when he's nervous, when he's hiding how he really feels under a million witty distractions.

Some wild instinct takes Tyler over, types, *I miss you,* and hits send before he can get a grip on himself.

It's not even two full seconds before Dylan responds, *i'm sorry*

*i suck*

*just do it okay i swear i want you to*

*please?*

*pretty pleeeeaase*

Tyler shakes his head, shoves his phone back in his pocket.

Tyler doesn't mope. He's not a moper. If he's stressed out, that's just incentive to work harder, tire yourself out. Push past it.

Four takes of the same running scene, mark to mark, catch your breath.

Aaand cut.

“Change it up,” Jackie shouts from behind the monitors. “Lets try a couple new things, give our DP something to work with.”

When reshoots turned into filming a second movie, Tyler doesn't know. He turns to Camille, who makes a bemused face at him. There's sweat streaking her hair, a flush high in her cheeks. Her wardrobe's about as original as his. Artfully torn low-cut tank top exposing a lacy bra strap, low-riding jean short shorts. Tyler'd feel more guilty noticing if that wasn't the whole point. If she hadn't eyed him up on their first day of shooting, raised her eyebrows.  

“Hollywood equality,” she said, laughing. “We're both the whore who gets killed for having sex.”

It's fine; it's funny. It's—people seem to like it.

It's not *Terminal,* so it's not *Terminal.* It is what it is. There's nothing wrong with that.

India's just putting ideas in his head, encouraging him to negatively re-contextualize everything.

She said it herself, it's like any job. Any job has bad days, or uncomfortable moments, and you just have to keep going until you can leave. Tyler's lucky, whatever shitty movie he's in. That he's in a movie at all. That he can support himself on his looks and a little bit of a workout. The character stuff is just a bonus.
And who even knows what becomes big? Tyler predicted Teen Wolf lasting six seasons back when they were shooting the pilot, and even Jeff Davis laughed in his face. You never know what picks up a cult following, what—or what bombs, some movie adaptation of a beloved book that no one can stand. There's no way to predict what it'll look like after the final edit. You're just—running, crying, giving it everything you have, every time. And then it's out of your hands.

Reset cameras, back to one, time to do it all again.

Tyler tries Dylan again outside the ADR booth, kind of praying about it. Fourth ring, he gets a notification.

threw up like 3 times. my throat is literally shredded. can we just text?

Tyler sighs.

You want anything? I'll come over he texts back.

please no, Dylan responds. i feel like shit. like actual excrement

sorry, he adds again. i miss you too. just can't now

Don't worry about it, Tyler texts back.

He takes a second to get his head straight, and heads back to work.
A week in, Tyler stops calling, and Dylan breaks up with his laptop, shoves it off to the side of the bed and curls small.

The days kind of blend into each other after that.

Blind item: Which twenty-something actor from a popular MTV show barely caught his vomit in his hands before tripping to the nearest trash can to finish up? Clues: He's not on the MTV show anymore. He's not acting anymore. He's still twenty-something? And male? Probably. No guarantees.

He's, like, startlingly sober. Like, getting drunk would not fix how fucking sober he is.

Getting high would make it worse.

He's not scrolling through Tyler's replies, apology and concern getting more and more distant, oh no. No, his mind's already memorized those. Turns out that great memory for scripts turns fucking kamikaze with nothing to do, and just pulls out all the ingredients for a mental breakdown and takes off to find some more.

Wah, wah, poor little self-sabotaging headcase.

SOFT PAN in on TYLER, our PROTAGONIST: staring down at his phone, a soft frown on his face. Eyes like the prettiest marbles you've ever seen, only prettier. Perfect stubble frames the kind of pout that makes everyone watching want to kiss it better. He's probably drowning in offers, right now. But, no—he turns them all down, because he's just that much of a GENTLEMAN.

Abrupt FLASH CUT to DYLAN, the ANTAGONIST. Hair like a cartoon of an electric shock, Justin Bieberish body. Camera probably catches him mid-stroke: even a mother could never love that O-face. On his bed, surrounded by trash, stinking—How can we physically demonstrate how disgusting he smells right now? He's probably adjusted to it—Will accept suggestions. Actual plumes of toxic smoke would probably be going too far.

We watch TYLER, our hearts breaking for him, read a string of bullshit excuses. He's [word that means “fuckable” but also means “we will cut the throats of anyone who upsets him”], but stoic, fully capable of getting out of bed and being a normal adult man despite whatever he's dealing with emotionally.

MONTAGE of TYLER being functional, charming, everyone's favorite person, juxtaposed with DYLAN clutching his gut to keep from vomiting major organs.
Roll credits.

Really, it's a shame Dylan never wrote that screenplay he was talkin' about.

He's clearly such a fucking pro at it.

Tyler's not the only missed call, oh no. The entire phone situation has become a little too daunting. Susan is probably gearing up to sue Dylan for screwing her out of her ten percent. Posey sent four text streams in varying levels of casual concern. Holland ships Dylan a box of strawberry shortcake cake pops that spell out STILES LIVES IN MY <3, and Dylan opens the box and stares and stares and kind of melts into the ground.

He means to thank her, he does, but instead he eats like twelve of them, and spends the next undefined blur of time convulsing on the bathroom floor, and then eating anything, drinking anything, keeping food down, thinking in straight lines, and standing up without immediately regretting it kinda rule themselves out as realistic lifestyle choices.

He wakes up freezing, head cloudy, throat sour. Skin soaked through with cold sweat, t-shirt sticking to him like a band-aid. Kind of maneuvers into the shower, where it becomes apparent that standing is no longer a thing he can successfully do.

The fun times just keep coming. Sit down shower, alright, Dylan's always wanted to know what it feels like to go through withdrawal without actually ever getting to enjoy the being high part. This is cool, he can use this—could have, could have used this if he was still a working actor, if he ever played an addict, or a fucking broken person. Still, maybe Tyler can...

And no, nope, bad direction. Bad train of thought choice, because this tsunami wave of, like, anxiety and fucking—grief comes over him then, and he's just kind of flattened under it, heart pounding and pounding, until he can't breathe at all.

Really, if Posey wouldn't have let himself in and called 911, things might've actually gotten pretty bad.

So maybe Dylan kinda stopped eating for a while.

It's just easier, you know, than eating and being sick, and being sick, and being sick. Except then he ate like, way more than his body could handle anymore, and kind of almost killed himself.

“That's not,” Dylan says, when his doctor tries to explain this to him. “I mean, c'mon. That's—Like actually dead, killed?”

Which leads to this whole tangent about eating disorders, which—Dylan doesn't, he's not—He's never had to lose weight. Like, he could always eat whatever, it never stuck. So obviously he doesn't have—well, obviously. He doesn't obsessively stare at himself in the mirror, all critical, he mostly resigned himself to his whatever body the day it showed up and never really changed. So all of this is obviously insane.

He just—stopped being hungry, for a while, there. You're not supposed to eat when you're not hungry; the five minutes stalking Tyler to his trainer taught Dylan that much. That's not even about losing weight, that's just—basic Person 101. Intro to Eating.
Also, Dylan calls bullshit, because Tyler is literally all muscle, no fat, and he's fine. Dylan, he's not fat but he's got, you know, an actual stomach, not six protruding—He's obviously still got some nutrition to spare, is the point. Stored some away for winter.

So then there's a speech about how all bodies are different, wow, shocker. And fine, maybe there's something there, being eighteen, kind of seeing Tyler, like, the apex of physical human male perfection, and being like, cool! Wonder what I'll look like when I'm a—a man. Shut up. And then getting to twenty-one, -two, -three, like, nope, you're gonna look sixteen forever. Also, your attempts at facial hair will look like stray pubes. Sorry, bud.

But—yeah, no. Dylan wasn't actually, like, competing—or trying to reach that, what, are you crazy? His face is on fire just hearing himself, his humiliating little admission, why would he even say that? Dylan knows what's possible, in his life, okay, he's not gonna start trying to—This dude's really off base, is the point.

Blind item: which blockbuster reject—

“Dylan,” the doctor says. “What you have is a disease. It's nothing to be ashamed of.”

“I'm not,” Dylan says. How is this his life.

“I'm not ashamed, I just—I don't have it.”

But it's one of those catch-22 things: That's exactly what someone with an eating disorder would say.

Try getting out of that one.

Posey looks worse than Dylan's ever seen him. He lifts his head from his hands when he sees Dylan stir; his eyes are swollen. Dylan's gut twists.

“I'm,” he says, but Posey cuts him off with a red-rimmed glare.

“Don't fucking say fine. I found you.” His voice is low, hoarse. “I'm done losing people. I'm done.”

That's a gut punch like nothing else, and Dylan deserves it. He's been so fucking selfish for so long. He doesn't know what came over him.

“Anxiety,” Posey says. “And depression. You told me. I should've—”

“I didn't say depression,” Dylan hedges.

“Yeah, well you may as well have!” Posey bursts out. “You didn't text for a month, and I thought you were just,”

“Bitter,” Dylan offers. It's a little bit true.

“Hoechlin just about had a heart attack,” Posey says. “I wasn't gonna tell him until I figured out what was up with you two, but fucking TMZ got the 911 call—”

“You're shitting me,” Dylan says, head thudding back against the pillow. If his career wasn't already dead in the water, this would be what took it out. And Tyler—“How much does he hate me?”

Posey narrows his eyes at him. “You think he hates you.”
Dylan nods like a bobblehead, pleading.

“He's been out in the hall for hours,” Posey says. “He thinks you don't wanna see him.”

Dylan closes his eyes, squeezes them shut tight. The tears come anyway.

“I'm such a jackass,” he says. “We've conclusively, after months of double blind studies, we can definitively say that I am the biggest asshole.”

“You forgot something,” Posey says. “When you were busy collecting all that information.”

“Doubt it,” Dylan says bleakly.

“You bet,” Posey says. His eyes are bright, fixed on Dylan's, challenging. “Fucking peer review.”

“I'm sorry,” is the first thing that tumbles out of Dylan's mouth when he sees Tyler, Tyler in the doorway looking so tired, and so scared, and then shoving all that back somewhere and coming closer, closer, closer, saying, “No, I—I'm not gonna take it.”

“Not,” Dylan says blankly, and then it comes back, thumps through him, the stupid movie. Tyler thinks this is about some movie, thinks—

“It doesn't matter,” Tyler says. “Not more than you. I'm not—”

His hands are trembling.

“You can't do that,” Dylan says.

“Watch me,” Tyler says, and glares at the ground, and Dylan can't let this go on.

“That's not what this is,” Dylan says. “You didn't—do this to me. You can't fix it.”

“That's when this started,” Tyler says stubbornly. “And I should've—”

“It started when I got fired,” Dylan says. “You weren't even on the same continent. I just—lost my appetite, you know? And then I just started vomiting all the time, and it was just—easier—”

“Not to eat at all,” Posey says.

“For a month?” Tyler says. “And I never even—”

He looks so much like a lost kid, it's heartbreaking.

“It's happened before,” Dylan mutters. “When I was like thirteen. It's not, like..." He gestures at the room, the contraption he's trapped in. "This isn't exactly normal, for me."

All of this is so surreal. That diagnosis, and this hospital room, and everyone acting like Dylan's on his fucking deathbed, for some overblown panic attack. And Tyler, Tyler with this tragic Derek Hale face on, treating Dylan's weird little anxiety habits like this earth-shattering plot revelation. Like it was his job to notice, or something. Like there was even something to notice, there wasn't.

"I get skinny plenty," Dylan says. "Like every season, I can just do that. It doesn't mean anything." He kind of half laughs, shoves his unencumbered hand through his hair, "And I'm not, like, the biggest... skin barer, in the room. There's not, like, all of this material for comparison."
"I've seen you," Tyler says. "Enough. I should've..."

"What, pointed out how scrawny I am?" Dylan jokes. "When you're this, like, perfect specimen, and I always am. Yeah, that really sounds like you. 'Bro, do you even lift?'"

"You said you were sick," Tyler says, ignoring the distraction completely. "You said you were sick. And you don't. You don't, you always say you're fine, even when you're not. So I should've known."

"Don't," Dylan says, and glares at the ceiling for a second, blinking hard. "Don't, like... I was being a little bitch. Blowing you off. That's why I told you, I just didn't wanna..."

Tyler looks punched, looks like that day Dylan punched him in the face, wide-eyed and hurt and trying and failing not to be.

"It's, no, Ty, it's just what I do," Dylan says urgently. "When, when I get like this. I don't bring people into it." He forces himself to catch Tyler's gaze, hold it. Anything to get that look off his face. "It's not you, it's not anything you... I just kind of... can't."

"You said it happened before," Posey says. "When you were thirteen."

"No, yeah," Dylan agrees. "Yeah, exactly. I have, like, the best parents in the world. No way they wouldn't've noticed. If there was, like, any sign. But I didn't want them to."

Except that just has both of them looking at him, like, Why not? Amazing parents, people dream of having these parents, why wouldn't you wanna take full advantage? Put all your weird crap out there, make them deal with it. Who wouldn't, right?

So totally confusing, why he might not want to be this massive anxious disappointing burden on everyone.

"You couldn't have known," he says. "You're not this oblivious guy missing all these blatant signals. I'm always skinny, I'm always anxious. Since you've known me. Nothing's different."

He can see the movie version of this too easy. Some big feed-the-moral line, like, I've been an actor all my life. Voice just catching, tears spilling down his face, a tight shot getting wider, Movie Dylan kept in exact center, all snot-nosed and shaky, his friends living props around him. Credits come in over the scene, one by one, no music, just the faint sounds of Movie Dylan's sniffling, the ambient noise of the hospital around him. And there you have it. The whole still, tragic scene. The Academy Award-bait cumshot.

That's not resolution, in real life. That's not honesty. That's just blowing everything out of proportion.

"Just, it's nothing," Dylan says. "I don't even know what I'm saying, that this happened before. I don't even know what 'this' is." He huff-laughs, one beat, says, "I just, I freaked myself out."

"That's not," Tyler says, everything else disappearing behind steady reassurance. "It's an illness. It's not your fault."

"Yeah, mental illness," Dylan says, only half jokingly.

"It's not your fault," Tyler repeats, like he's on a very special episode of 7th Heaven, but something about it, the pleading look on his face, grabs at Dylan's heart and twists.
“It's like cancer,” Posey says. “You wouldn't judge someone with—”

“I was a dick,” Dylan says. He can't take this surreal sympathy a second longer. “To both of you. That's not a fucking symptom.” He shakes his head. “None of this is an actual—I did all of it. I got myself fired. I stopped eating, I stopped answering the phone, I went psycho on Tyler for getting good news. None of that's in the fucking DSM-V.”

“It fucking is,” Posey says.


“Stop,” Tyler says. “You're not the only person I know with major anxiety. I just didn't put it together.” He tips up his glasses, rubs his eyes. “I should've—it just manifests a little differently. But the ruminating, and avoiding the phone—”

“Loss of appetite,” Posey says.

“Oh my god,” Dylan says, his head swimming. “It doesn't have to be this whole thing, okay? Can't it just be, you know, me, being a—a selfish—”

“No,” Tyler says softly.

“No way, dude,” Posey says.

“Well why not?” Dylan says, exasperated. “Why do I have to be—sick, or insane, why can't this just be something fixable?” His throat is killing him, making his eyes water, and he hates—how he does this to himself, makes something out of literally nothing, wastes everyone's time. “Shit,” he realizes, elbowing himself upright. “My parents—what if they heard—”

“I didn't say your name,” Posey says. “You're not in the news, it's not—it's just me, freaking out. They don't even know if I know you.”

“But Hoechlin,” Dylan says.

“I just had a bad feeling,” Tyler says. “And I would've called Tyler anyway, but I had to make sure —” He stops. “Do you want to talk to them?”

“I can't.” Dylan says, adrenaline spiking just considering it. “I'm telling you, they're the most supportive—They're gonna think they did something wrong.”

“It's not about blame,” Tyler says.

“They wouldn't blame themselves if it was cancer,” Posey says, and Dylan snaps, “But it's not. I don't even know if it's anything for sure, the doctor thinks I have a freaking eating disorder—” He shakes his head. “You guys aren't psychiatrists, okay, you're guessing. I'm not gonna worry my mom over some stupid—stomach virus, or—”

“You know that's not what this is,” Tyler says.

“Or mono,” Dylan challenges. “Fatigue, loss of appetite, vomiting—it doesn't have to be some—” It doesn't. Dylan's not, like, talking to people who aren't there, or blowing his brains out. This was just a bad couple of days, you know? A bad year. No need to sound the alarm, send everyone running. “I'll figure it out, I swear. I just have to find a job, and start packing my schedule again. I'm fine as long as I'm working.”
“I'll talk to Jeff,” Posey says. “The show's not the same without you, dude. He wants you back, he's just too proud to admit it.” He looks at Tyler. “You too.”

“Stiles is dead,” Dylan says, staring down at his fingers. “I screwed up. I got the memo, okay, it's over.”

“It doesn't have to be,” Tyler says.

“What is?” Posey says, frowning.

“Me, acting,” Dylan says. “Pretending I could—” A lump slots into his throat, chokes him. “I had a good run,” he says after a couple of covert thick swallows, trying not to sniffle, but also not have an exposed snot situation. “Better than most people get.”

“You're serious,” Tyler says.

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Posey says. Dylan can't help but grin, if a little wanly. Always the diplomat, Posey.

“I got fired,” Dylan reminds him. “And I was—Blue Mind's on Netflix. And it has like, a zero star rating. I don't know what the fuck I was thinking, the whole time. I was trying to like, do this deep, this really intricate—” He scrubs at his eyes, his jaw. “I got lucky, okay? Stiles was funny. Now it's over.”

“Blue Mind's the most boring fucking piece of shit I've ever seen,” Posey says. “You couldn't've saved it. No one could've.”

“I liked it,” Tyler says.

“It was completely up its own ass,” Posey says. “That doesn't suddenly white out all the crazy shit you're able to do. Stiles wasn't a fucking fluke.”

“I don't think Blue Mind was that bad,” Tyler says, almost to himself. “The scene by the water—”

“Oh god, don't,” Dylan says, his skin turning to lava just remembering.

“Or, or the part with your girlfriend, the breakup—”

“I was literally ham in that scene,” Dylan says. “Just—hammin' it up. Chewing the scenery.”

“Oh, be quiet,” Tyler says. “You've never overacted in your life.”

“Kate was dead,” Posey says. “Peter. No one gives a fuck. They want you back, man.”


“He can't fire you for being sick,” Posey says, practically vibrating with the sudden realization. “If—if someone's sick, and it affects their work—You can't fire them! It's discrimination.”

“I'm not—” Dylan says, and gives up, exhausted. His throat is killing him, he's gonna pass out in a minute.

“Dylan,” Tyler says, and Dylan can't, he can't deal with this. With the glasses and the stubble and the eyes and the face, and all this reassurance, like he's his dad or something. And now he thinks Dylan's crazy, and they're never gonna have sex ever again. Dylan's always gonna be this fragile little—and he needs to throw up, he needs to throw up right the fuck now.
“Bathroom,” he chokes out, eyes already watering, and bolts past them, past Posey's self-righteous advocacy and Tyler's intervention-y soft-eyed understanding and support, and barricades himself in the bathroom, and takes a breath, and blows and blows and blows.

Chapter End Notes

my beta's a little busy lately, so i'll probably love you forever if you take a minute and drop a comment. otherwise i'm just rereading my own stuff obsessively, like a dude thinking he can hear the ocean with a seashell when it's actually the blood rushing in his ear.
the dude can be a shirtless tyler hoechlin, if you want.
(that's not really the point, but it's a nice visual, isn't it?)
“It's really fine,” Tyler says, trying his hardest to exude calm, twenty-six ounces of gloppy fake blood drying across his face and neck. It itches; he concentrates on that. The banal little inconveniences of his job, and not Camille and India's mostly well meaning and completely irritating attempts to force him to talk about his problems.

“He called him three times in ten minutes,” Camille says, like Tyler isn't even there.

“I did not,” Tyler says defensively. He can't help it. “It wasn't ten minutes.” Maybe it's not the best retort in the world, but it's true. That should count for something. “Don't you two have anything else to talk about?”

“I saw that audition video,” Camille says. “How he was looking at you. That boy's got it baaad. Not that I blame him,” she adds, reaching over to pinch Tyler's cheek.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Tyler thinks of dodging, but he doesn't. He stays still, forces a smile. Watches his face move in the mirror, dried blood flaking where the muscles twitch.

India bats Camille's hand away. “That is a *work in progress*,” she says. “And it doesn't matter how the boy feels. You can't reward bad behavior.”

“He's not a boy,” Tyler says. His voice sounds a little faraway to his own ears. India and Camille share glances. “And it's not—He's not feeling well.”

“For a week?” India says skeptically. “Honey, he's not sick. He's throwing a tantrum.”

You get used to it, Tyler thinks. Slipping away while staying rooted in place. He can't actually leave the makeup chair; any excuse would just mean a couple minutes' relief, and then throwing himself back in it again. It's easier to not move at all, not respond, just try to focus on anything else.

“Oh, Tyler,” Camille says, in what Tyler supposes are probably tones of genuine sympathy. She's not a bad person; he probably shouldn't resent her. Shouldn't feel so cagey under her wide-eyed gaze. “I so get it, okay, I've dated so many assholes who seemed so sweet at first.”

“He's not,” Tyler starts, and thinks better of it. A cloud of powdery dried blood showers from his tensed jaw.

“And India's right, you can't reward him,” Camille goes on. “Grow a little backbone. Show him you've got other things going on in your life. You're not just holed up with your phone, waiting—”

“I really don't remember asking for the public's opinion on my private life,” Tyler says, as sedately as he can manage. Camille and India exchange another look. Tyler breathes in. Breaths out. Doesn't notice.

Tyler's not a heartsick teenager; he's doing just fine. He's not obsessively checking his phone, obsessively thinking about where things went wrong. But he's not taking bad advice, spending another year miserable over stupid misunderstandings. And he's not about to make his life a roundtable discussion.

If Dylan needs time, Tyler can give him time. But if he doesn't, if he wants to talk—or even text, Tyler doesn't care anymore. More than anything, he hates uncertainty, hates feeling like the edge is
coming any minute, and he's gonna miss it and drop six stories.

_I love you_, Tyler wants to text. Just in case Dylan doesn't know, or didn't believe him the first time. All of these—relationship rules, games, it doesn't matter. He's not pretending he doesn't care to soothe his own fragile ego, punching Dylan in the stomach like revenge would make any of it any easier. This isn't a movie. Tyler doesn't have anything to prove.

He reaches in his pocket for his phone—

“Oh no you don't,” Camille says, snatching it from his fingers. “I realize you've made a decision. But given that it's a stupid-ass decision, I'm exercising my veto powers.” She looks at him, at India. “The Avengers? Nick Fury. Nothing?”

“Give me my phone back,” Tyler says tiredly.

“Come and get it,” Camille says, shrugging, like Tyler's gonna take her up on it, gonna let her play keep-away with his phone like he's six years old. He doesn't move.

“I'm serious,” he says. “I'm—I wasn't going to call him.”

“Really,” Camille says, disbelieving. “Who were you gonna call.”

Tyler gives himself a second to flip through his mental Rolodex, finds himself settling on, “Tyler—Tyler Posey.” He adds a casual shrug, half-stifles a smirk, eyebrows rising. “I do have other things going on in my life, believe it or not.”

“Not,” Camille says. “I am not enabling you. In fact—” She leans down, swings her free arm around Tyler's shoulders, his phone held high out of reach. “We're hanging out tonight. You and me. You like Call of Duty?”

Tyler gives Camille this much: she's determined to get him back to enjoying his life. Not that he hasn't been, not that he's suddenly blind to all the good he has. He's just been busy, distracted, with reshoots for this never-ending movie, with drafting apologies and responses in his head. It's been more than a week; the job's probably lost in any case. It's getting harder and harder to care.

“The only difference between a martyr and a pushover is PR,” Camille informs him. “If nothing else, you should get a buttload of positive publicity from this. Emma I-Don't-Know-Who _personally_ wrote you a love letter, and promised you—whatever his name is. Main character guy.”

“Micah,” Tyler says.

“Sure,” Camille says. “And it's like this John Green-ish thing, right? Like, the kind of romcom people _like_.”

“It's not a romcom,” Tyler says. “Micah's separated. His son's dying, that's the story. He's looking at his life through all these different lenses, trying to see how he got here. Trying to redirect the stream somehow.”

“It's a pun,” Camille says, making a face. “_Terminal_. Dear God, that's awful.”

“It's not a pun,” Tyler says, bristling a little bit despite himself. “It has different meanings. It's not funny.”
“Is anything, to you?” Camille asks, then waves this away. “No, that was low. Do over.”

“It's fine,” Tyler says.

“Do you know how often you say that?” Camille says. “It's fine. I'm fine. He's fine. We're fine. I do not think that word means what you think it means.” She waits a beat. “Princess Bride. Are you sure you like movies?”

“Maybe I'm just trying to politely get you to drop it,” Tyler suggests.

“Someone's gotta look out for you,” Camille says. “You obviously won't. You're too nice. Like, an actually nice guy, not a Nice Guy. It's a pretty endangered species.”

“Was I supposed to understand that?” Tyler asks. Camille laughs.

“Nice Guy,” she says. “You know, to a point. Where suddenly the bill comes due, and you owe him.”

“Owe him,” Tyler says.

“Sex.” Camille says. “Or attention, or half your estate. Or your agency to live your life with or without his approval. Or him going on a mass-murdering rampage.”

“Ah,” Tyler says. Now that he thinks about it, he's pretty sure Holland mentioned something about it once. “So I'm—not that,” he clarifies.

“Unless you're really covert about it,” Camille says.

“You really know Tyler Posey?” Camille says, out of the blue, two days later. They're on the back of a golf cart, thumbing through suspiciously new sides.

“We lived together,” Tyler says.

Camille's eyebrows jump.

“Not like that,” Tyler says, ears heating. “Dylan too. When Teen Wolf was in its first season.”


“What happened there?” Camille asks. “Tyler Posey. He was gonna get married, right? Or—” She shakes her head, says, “Sorry, I have, like, zero filter. Totally fine if you don't answer that.” Her mouth clicks sympathetically. “And then his mom, and now this friend—”

“What?” Tyler says, some instinctive hackle rising.

“His mom,” Camille says. “It's so sad—”

“Not that,” Tyler says. “Something about his friend?”

“Oh,” Camille says. “Yeah, some friend of his OD'd or something. There's this recording of him freaking out to 911. It's basically all Tumblr can talk about.”
“I,” Tyler says, and stands. “I have to—I need a minute.”

His trailer's the closest thing to privacy Tyler has. Wardrobe can get in, but that's it, and Stacy's good about keeping unexpected visits to a minimum. Roger not so much, but he mostly delegates, so it's fine, it's fine, it's fine.

Yeah, even Tyler's starting to hear it now.

He braces himself against the door, whips his phone out. Taps into Twitter without even really thinking about it.

And there it is.

TMZ @TMZ

Tyler Posey 911 – “He's not f**king breathing” tmz.com/tyler-posey-frantic-911-call

There's a hastily written scrap of article, more an admission of ignorance than anything else. No mention of who was hurt, or what condition he's in now. Not even a standard “asks for privacy at this time.” And when did Tyler start getting news about his friends from gossip sites?

Posey picks up on the third ring.

“I was gonna call you.” His voice is low, wracked. “I just kind of froze, you know? Like my fingers went numb. I couldn't—”

“What happened,” Tyler says. Fine, he's fine. Posey needs a shoulder to lean on, that's all he's saying. It doesn't have to be—

“I thought he was just,” Posey says. “Feeling weird. About not being on the show anymore.”

“But,” Tyler says. Some kind of fire is burning through him, scalding his chest. “But he's—What happened?”

His hands are freezing.

“I got sick of giving him space,” Posey says. “And I went over there, and let myself in, and found—Fuckin' shit,” he says, after a couple of sniffs. “I can't fucking talk. He could've died.”

Could've. Didn't. Something like relief breaks open in Tyler's chest, has a near-sob rising through him, stopping just under his throat. The relief dissipates in seconds, replaced by pure icy fear, and sick regret. He should've kept calling, he should've explained—

Tyler sits down, hard, and scrubs at his jaw until it unsticks.

“I still don't, I can't...” Posey says. “I thought, for a fucking million-year minute I actually thought...”

Tyler can't even imagine it. Finding Dylan like that, and keeping it together long enough to save his life.

“You saved his life,” Tyler realizes. “You were there. If you weren't...”

But he can't go there, can't even consider it. What might've happened, if Posey hadn't run out of
patience exactly then.

How close they both came to losing—

He closes his eyes, leans his head against the heel of his hand like he can push all this away with enough concentration.


“He's in love with you,” Posey says. “Isn't he?”

“I made a mistake,” Tyler says. His palms are sweating. “A really idiotic, selfish mistake. I, I don't know if he'd wanna see me.”

“You cheated?” Posey says, his voice suddenly alive and razor-sharp.

“No,” Tyler says, shocked. “No, nothing like—I wouldn't do that. No,” he says again, shaken. “Terminal, I read with him. And then I got the offer, and it went to my head. I knew how upset he was,” Tyler tries to explain. Posey's silence feels like disbelief. “When he thought he didn't get it the first time. Before he made the video. And then I got it, and all I could think about was—”

“Jesus fuck, shut up,” Posey says, unimpressed. “So you're five percent human. Congratulations.”

“Wow,” Tyler says. His ears should be ringing right now, but he can't bring himself to give a damn. “Was it,” he says, hating even considering this, “intentional?”


“So then,” Tyler says. “It's just a random—just some freak—” He can't fathom it. Forget everything happening for a reason, forget mysterious ways, all that too-easy platitude crap, there has to be an answer somewhere. Just because he doesn't know it doesn't mean there isn't one.

It's just that he can't imagine an answer that would make any of this even a little bit more bearable.

“Cardiac arrest? I don't know,” Posey says. “There was something about, uh, potassium, and electrolytes. Re—Refeeding syndrome? Who knows. They think he has an eating disorder.”

“An,” Tyler says, and runs out of words. “Based on what?”

“Yeah, that's the part I don't get,” Posey says. “I mean, besides all of it. He's never given a shit about how he looks, right? Did I just miss it?”

“He was sick,” Tyler realizes, going hollow. “Vomiting. That's why he couldn't talk. And I wouldn't let him—”

“If you make this about you, I'm hanging up,” Posey says. “I wasn't there either. I didn't even know he was sick. I think that's worse.”

“How's that worse,” Tyler says. He's dizzy with guilt, vision fogging. “You didn't know there was something wrong.”

“Because he's my best friend, asshole,” Posey says. “And he stopped talking to me for a month. Of course there was something wrong.”
“Whoa, boy,” Camille says, steadying Tyler by the arm as he stumbles out of his trailer. “You okay? Don’t say ‘fine.'”

“No,” Tyler admits. “No, nothing’s—I can’t talk right now.” Parking, where’d he park his car? Where’d he park his fucking, fucking, fucking—

“Stop,” Camille says. “Dude, take a breath. You look like you’re about to fall over.”

“Do I,” Tyler says disinterestedly, and attempts to walk past her.

“Okay, wait,” Camille says, grabbing his wrist. Tyler goes absolutely still. “Just wait a second. This is about Dylan, isn’t it? He’s really holding that dumb movie against—”

“He’s in the hospital,” Tyler says. He’s going to burst into flames any second now. “He stopped breathing. He could’ve died, and I—” He breathes out, hard, and his eyes fill.

“Shit,” Camille says, her fingers slipping down around his. “Tyler. I’m so sorry. What do you need?”

“I need to get out of here,” Tyler says, choking on nothing. “I need to find my fucking car and get the fuck—”

“You’re not driving like this,” Camille says. She’s still holding his hand; she gives it a reassuring squeeze, pats his side. “No way. I’ll drive.”

Dylan’s stable. That’s the first thing Posey says, and then every doctor Tyler can get a hold of, trying to make sense of it.

He’s hooked up to a heart monitor, a pulse oximeter, an IV drip. He’s been run through half a dozen tests. Tyler’s about as familiar with the terminology as an extra on General Hospital.

But Dylan’s stable. He’s alive. All of this could be a lot worse.

He’s not unconscious. That’s the second thing. Don’t worry, it’s not a coma. He’s just passed out.

Tyler tries checking the monitor for some kind of reassurance, but just ends up squinting himself into a headache. His vision is foggier than ever. He can barely count his own fingers.

“What’s wrong with you?” Posey asks, when Tyler starts fishing around the vicinity of his eyeballs.

“Contacts,” Tyler says. “Or sudden blindness. Either one’s a possibility.”

It feels wrong joking with Dylan like this, with everything suddenly so fragile like this. Tyler takes a sharp breath.

“He’s gonna be okay,” Posey says. There’s a sudden arm around Tyler’s shoulders, bracing.

Mom would say, From your lips to God’s ears. Tyler can’t unclench his jaw.

“He’s strong,” Posey says, and pats him on the back, and Tyler closes his eyes.

“Maybe wash your face,” Posey suggests. “Cause between the two of you? You look worse.”
Tyler frowns at him, reaches up and touches—oh. He's still got the silicone scar application and a crumbling layer of fake blood slathered over his skin. Tommy trips over a rotating saw in the opening scene, carves his forehead and cheek open like the Joker. Last scene he finds himself buried alive, suffocating. Skin crawling, there's something crawling on his skin. He reaches up, swipes it away, and the image rushes to extreme zoom, maggots pouring from the wound.

It's a good reveal, the slow-dimming realization that Kara's been fighting this thing all on her own. Instant rewatch value, going back to every scene you thought Tommy was helping her, or talking to her, and realizing she had no idea. It's a good ending. Tyler liked the original ending.

The new sides take it further. Tommy's a malevolent spirit, a poltergeist. He's the thing they're all running from.

It's a cool twist, except for the part where it makes no sense at all.

Camille's in the hall, doing a Sudoku on her phone. She looks up when Tyler approaches, taps to pause the clock.

“How are you doing?” she says.

“He's stable,” Tyler says.


“I messed up,” Tyler says. “I should've been there. I should've—I was there. I should've put it all together. Gotten him help.”

“You're not his only friend,” Camille says. “No one saw this coming. How could you?”

“He let me in,” Tyler says. “He trusted me. Told me things. And I just dismissed all of it.”

*How do you—I mean, just be happy. Without getting distracted, you know?*

*Self loathing, mostly. With just like a side of random minutiae-fed anxiety.*

*Welcome to my head, I guess. Just, on any given day.*

*This isn't a logical thing. I know that.*

*I'm not looking at methods.*

*I'm fine.*

Fine, fine, fine.

Tyler can't stomach the word anymore.
I missed you

“I didn't pass out, whoa,” Dylan says. “So dramatic. I got a little lightheaded, that's all.”

Is waking up in a hospital bed again a surprise? Maybe a little bit. But Dylan was enjoying that bathroom floor, okay, this is his life. If he wants to crash in prime puking position, nice cool linoleum against his skin, what's the crime in that?

“You were unconscious,” Posey says.

“I was napping,” Dylan says. “Closed my eyes for a second. Jeez.”

“It wasn't a second,” Tyler says.

Dylan groans, shuts his eyes so hard he sees constellations.

“You're in the hospital,” Tyler says. “You could've died. This isn't a joke.”

“Not my fault you have no sense of humor,” Dylan says. He risks a peek through low-lidded eyes: Tyler's not even blinking at the bait, just looking like a freakin' concerned parent trying not to sigh. A week ago Dylan was feelin' this guy up on the regular. Now he's pretty much his sponsor.

Dylan kind of wants to die.

“You can talk to me, man,” Posey says. “Or one of the doctors—they're here to help you.”

Or we can find someone,” Tyler says. “An expert. You don't have to deal with this alone.”

There's a steady headache thumping away just between Dylan's eyes. Steady nausea rising all through him.

He shuts his mouth hard, doesn't say anything.

Tyler goes to get coffee; Posey needs an emergency shit. These are the things Dylan's friends apologize for, now. This is what his life has become.

The cutest girl Dylan has ever seen drops by in the meantime to see how he's doing. Tyler's been really worried about you, she says.


“Camille Rodriguez,” says Camille Rodriguez, apparently. “I'm a friend of Tyler's.”


“He still hasn't answered her,” Camille says. “Emma whoever. Not a single tweet.”

“I told him to take it,” Dylan says, shrugging. It's like this weird twitch: he means to, and then he doesn't, and it's happening without him. Wonderful, he's making a fantastic impression on Tyler's obviously much more appropriate love interest.

“He idolizes you,” Camille says. “Don't you get that? He'd do anything for you. Throw his whole
life away."

“I don’t know what you want me to say,” Dylan says. He hits his itching shoulder still, super casually transitions to rubbing the back of his neck. The weird plastic clothespin thing on his finger makes a surprisingly good back-scratcher.

“You’re an actor,” Camille says. “Allegedly. So Tyler got a job you wanted, so what? Do you love him or don’t you? Let him have this.”

“Whoa, ‘allegedly,’” Dylan says. “Someone get me some ice for this burn, am I right? Call a doctor, because I am, I am down.”

“I don’t know what he sees in you,” Camille says. “But—”


“But if it’s even a shred of empathy,” Camille says, unimpressed, “then stop him from pushing away the biggest break he’s gonna get.”

“Now he just stares longingly at my chin, hoping—no, praying for the day he’ll catch a glimpse of it again,” Dylan says, really warming up to a theme. “Sometimes he just gazes out a window and thinks back to the time when he and my beard were together. Those fond, yet bittersweet memories.”

“Just think about it,” Camille says. “If you care about him at all.”

“Patchy, he still calls into the dark, moonlit night,” Dylan calls out at her as she goes. “‘Patchy, please. We could be something!’”

She doesn’t turn around.

The paps try to corner Tyler on reentry; now Dylan's spaztastic breakdown is a full-fledged walkthrough experience. Posey puts security on the door, like Dylan's hospital room is an exclusive nightclub, or whatever other gig has a dude at the door doing security. Dylan's not the biggest partier, himself, unless you're basing it all on the morning after. Then he's the coolest cat in town. Real Carlos Danger, over here. Rodney Dangerfield. Danger, choking hazard. May contain small parts.

“So, Camille,” he says, when Tyler resurfaces from behind his coffee. He got permission to get Dylan milk. This is life on the edge, people: permission for milk. Punk rock theme song! “She's fun.”

“You met her?” Tyler says.

Dylan can't fault milk, actually; you don't realize how much your mouth tastes like horse balls until it doesn't, anymore.

“While you were out,” he says. “You never responded to Emma Donoghue?”

“And I won’t,” Tyler promises. “I told you. I’ll tell my agent too. Thanks but no thanks.”

“That's not what I want, man,” Dylan says. He feels kind of sick. “You deserve this shot, don't be
stupid.”

“I've made up my mind,” Tyler says. “I'm done confusing my priorities.”

“It's not either/or,” Dylan says.

“I almost lost you,” Tyler says, and Dylan just about passes out from the intensity in his voice. “I don't care about anything else. Anything.”

“That's,” Dylan says, trying not to wheeze. “That's really, um.” He might be the hardest he's ever been. “Shit.”

“What is it?” Tyler asks.

“Who knew I had a caring kink,” Dylan says. “I mean, you're always so fucking nice—”

He instantly regrets it; Tyler looks horrified.

“I'm not,” Tyler says. “I'm not trying to—I'm sorry.”

“Dude,” Dylan says, his face flaming. What did he say? Not a clue. Doesn't matter, it was clearly terrible. “We can just, why don't we just pretend I never said that? Objection, sustained, jury will disregard.”

“No,” Tyler says. “That's not what I'm saying. You don't owe me anything.”

“Sure,” Dylan says. “I'm just gonna put this out there: I have no idea what you're talking about.”

“I'm not a nice guy,” Tyler says, like a much, much more attractive, but also very wrong Edward Cullen.

“Uh huh,” Dylan says. “My mistake. All this time I've been totally blind to all the ways you're a selfish asshole. You know what they say about love. And justice. And Stevie Wonder.”

“What?” Tyler says.

“They're blind,” Dylan says.

Tyler doesn't even roll his eyes.

“When was the last time you slept?” Dylan says.

“I'm,” Tyler says. He swallows. “I'm not tired.”

“You're something,” Dylan says.

“I want you to tell me,” Tyler says. “If I'm pressuring you. I'll back off.”

“Pressuring me to what?” Dylan says. This is it, this is the moment where Dylan's—whatever's wrong with him—goes nuclear and starts taking over the world like H1N1 was supposed to. “Take a breath, Ty, everything's gonna be okay.”

“I'm—” Tyler shakes his head. “Don't worry about me.”

“No, listen,” Dylan says. The milk is maybe going rancid in his throat. “This whole thing, all my shit? It's not on you. You didn't sign up for this.”
“I'm signing up now,” Tyler says. He takes Dylan's hand in both of his, holds his gaze. “I'm gonna be here. Whatever you need.”

“I just wanna go back to how things were,” Dylan says. He's a little lightheaded just looking Tyler in the face. “Y'know, pretend I'm still somewhat attractive. If you squint.”

“Dylan,” Tyler says, helplessly. “That's—You have to know you're attractive. I don't know how you can dispute that.”

He's doing that face, that serious-eyed Derek face, but combined with his Passionate Romantic Lead face. And this—this is just one more example. Tyler hasn't slept in a day, maybe two. Hasn't showered or shaved or switched clothes, and he still looks ready to represent at the Inhumanly Hot People/Gods Awards. Dylan doesn't even wanna think about how he looks right now. Pale and pube-stubbly and dark circles like two black eyes, sweaty hair and probably herpe-ish acne, some super flattering open-assed hospital gown, a million moles everywhere. This is why it's so fucking insane for anyone to think Dylan's trying to keep up; the only thing he and Hoechlin have in common are how they've been tearing up, which just brings out the green in Tyler's eyes.

“It's a mystery,” Dylan says.

“You are,” Tyler says, looking disturbed. “Of course you're attractive. You can't seriously—How do you not know that?”

“Because I'm funny,” Dylan says, tired of this. “You know what they say, everyone wants a guy with a sense of——”

“And funny,” Tyler says, looking at him seriously. “But that's not—You're beautiful.” The tips of his ears go red, then the rest of him. “Handsome,” he amends. “Hot. All of it.”

“America's Next Top Model,” Dylan suggests, doing a little hospital bed booty tooch, flexing nonexistent abs.

“I'm serious,” Tyler says. “I wouldn't just—butter you up, you know that.”

“Do I know that?” Dylan asks. “I've called you hot approximately six billion times. You started thinking I was beautiful, let's see, uh,” he checks the invisible watch on his wrist, “four seconds ago.”

“Don't play stupid,” Tyler says. “I know you get come-ons on Twitter all the time. There are huge masses of people in love with you.”

“For being funny,” Dylan says. “For being Stiles.”

“Oh my God,” Tyler bursts out, heaving a massive sigh, shaking his head. “That too. But—everything, everything I see in you, they see it too. I'm not—You're the only one who doesn't see how amazing you are.”

“Yeah, you always say stuff like that,” Dylan says. “Just not about my—looks, or—”

“Because I thought it was obvious,” Tyler says. “Because that's—” He ducks his head, scoffs at his knees. “That's all anyone ever has to say, with me.” He aims a glare at the floor, adds, slightly mockingly, “At least he's pretty.” A tight smile slips back into place, goes almost natural. “So it—doesn't really feel like a compliment, anymore. Like, thanks? Thank my parents, I guess.”

“C'mon,” Dylan says, a little helplessly. “That's—I never meant it like that.”
“No, I know,” Tyler says, still sounding fake as hell, like he's doing some interview.

“I swear,” Dylan says. “Your attractiveness is like, sixth on the list of reasons why anyone'd have to be an idiot not to like you.”

“Really,” Tyler says dubiously.

“Swear to god,” Dylan says. “Like, first of all, Mets cred. Day one. And have I mentioned stealing scenes from Tom Hanks? At like, what, fourteen?”

“I didn't steal...” Tyler starts. Dylan raises his eyebrows in challenge. “What scene?”

“Okay, so that part where he comes into Michael's room and hugs him? And there's, like, all this baggage between them, it's crazy. But he's still your dad.” Dylan looks at Tyler, who's suddenly stock still, mouth caught open, just watching him. “And then, that last scene? Just before the voice-over kicks in. Broke my fucking heart, man.”

“You're just—”

“Don't even, dude,” Dylan says. “If I have to learn to take a compliment, so do you. In fact, I'm making up for lost time, right now. Why do you think I liked Derek so much? I'm serious. It wasn't Jeff giving him all of two character traits, okay, it was you. What you brought to it.”

Tyler's blushing so bad he's practically luminescent, staring at his sneakers, then back up at Dylan, searching his face for a hint of a lie.

“That's why it pissed me off so bad when he threw out our scenes,” Dylan says. “Your scenes. Like we really need that hundreth make-out session more than actually letting Derek be hum—well not human, I guess, but—you know what I mean. With his mom, or—any of it. Or bringing in that de-aging stuff, and just wasting you, what was that?”

Tyler's eyes are bright green, and just bright, but he's still got this awful look on his face, like he's ready to laugh if this turns out to be some long-winded joke.

“You know what I think?” Dylan says. “I think he was trying to prove he didn't need you to have Derek on the show. That he could go back to writing the story he wanted, without Sterek, or any of your ideas—”

Tyler's face falls, drags Dylan's gut with it.

“He couldn't,” Dylan says. “Even with Ian—that kid does a scary good impression of your mannerisms, it's unreal—even with him, he couldn't do it. He couldn't replace you. Couldn't even come close.” He levers himself upright, palms at Tyler's tensed shoulder. “I just missed you, Ty. It drove me insane, you know? Him trying to fill this hole you left like that, with mini-you and Malia and all this two-bit shit. It never made any fucking sense.”

“People seemed to like it,” Tyler says. “My last episodes. I didn't have to be Derek, or act, or anything. Just—on screen. In bed, or—”

“I couldn't watch it,” Dylan says. “With Braeden, right, she's—great, y'know, that pool cue intro was actually really bad-ass, but, like—Why's Derek suddenly such a suave relationships guy? Didn't he just get out of being mind-raped by Jennifer?”

“I know!” Tyler says. “And Kate, and Braeden's worked for hunters.”
“Shit,” Dylan says feelingly. “And Stiles—like, I get it, he's a teenager, but—Holland's dating a cop. And Danny had a full-on sex scene with like, the identical dynamics, so—”

“And your scene,” Tyler says. “I missed you.’ You came up with that.”

“That's not even,” Dylan says. “Stiles beat up Scott for letting his dad get hurt. I almost walked off set.”

“And Scott let him,” Tyler guesses. “Held him.”

“It's okay, Stiles, you can hit me,” Dylan says. “I can take it.” He makes a face. “I've never been such a crabby little bitch in front of Tyler before. Like, 'don't even touch me, I can't—’”

“I love you,” Tyler breathes. “I should have texted it back. I should've—Talking's hard, sometimes. I knew that.”


“Shut up,” Tyler says, ears pinking, head ducking down.

“Like, too much,” Dylan says. “Did you see that video? Like, your side of it. How perfect you were. Playing some Coachella-reject soccer mom, and making it literally the saddest thing I've ever seen. But in the best way.”

“Don't—” Tyler says.

“What, blaspheme the sacred name of Dylan?” Dylan asks. “You were better than me, Ty. I'm not being fucking humble, I'm saying I'll be pissed if you don't take the fucking job. 'Cause I wanna see that movie.”

“I'm busy,” Tyler says. “I'm gonna be here, and then... Harvest is gonna take at least a few weeks to wrap, even if this is the last draft. And then there's press for Vertigo—the spy one,” he reminds Dylan. “And I don't even—I'll blow it off for you. Not for some dumb—”

“You're dumb,” says Dylan O'Brien, famed witticist. “You can't put your whole life on hold trying to make me happy, man. That's not how happy works.”

“Fine,” Tyler says. “I'll take it. If you talk to someone.”

“Yo,” Dylan says, and smirks at him. “Done. No takebacks.”

“You know what I mean,” Tyler says, but he's laughing.

For a moment, the tsunami in Dylan's gut almost settles.
“I'd say if I spent one more day in this room I'll lose my mind, but,” Dylan says brightly.

Tyler looks up, swallows a frown. “You didn't lose your mind.”

“Then I'm about to,” Dylan says. “I'm, like, legit going The Yellow Wallpaper here. Or getting Charles Bonnet Syndrome, I don't know.”

Tyler sighs. “Stop diagnosing yourself.”

“What, I'm the only one who doesn't get a try?” Dylan says. His tone is light, expression teasing, but Tyler's careful anyway. He can't shake the feeling this conversation is a mousetrap, about to snap shut and decapitate him any minute.

Yesterday Dr. Adams suggested a support group. It's mostly people in recovery from anorexia or bulimia, he said, but there are a few EDNOS cases too.

“There's a Christmas classic ruined,” Dylan said. “Rudolph the EDNOS reindeer. Poor guy can't take being picked on and starves himself to death. Happy holidays, kids.”

“Some people find it very helpful,” Dr. Adams said, ignoring that. “It's common to think no one understands what you're going through. That sharing your innermost feelings would just push people away. That's simply not true in a support group.”

“Or at all,” Tyler said. He couldn't help giving the doctor a judgmental look before focusing back on Dylan, who was nodding like an automaton, a smile fixed on his face. “It wouldn't push me away. Or Tyler. Or anyone who isn't a jerk.”

“Ooh, 'jerk,'” Dylan said. “Hoechlin's feeling naughty today. Might take Gosh's name in vain, next.”

It looks like normal teasing, sounds funny enough, until it isn't. And Tyler has no idea what to do, then, what to say, when Dylan looks down at nothing, mutters, “I get it, okay. You don't have to humor me.”

Tyler's just looking at him, trying to formulate some kind of response, and Dylan says, his voice too quiet, “I know how much it weirds you out that we ever—Now that it's so fucking obvious how pathetic I am. You don't have to sit by my bedside like I'm some superfan dying of a brain tumor. You can just move on with your life.”

What do you say to that? What's the right response? Tyler doesn't know, but he's sure he's getting it wrong. Sometimes they have whole conversations and they're fine, Dylan even seems happy, but then he gets quiet, and his jokes aren't jokes anymore, and Tyler can't convince him they're real anymore, that this isn't some—good deed he's doing, charity work. “Saint Hoechlin,” Dylan says, and it doesn't mean anything good, it means stop lying. Stop being so fucking nice. Punch me in the face and storm out and never come back, then maybe I'll finally believe you.

“I love you,” Tyler says, and tries not to get too emotional, make this about himself. It's too easy, something in him tensing, then the lump in his throat; too easy to get distracted by your own feelings, but he can't. That's not what this is, it's not personal. Dylan doesn't mean it like that.

Whatever Tyler's feeling, whatever's welling through him, any kind of fear or insecurity, it's
nothing compared to what Dylan's own mind is doing to him. And Tyler can't stop it, can't turn it around. Can't grab that dark part of Dylan and shake him, say, Stop it, stop it. Stop this. I love you, can't you trust me? What do I have to do?

Eyes prickling even thinking about it, tension in his shoulders, the shadow of that old twitch. But Tyler just needs to power through it. Be here, no matter what.

Anyone can say anything. Actions speak louder.

“You think you have to say that,” Dylan says. “Just in case you dumped me and I offed myself. But I'm not your responsibility, dude. Go live your life, seriously.”

“Is that,” Tyler says, watching his face, trying to—He's never said it so seriously, like it could really happen. And all at once Tyler's sure he means it. That it's really a possibility. “Promise me you won't.”

And Dylan just—nods, like that confirmed some deep-seated suspicion, exactly. “Don't worry, Ty, I couldn't do that to you. I know how much you care.”

The worst part of that is how bad Tyler wants to believe it.

And how sure he is that that would be the worst mistake he's ever made.

Posey comes back with Dylan's laptop. Tyler should've thought of that. He can't believe he didn't. Of course Dylan's feeling low, worse than ever, when there's nothing to do all day but watch TV and think and overthink. Understimulation—even Tyler has his phone. Camille's sent about a thousand texts. Pages and pages of animated stickers. A couple of selfies, usually her reacting to an especially awkward line in the new sides. Voice messages of her reading them while doing various celebrity impressions. Her Nicki Minaj is especially poignant.

Brittany's almost done with press and wants to get together. Colton and Ian are either tentatively dating or pulling an incredibly elaborate prank. Either way, it wouldn't be the first time.

The point is, Tyler's had his fill of social interaction. Dylan's just had him, and Posey, usually trying to get him to talk about something depressing. And somehow he's feeling depressed? Go figure.

Dylan's phone bleeps. Tyler nods to it.

“You gonna get that?”

“Nope,” Dylan says cheerfully.

“I think you should get it,” Tyler says. “Could be important.”

“I am officially letting the other shoe drop without me,” Dylan says. “If the plane's going down, I'm keeping my eyes shut, thanks.”

Tyler says nothing, just brings his phone toward his face theatrically and sends another message.

Dylan's phone bleeps again.

Dylan looks at it. Looks at Tyler, who should be winning a Razzie for his interpretation of Man Intently Texting.
“Seriously?”

“Uh uh,” Tyler says. “I can't hear you. I'm trapped behind this soundproof glass wall.” He puts his free hand up and around, patting the air, mime style.

Dylan stares at him.

“It's too bad Dylan can't hear me,” Tyler stage-mutters, maybe blushing a little bit by now. “I just had this really cool idea for our movie. Thought we could talk about it.”

“I really worry about you sometimes,” Dylan says, but he's thisclose to laughing.

“Mmhm,” Tyler hums. “I know Dylan can't hear me, and I'm not busy texting, so I guess I'll just... sing myself a little song.”

“No,” Dylan says, disbelieving. “I have never heard you sing. I don't think you know how.”

“You're right,” Tyler says, smirking. “Is what I would say if anyone told me I couldn't sing. I can't. But why should that stop me?”

“I can't.” Dylan says, picking up his phone. “I can't, I can't enable this. I'll never be able to take you seriously again.”

“Serious is overrated,” Tyler says, but he doesn't go through with it. Singing really isn't one of his talents. He's been told this by people who normally would lie to semi-famous people if they were, say, anything above painful at it.

His phone vibrates in his hand. He checks it, looks up at Dylan, who's furiously thumbing at his screen. Tyler's phone vibrates again.

Tyler grins.

Disaster strikes when Dylan searches his name on Twitter, finds some gossip roundup article. He and Tyler are fake, “Gossip King” says. A “reliable source” says it was just PR for his “desperate YouTube audition.” That he knows his career is going down in flames, and he'd do anything to resurrect it—even gay baiting. That Tyler, his own career stagnant for years, is all too happy to play along for the cameras.

“That's not,” Tyler says. It takes a few seconds to swallow the bile in his throat. “That's garbage, you know that.”

“This isn't,” Dylan says, and scrolls down. The blind item's been updated, solved. The conclusion? It was all a wasted effort. Terminal's official Twitter account, @Terminalthemovie, “quietly congratulated Alex Saxon a few hours ago.”

There's a link, and there it is.

Terminal @TerminalTheMovie

[Felicity Jones @FelicityJonesOfficial:

@ALXSXN welcome to the family :) ]

With no “official contract” in play, Gossip King surmises, “expect a breakup within the next few
months. Sorry, Hobrien fans. Some things really are too good to be true."

"Ho—?’’ Tyler starts.

"Us,” Dylan says. “Like Sterek's Stiles and Derek. And that's not real either.”

"I wanted it to be,” Tyler says.

"Yeah,” Dylan says, but he's gone quiet again.

“You have to respond to her,” Dylan announces. Tyler's been texting him, trying that same joke again, with no success. Dylan just curled into a ball on his side, turned away. But now he sits up, animated. “Emma Donoghue. Blame me, say you haven't checked Twitter in weeks, do whatever. Just get her back on your side.”

“I'll try,” Tyler says. “But if I can't—it's okay. We'll write something better.”

“What?” Dylan says blankly.

“Our movie,” Tyler says. “You and me. That's what we should focus on.”

It's not enough; Dylan's still nervy, his hands trembling a little bit.

“I want you to direct,” Tyler decides.

“What? No way,” Dylan says, lighting up with panic. “I've never even—I always thought I'd watch the greats, you know? For years and years. Pick it up that way.” His expression goes thoughtful for a second, but he shakes his head. “You can't just jump in.”

“You did,” Tyler says. “With Stiles. You didn't need training, you were a natural. And you've already directed me into the best performance I've done in fourteen years,” he points out. “Maybe ever. I trust you.”

“You're ridiculous,” Dylan says, staring at him. “How are you even, like, real. And not some insane fantasy, I don't...”

“No one ever got me there before you,” Tyler says.

Dylan's eyes bug. “Really?”

“No,” Tyler says, smirking. “See? I'm not a fantasy. I'm—”


“You love it,” Tyler says, unconvinced.

“Yeah, I do,” Dylan says.

“It could be real,” Tyler says. “Stiles and Derek. We could do it. Not for cameras,” he adds quickly, thinking of the awful Gossip King post. “Just... for us. You said it yourself, our scenes were better than the ones that made it.”
“Stiles is dead,” Dylan says.


“So he never died,” Tyler says. “The whole thing was a trick. A lie Scott told some—the hunters who hurt your dad, he was protecting you. And really Stiles is in some safehouse somewhere.”


“Of course,” Tyler says, nodding.

“And like drop-in visits from Braeden, and Cora. Who are hooking up,” Dylan adds, grinning. “Super casual, supposedly, but in actuality, leaking feelings everywhere.”

“Derek's kind of wary about it, because Braeden's worked with hunters,” Tyler says.

“And Cora basically hugs him and then flips him off about it,” Dylan says. “And, and it turns out they've got all this history, you know? Like, that's why Braeden rescued Derek that time, or—”

“Or gave Lydia and Allison that mark,” Tyler bursts out. “The, the bank logo. Leading Derek to Erica and Boyd. And Cora.”

“Holy shit,” Dylan says, eyes wide. “You're a fucking genius, you know that?”

Tyler goes hot, smiles down at nothing.

“I'm serious,” Dylan says. “You're incredible. You should write the show, man, not—”

“I'd rather do this,” Tyler says. “Just us, talking. No executive edits.”

“Stiles wouldn't be okay with just leaving Beacon Hills,” Dylan says, after some thought. “Leaving his dad alone. Exposed.”

“It was his idea,” Tyler says. “Trying to keep his kid out of trouble. Getting kidnapped really drilled into him how serious all of this is, he's not taking no for an answer. And he's not alone, he's got the pack. And Argent.”

“Ugh, Argent,” Dylan says, making a face. “The hunters who hurt my Pops, they have a talk with him, right? Thanks for being such a brilliant double agent. He's not,” Dylan clarifies, at Tyler's raised eyebrows. “They just think he is. Because he's such a speciest dick.”

“Speciest,” Tyler says.

“He hates werewolves,” Dylan says. “Not just the bad ones. He stuck a gun in Scott's face! Like three times. Shot him with arrows, shot you—He's not a good guy,” Dylan concludes. “He's just not an outright psychopath.”

“I think he's grown,” Tyler says. “Over the seasons.”

“Yeah, so has Peter,” Dylan says. “He's still skeevy.”

Tyler has to admit he has a point.
“So yeah, these hunters think he's like, this double agent,” Dylan says. “So he is. But exactly the opposite way.”

Tyler nods, impressed.

“But like, it's his first time kind of realizing,” Dylan says. “What a bigot he is. And what that looks like, and, like—” Dylan shakes his head. “He actually—feels a little shitty, you know? And goes to Derek, like, apologetic. And Derek just, like, rebuffs him. 'Don't worry about it.' Because you can't just apologize for shit like that.”

“Sorry I made fun of your dead family,” Tyler agrees.

“Exactly,” Dylan says. “You have to earn it. So that's his character arc, you know? The road to self awareness. And actually being a good guy, not just being called one.”

“I like it,” Tyler says. “I bet JR would too.”


Tyler shrugs.

“But like, good,” Dylan says. “Character-true. Like the show.” He considers, corrects himself. “More than the show. No, like, random sexy make-out scenes all over the place.”

“But ironic ones,” Tyler suggests. “Coach Finstock and Gerard Argent. Someone just pulls open a broom closet, there they are. Shuts it again seconds later.”


“Speaking of,” Tyler says. “Have Ian and Colton texted you recently?”

“Why,” Dylan says. His eyes go wide. “Again? I thought that was, like, way over.”

“It could be a prank,” Tyler admits. He pulls out his phone, taps into his Instagram messages. “You tell me.”


“Yeah?” Tyler says.

“Are you kidding? Colton keeps joking,” Dylan says. “Like, if it was a prank, he'd be selling it, right? Looking super serious, super invested. But it's not, so it's just the opposite. He's playing it down, trying not to freak out.”

“Ah,” Tyler says. He frowns. “What if someone's just sincere?”

“What do you mean?”

“What if things just are what they look like?” Tyler asks. “If people just—say they care, and mean it. No games.”

“That would be weird,” Dylan says. He looks at Tyler, goes pink. “Not bad weird,” he expounds hurriedly. “Just hard to get used to.”

“So if I—pretended I didn't love you,” Tyler hypothesizes. “You'd know I do. Somehow.”
“Probably not,” Dylan admits. “It's kind of impossible to see outside yourself. No distance.”

“So then—” Tyler starts, and sighs. “How do I prove it?”


Right, right. Just another joke.

It's fine.
Suddenly Tyler's Sterek-obsessed: He's constantly texting Dylan prompts, starting furious texting sprees between them. Pretty soon, Dylan's straight-up writing whole scenes, real fanfiction—but like, good fanfiction, you know? Like character-true stuff, not porn. Not that there's anything wrong with porn.

Maybe he writes a little bit of porn.

He keeps that to himself, though, shows Tyler the serious stuff. Stiles and Derek trapped when this brainwashed hunter kid finds them, guns blazing, threatening to shoot Stiles full of wolfsbane. It's a bottle episode, tensions high all the way through. Stiles starts off wisecracking like none of it matters, and Derek starts off being all dark and threaten-y, but he and Stiles both kind of realize that that's not gonna work this time. That this really might be the end of the road. So Stiles asks for his one phone call.

“What?” Hunter asks.

“You're arresting me,” Stiles says. “Hey, my dad's the sheriff. I know my rights. You wanna bag and tag me, I get a phone call first.”

“You don't have any rights,” Hunter sneers. “You're an animal.”


“You got bit,” Hunter says. “You didn't die. That means you're a monster.”

Derek snarls.


Behind him, Derek's face is murderous.

“You ran,” Hunter challenges, but less certainly. He looks over at Derek, who's a magnet at Stiles' side, black ink already running up his arm. “To be with this?”

“You blame me?” Stiles says. “Derek has painkilling hands. Do you have any idea how often I get banged up trying to keep my family alive? Hint: We haven't had sex yet, but I can guarantee his stamina is incredible.”

“Stiles,” Derek says, ears pinking adorably.

“Don't be humble, honey,” Stiles says, patting his shoulder. “He really is, though. Do you know how many times this guy has put himself in danger to save someone else? Like, way too many times. You need to cut it out, I'm serious,” he tells Derek. “Scares the shit out of me. And no one ever appreciates it,” he adds. “Does he ever get thank you notes? Complimentary gift baskets? Even one Edible Arrangement?” He shakes his head sadly. “No, no he does not. You know what
“He does get? Shot. Stabbed. Poisoned, kidnapped, gutted, kidnapped *again*, de-aged—”

“De-aged,” Hunter says dubiously.

“You don't even wanna know, man,” Stiles says. “And that's the abridged list. The extended edition makes Dostoevsky look like a leaflet.”

“He's a killer,” Hunter says. “So are you.”

“So are you, I bet,” Stiles says. Hunter doesn't deny it. Stiles fights back a shiver. “See? We're two sides of the same coin, man.”

“I don't kill innocents,” Hunter says. “I *exterminate*—”

“EX-TER-MIIN-AAATE!” Stiles blares. “Sorry, old instinct. You were saying?”

“Stiles,” Derek says, quietly warning.

“How *old* are you?” Hunter asks.


“Just let Stiles go,” Derek says, stepping in front of him. “He's not the one you want.”

“Are you seriously martyring yourself right now?” Stiles says, grabbing his arm, trying to spin them back around. Derek doesn't budge. “Does nothing I say matter to you?”

“Not as much as you do,” Derek says.

Stiles blinks at him. “Well that's... candid.”

“I want you to know,” Derek says, quietly. “Even if we run out of time.”

“That's not gonna happen,” Stiles says, trying to bite down on the sudden flash of fear. Derek doesn't talk like this. He doesn't give up.

“If there's one thing I've learned,” Derek says, “it's that the people I care about aren't safe. That I'm not safe.” His gaze goes from intense to faraway, and back again. “Not for long.”

“Don't,” Stiles pleads with him. “We always make it through. That's our thing. I'm all doom and gloom, and you're all, 'Shut up, Stiles. We're getting out of here, Stiles. You're gonna be alright, Stiles.'”

“You will,” Derek says. “You have Scott, and your dad. The pack. You'll take care of each other.”

“Stop it,” Stiles says, tears beading in his eyes. He rubs at them, sniffs. “You're not—I won't let you.”

“I'm not giving you a choice,” Derek says. He pushes Stiles behind him, stands tall. “I'm a werewolf,” he says. “I'm what you want. He's just a kid.”

“You're an asshole,” Stiles says shakily, but Derek doesn't respond.

“He's just a kid,” Derek repeats. “An—animal rights activist.” Slightly sardonic, despite himself. “He doesn't know what he got himself into.”

“I get a phone call, jackass,” Stiles bursts out. “Legally!”

No one pays him any mind.

“Just let him go,” Derek says. “I'll come peacefully. As long as he's safe.”

He steps forward. The gun goes off. Derek roars, launches himself into the air and lands on top of Hunter, wrestling the gun from his hands and throwing it across the room.

“I really don't enjoy killing,” he says, matter-of-factly. His eyes are halogen blue; he's hunched over Hunter like he's easy prey. Dead meat. “But you and I, we understand. When it comes to your family, you can't let that get in the way.”

“Please,” Hunter says. Without his weapon, he's a scared kid, trembling. “Please, don't.”

“Why not,” Derek says. Under sharp yellow light, eyes shining, he looks almost feral.

“B—because you don't hurt innocents,” Hunter stutters.

“You're not innocent,” Derek says.

“I— I could've killed him!” Hunter says desperately. “I could've shot him coming through the door. I didn't. I hesitated.”

Derek looks at him, considering.

“I kept hesitating,” Hunter says. “He pulled a freaking knife, man. I didn't fire. Don't you think maybe there's a reason for that?”

“I think—” Derek says, and looks down.

His shirt is dark with black blood.

“Cliffhanger,” Tyler says. He nods, impressed.

“I was thinking Stiles could remember the wolfsbane cure thing, you know, from season one,” Dylan says. “Kind of a nice reminder of how far they've come. And how it was kind of there from the beginning. Like, it just made sense. Right away. The banter, and the humor, and the high-stakes emotional stuff.”

“I always liked the car scenes,” Tyler says. “The Jeep, or—Those were always really fun.”

“Bashing my head on the steering wheel,” Dylan says.

“You know what you did,” Tyler paraphrases.

“Pimped you out,” Dylan says, laughing. “We didn't know all Derek's issues yet, we just thought it was funny.”

“I still think it was funny,” Tyler says. “Just—dark humor.”

“He just keeps getting used,” Dylan says, tsking. “Even by the good guys, they can't resist.
“Revictimizing.”

“Derek's used to it,” Tyler says. “That's his life.”

“His awful, depressing life,” Dylan agrees. “Poor guy can't catch a break. Not even when we write him.”

“I think things are looking up,” Tyler says. “He found his sister, he's comfortable with who he is.”

“He's suicidal,” Dylan says.

“Not actively,” Tyler says. “Only if he can save someone. I'm not suicidal, but I would still try to —”

“What, take a bullet for someone else?” Dylan says, eyebrows high.

“Maybe,” Tyler says. “If it saves a life? I don't know. If it saved you?”

“Don't,” Dylan says, going cold. “That's—don't be stupid.”

“I'm selfish,” Tyler says, too easily, too calm. “I love you. If I could—”

“Shut up,” Dylan says. He shakes his head, tries to blink the sudden fog away. “Shut up, shut up. You can't say shit like that. That you'd die for me, you can't—I'm gonna start having nightmares again.”

“It'll probably never happen,” Tyler offers.

“See, why am I not comforted by that,” Dylan says. “Like, at all.”
wreck Dylan's become.

Even the people who love you can only take so much, you know?

And they'll be supportive, they're always supportive, but it's obvious: your time's ticking down. Any minute now they're gonna throw their hands up, say, Some people just can't be helped. And then they fuck off, or just—check out. Or keep faking it, but grow to resent you so much you just hear all their silent little judgments over every nice thing they try to do for you, on a loop, forever. And all those sweet gestures just add up into this debt you can't possibly repay, and your head fills up with all this self-loathing crap in their voices. And you just wanna fucking die. Put them out of their misery, give them their lives back.

Dylan's never actually gone through with it. Not seriously, not in any foolproof way. He's too chickenshit to actually jump off a bridge, or something, something definitely irreversible. He just... rolled the dice a few times. Baby steps.

And that was years ago, that was back in freaking middle school. That was supposed to be just some bad memory, just some motivation to go out and do shit, not get swept up in—whatever this is.

But now Dylan can't leave this bed, he's trapped here. Wired up to these machines, mind just going and going, right off the edge of a fucking cliff.

But Tyler loves Dylan, he loves him. He keeps saying it, now, like that's the key to all of this, click your heels three times and say “I love you, I love you, I love you,” and wake up from this crappy existence. Go back to when Dylan was just funny—haha funny, not fucking funny in the head. Not the kind of funny where you're just laughing because if you don't, there's just silence. Just this massive gaping black hole of silence, and blank faces, watching, waiting, for the moment when the tension finally breaks. And the joke's just going on and on, no end in sight, until the tension becomes all there is. And people just start leaving, changing the fucking channel, moving on. Still laughing nervously, like, Did that really just happen?

Sure, Ty, die for that. For some supposed moral obligation, what would Jesus do? Probably fuck off, honestly. There's only so long you can spend curing lepers before you go back to schmoozing the prostitutes.

But that's religion for you, new religion, all idealism and being a bigger person, not giving into vices, much less genocide this time around. Not—not no genocide, don't get them wrong, but definitely less. And guilt trips keeping you trapped in unhealthy marriages, or forgiving shit that shouldn't be forgiven, because god forbid you not be miserable for five seconds, just taking and taking it.

Tyler deserves someone who can actually be a person, you know? A real person, with normal reactions. Stiles and Derek, it makes sense; their traumas kind of fit together, complement each other somehow. Tyler's too pure. Which is why he should be running for the exits, before that changes. Before he actually starts to understand.

Dylan goes back to the Sterek scene. Derek grabs the gun, empties the magazine. He's already trembling, poison circling through his bloodstream. He breaks open a bullet, waits. Stiles is striking matches on the side of the box, but nothing's catching. His vision's clouding, heart pounding out of control. Failure, he's failing. Derek's going to die with the cure right in his hand, all because Stiles couldn't get it together.
He closes his eyes, tries to breathe. Belief, what ever happened to belief? Being a fucking spark. What kind of goddamn spark can't light a fucking match?

What does fire look like? Remember it. The way it flickers, bends and dips like a dancer, see it in your mind. And smell it, sharp, that sweet-acid smoke filling the air.

“Stiles,” Derek says, quietly. Stiles shakes his head, squeezes his eyes shut harder. Really feels it. How your hand heats up around it, without even touching it. The flame chewing its way down the match, the wood going black and thin, disintegrating into nothing.

“Stiles!” Derek says hoarsely. Stiles opens his eyes.

His hand is on fire.

Not catching, but sheathed in flames, his skin unsinged. For a long moment he just stares, and then Derek chokes, black blood on his lips, and Stiles bounds forward, takes Derek's hand in his. Drags his shirt up, and presses it to the wound, Derek's poison and Stiles' flame.

Derek shudders, seizes, retches black blood, and goes still.

The music drops out—or would, if this was a show, if it had been some intense instrumental all this time, echoing Stiles' frantic heartbeat, a little bit of epic orchestral stuff when he opens his eyes and we pan down, see the smoke curling through his fingers.

And all of that lasts maybe a few seconds before he realizes what he's done, what he's doing, and his face goes from epic bad-ass to frozen shock, and the flame snaps out.

But now he knows what he can do, his stance changes; he's standing tall, eyes dark with determination, focus. A vein jumps in his forehead; the lights blow out with a shattering pop, this massive column of fire rising from his palm. Smoke curling around him, blurring the room behind him into hazy shadows.

One of those really great instrumental pieces, as the fire rises—Dylan's thinking of the one from the season 3A finale, the three sacrifices. As Derek chokes, and Stiles runs to him, just the slightest hint of slow-motion, drops to his side and takes his hand. Drags up his shirt and applies the cure, keeps his hand there. And Derek shudders, goes still.

And the music drops out, as the whole scene becomes this held breath, Stiles cradling Derek, tears in his eyes.

Hunter bolts then, tries to run; Stiles raises a hand in warning. Hunter stills, sinks back to the ground.

“C'mon,” Stiles says, his hands on Derek's wrist, his neck. “C'mon, c'mon, please—”

And Derek jerks to life. The music comes back, nothing too dramatic, just a soft relief, a caught breath. Stiles' head dipping as all the oxygen rushes back into the room, leaning his forehead against Derek's, just breathing.

The tender moment breaks about a second later, Derek turning his head and retching black blood, wiping his mouth with a palm. Making a face, like that all of that was just a bad taco. That dude has faced down death too many times to be fazed by it. Besides, he's just that much of a bad-ass.

But he sees Stiles, takes him in, how bad he's doing, coming down off the adrenaline, going into shock.
“Thank you,” he says, helping him to his feet. His hands linger on Stiles' shoulders just a little longer than necessary.

Stiles waves a hand dismissively, swipes at his streaming eyes. “You know how it is. Could've just used the normal stick-plus-friction method, but—Go big or go home, that's how I see it. Why do anything halfway, am I right?”

His voice is just trembling, but growing stronger, getting back to normal with every word.

“So,” he says. He tips his chin up at Hunter. “What do we do with him.”

“Let him go,” Derek says.

Stiles gapes at him.

“We're not killers,” Derek says. “We defend our territory, same as him. You can take that back to your bosses,” he tells Hunter. “How the monster let you go with a warning. And it is a warning,” he says, his voice going low, dangerous. “You won't get another chance. You, or anyone who endangers my family.”


“I think he gets it,” Derek says. He fixes Hunter with an iron gaze. “Do you?”


“Yeah?” Dylan asks, stupidly shyly. It's not that he's not proud of his work. He's just not exactly impartial, here. For all he knows, it's cheesy, trope-y shit, and he's patting himself on the back for a story that only plays out right in his head.

“Of course,” Tyler says. “You ever doubted it?”

His gaze is warm, unfaltering. Like even now, he still sees Dylan as something impressive. Something you'd have to be crazy not to be in love with.

Basking in it, Dylan almost believes him.

Chapter End Notes

final sacrifice (instrumental)
Time slows to a crawl, or seems to, the hospital walls closing in, and then Camille texts:

*Dude they're threatening to sue*

? Tyler sends back.

*Stevens/Richter, Camille says. Rumor is they're coming after you. For holding up production*

*They're off schedule over budget you're an easy target*

Tyler stares down at his phone, mind whirring.

Then he calls his manager.

It's true. It's true. There's an ultimatum: come back to set and get everything right on the first take, or...

“Sued for how much?” Tyler asks, thinking—he's comfortable, more than comfortable. He can pay off a chunk of some indie movie budget if he has to, if that's what it takes to get them off his back.

And then his manager tells him the number, and he realizes how in over his head he is.

“Dylan could afford it,” his manager points out. “If he needs you bad enough to blow up your career, let him pay for it.”

“I'm not the fucking hired help,” Tyler says, as calmly as he can. More and more, he's finding his jaw locked, clenched tight. He rubs at it, says, quieter, “I'm not gonna hit him with a bill. What if I... Can't I fight it? I did my job.”

It's ridiculous that this can even happen. Like it's his fault this movie's months behind its production schedule, every new batch of re-writes extending and extending it. But Tyler needs a few fucking weeks to be there for his family? That must be the problem. Sure.

“This is all reshoots,” he explains. “Alternative endings. Couldn't I—”

“You could,” his manager says, and then he tells Tyler that number.

It's—it's not fine, it's not. How Dylan takes it as rejection when that's the furthest thing from the truth, when Tyler wants to be here with him, and he knows Posey does too. It's just that Teen Wolf's production costs are a hell of a lot higher than Harvest's.

“I love you,” he tries, and Dylan says, “Sure,” and closes his eyes.

Tyler texts Dylan nonstop from the makeup chair, barely saying two words to India, or looking up from the screen. He's got his phone out as soon as Jackie calls cut. Takes off the second he's no
longer needed, heads right back to the hospital.

Dylan's on solids, now, a bland hospital-supplied diet, and the nausea comes back and stays. Tyler stocks up on energy bars, scentless, and near tasteless, but that doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Dylan's not gonna eat real food in front of him, wolf down a pizza and fries out of some selfish craving while the fumes only make Dylan sicker.

He eats at work. Works out at work, makes those running scenes count. He's not going to the gym anymore, and it's stupid, but he feels off, without it. Or maybe it's just all of this, adding up.

“You should have said something about the nausea,” Dr Adams says, when Dylan's sick anyway, again and again, eyes streaming, croaking an endless string of apologies, Sorry, sorry, sorry. “How long has this been going on?”

And of course he should've. Of course he should've, why didn't he? All this time, Dylan's doctor had the wrong information, and Tyler could've set him right. All this time, he's been focusing on some—eating disorder, some problem which isn't even the problem, doing nothing for the real one.

It's such an obvious mistake, Tyler can't actually believe himself. Dylan's trying so hard to be fine, fine, fine, to be funny, to throw Tyler off, make him think Dylan's okay, but he isn't. He's sick twice in the same hour, trembling, pale. And he doesn't have to be—Dr. Adams prescribes medicines, once he knows, anti-nausea drugs. He could've been feeling better days ago, but Tyler just...

Dropped the ball, he's losing it. Losing focus. Snapping at work, wearing thin here, turning into someone he's not sure he can stand.

And that hurts Dylan too, Tyler being too prepared for another humorless joke. Anticipating it, and tensing up waiting for it, and even—he's ashamed of it, but—baiting Dylan into it, sometimes. C'mon, D, tell us how you really feel. How much of a liar I am.

It's almost a relief, going to work, even if that's just one more place to try to play calm, and fail. India's sympathetic, and then she's curt, and Tyler should apologize, make things right, but he's too busy making sure Dylan isn't dying.

Camille puts her hands up, surrenders, the first time Tyler swears at her. She pats his shoulder, leaves him alone.

And he is, he is alone. As much as he's with Dylan, Dylan's not—he can't be expected to be himself, now, to be easy to be with. It's unfair of Tyler to expect that. To demand that, and be disappointed when Dylan's voice goes quiet again, or too sharp, when he stops talking at all.

But it is lonely, lonelier than Tyler ever thought being with Dylan could be. Having him right there, and so distant, untouchable.

You can't just give up when things get a little difficult. You can't just turn around, turn your back on the person you love because you're selfish, because you're tensing and tensing and you don't know how to stop.

If Stiles was lost like this, if his mind was conspiring against him, trying to kill him, and Derek walked out on him—that's inexcusable. That wouldn't happen. Derek would be there, he'd be—still focused, weeks later, still searching, doing everything he could think of to bring Stiles back. Months later, years. Derek doesn't give up on the people he loves. Dylan's just—fighting the Nogitsune, this evil voice in his head telling him his friends don't need him, and his parents can't
know, and everything he thinks he knows about Tyler's feelings is a trick. It's distorted reality, and he's trapped in it, and what's Tyler doing? Taking it personally. Making it worse. Leaving Dylan alone, for hours at a time, to be tortured by it.

Tyler's tired, but that doesn't matter. That doesn't matter.

He'll sleep when the evil thing's dead.

Shooting runs long. It's dark when Tyler gets back to the hospital. Dylan's curled on his side, facing the door; he was waiting.

“I'm sorry,” Tyler says, defeated; he didn't do this, couldn't have prevented it, but that doesn't matter. Dylan was waiting, he was waiting alone. Tyler should've been here.

“Don't be,” Dylan says, and turns over, facing away.

It comes too fast, unstoppable; some uncontrollable misery wells up in him, clogs up his throat, his nose. Tears streak down Tyler's face, his shoulders shuddering, and he's covering his face, smearing tears around trying to get a hold of himself, and Dylan alerts somehow, turns back, freezes.

“Tyler,” he says, eyes wide.

Tyler shakes his head, inhales sharp. This can't be happening, he can't be—He thought he was stronger than this.

“Ty,” Dylan says, softer.

“I'm just tired,” Tyler says, not looking at him. Pinching the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger, rubbing his raw eyes. “I'm just a little tired.”

“Just come here, okay?” Dylan asks, pats the mattress, so of course Tyler comes, sits down, too heavily. Dylan reaches out, touches him, light, on the arm, on the shoulder, mutters, “Don't, don't, don't...”

“I know,” Tyler says, “I'm sorry.”

“Don't be,” Dylan says, palm warm on Tyler's shoulder, the knots in his back. “You don't have to be superhuman in real life,” Dylan says. “That's not possible. That's not possible.”

Tyler's cotton-headed, unsteady, but this isn't—this is all backwards. He needs to be the strong one. Be there for Dylan. Not—Dylan's got enough to deal with without this, without Tyler breaking down like this.

“Hey,” Dylan says, his hand trailing up and down Tyler's side, his chest. Warmth soaking through Tyler's skin, he missed this.

“I'm not your patient,” Dylan says. “Or a kid. You're allowed to be upset in front of me. Don't keep that to yourself, Ty. I don't want you to.”

And Tyler's tired, he's tired, he lies down. Dylan close behind him, an arm over his chest, a good, steady weight.

“You've been amazing,” Dylan says, “holding out for this long, I swear. And I love you—”
And Tyler breaks, breaks down in Dylan's arms, jaw shuddering, Dylan holding him, holding him together, saying, “It's okay, it's okay, it's okay.”

And it is, somehow.

There's more touch, after that, Dylan's hands on Tyler all the time. Tyler didn't realize it, but he's been holding back, thinking he's here to be supportive, not some—horndog, some needy frat boy. He didn't think how Dylan would see it, didn't think it would feel like proof that Tyler doesn't like him like that, anymore, that he's turned off by all of this. Didn't realize that's the only reason Dylan was pulling back too, keeping his hands to himself, thinking this sickness makes him untouchable. And it was only Tyler giving in, losing control, waking up with Dylan behind him, pressing into him, and reciprocating without even thinking about it, that put them back the way they should have been, all this time. Dylan losing it with just a few simple touches, Tyler's mouth on his throat, hands in his hair, and Tyler coming apart just feeling Dylan shudder like that, head tipping back, breath catching.

The hospital bed wasn't made for this, for two people stretched out, spent. Tyler's on his side, watching Dylan's breaths slow, the flush in his cheeks, the sleepy grin. Looking up at Tyler through his eyelashes, blushing brighter catching Tyler's eyes on him, squirming closer. Heat slinking through Tyler again, Dylan catching the change, smirking.

Time goes a lot faster, after that.

Chapter End Notes

The average length of a hug between two people is 3 seconds. But researchers have discovered something fantastic. When a hug lasts 20 seconds, there is a therapeutic effect on the body and mind. The reason is that a sincere hug produces a hormone called "oxytocin", also known as the love hormone. This substance has many benefits in our physical and mental health, helps us, among other things, to relax, to feel safe and calm our fears and anxiety. This wonderful calming is offered free of charge every time we have a person in our arms, we cradle a child, we cherish a dog or cat, we're dancing with our partner, the closer we get to someone or just holding the shoulders of a friend.
too much, just enough

Tyler's stopped saying “I love you” like some kind of grounding mantra, but when he does say it, he searches Dylan's face, eyes all Derek-y and sincere, making sure Dylan gets it.

And Dylan does, he does. Most days. It's just—love only goes so far, you know? Like, Dylan loves movies, but after fifteen hours of nothing but Netflix, he kind of wants to strangle himself. Or throw his laptop out a window, against a wall, something. And that's a weird impulse, right? It's not even new. Like, the urge to throw your phone into an ocean or something, even if you need your phone to survive, and also, pollution. Pollution is bad, you don't want your phone to cause, like, seagull genocide. Or texting and swimming, that's bound to be lethal. Poor guy loses focus, swims right into all the other junk people dump in the ocean. Condoms and broken bottles and those plastic ring things that hold six-packs together. And then the lil' dude just ends it all out of misery of what his home has become.

Watch Dylan just about start crying about that, next. He's so together, it's incredible.

Dylan's parents love him. He should call them, call his mom, he's terrible. Keeping them out of the loop like this, and if they find out—and not even from him? Dylan doesn't even want to think about it, how shitty that would be for them. And they'd see it as like some kind of personal failing, like it's their fuck-up, their fucked-up son is their fault, always. Even if that's insane, and they always did everything, offered everything, went above and beyond. And Dylan just, just turned out a turd anyway.

They'd be here like Tyler, camped out at his bedside, or—or moving him back home, swooping in and taking care of his whole life. And hugs and pep talks and meaningful looks, and finding him a therapist, or a million, and suddenly his life isn't his anymore, suddenly he's two years old and can't tie his own shoes anymore. But he can't, obviously, obviously can't hack adult life like every other guy his age manages it, like freaking sixteen year olds are managing it, the other Dylan, Sprayberry? He's got it all figured out already, he's like, super intense and motivated, just focusing on his goals and going after them, no doubts. Dylan can't even keep food down without medical intervention, so what are his parents supposed to do? Nothing?

Except yeah, he kind of—and it's awful, it's ungrateful, he's sick at himself, seriously, but—he kind of just wishes they didn't care at all. How insane is that? Like, just be like, “You'll work it out, I trust you,” and leave it there, don't—but that's crazy. That's just off the reservation, Dylan's so fucking spoiled he can't even appreciate the people who've been devoting their entire lives to his failure of one.

Love, love, love.

Maybe people are just better off without it.

Tyler hates leaving, always looks so guilty about it. Sorry, D, sorry I'm an adult human being with real life shit to take care of sometimes. He's not even letting himself go to the gym anymore, or to a club, some party, some friend's couch. Just—work, hospital, sleep, work. He's gonna run himself right into the ground if he keeps this up, but he doesn't wanna hear it, refuses to give himself a second to breathe.

“I'm not at death's door,” Dylan says. “This isn't a hospice. You can do other shit, you're not gonna
lose me.”

“I don’t wanna do other shit,” Tyler says. “I wanna be here. With you.”

Heart-melting, right? Dylan's gonna turn into literal goo, one of these days. Except it's too much, y'know? Dylan can't buy anyone being that committed, that's not—that's not even human, anymore. Like, there's gotta be some side of Tyler resenting the hell out of Dylan, all this time. Maybe he's not even conscious of it, but it's gotta be there. And sooner or later it's gonna surface, somehow, and a cuddle session isn't gonna be enough to tamp it down again.

And it's stupid, because Dylan's not even making all these rules for him, making him sacrifice his whole life. He just thinks he has to, probably. That that's what love means. Or being a good Christian, who the fuck knows. Saint Hoechlin, martyr Hoechlin. Patron saint of the Energizer bunny, and coffee, and Red Bull, and falling asleep anyway, because there's only so much the human body can take, even if Tyler's determined to push it to its limits.

But Tyler's insecure about it, like, borderline clingy, which is ridiculous, but there it is. The second he gets some downtime, Dylan's phone lights up with texts.

Not that Dylan minds that, okay, it's as good a way to stop your brain shrinking from disuse as any. So they text, they text about—well, about Sterek, mostly, to be honest. Tyler's got a million little—head canons, Dylan thinks is the word, or phrase actually, unless that's something totally different, who knows. Like little, mini factoids about the characters, that could be true, just weren't ever actually said on the show. Like, Derek and Cora were always really close, out of all the Hales, so he took her loss the hardest, and then when he found her again, and she was like, this whole different person, he didn't know what to do. How to talk to her, anything. And it was kind of like losing her all over again.

No shit, Hoechlin just—came up with that. Out of nothing.

So obviously Dylan has to come back with some Stiles thing, like uh, like until Scott moved to Beacon Hills with his mom, Stiles didn't actually have any real friends. Like he had—he did social stuff, he was fine, but he just never really clicked with anyone, 'til then. Just kind of joked around nervously, and made his little videos, and—shit, shit, shit.

So, no. Not that.

Stiles' mom, his mom. Stiles' mom got sick, and he, he...

Dylan needs to call his mom.

Except he can't, he just can't. His fingers won't let him dial, his mouth won't let him speak. He's literally forgetting how to speak, as we... speak.

Stiles, Stiles. Stiles' dick. Stiles' dick decided he was gay wayyy before Stiles was ready to. And Lydia Martin was basically this perfect excuse to never actually make a move on anyone at all. Because he's saving himself for the queen, you know? Not that he was homophobic, it's just intimidating. Comes with a lot of shit, you know? A lot of judgment. And he wasn't actually getting any, so why even make it a thing until it was? Maybe it wasn't. Maybe he was just asexual. Or only affected by porn, not actually real people, so why even worry about it?

And then Derek Hale. Derek Hale's everything, his existence, was just this giant exclamation point to the contrary. And Stiles was like, shit. Now what.

Like, fine. It's just a physical thing, and it's never gonna happen. So just...
And then Derek Hale turned into a real person, with real shit, real feelings. And Stiles had real feelings for him, and what do you even do with that? Just constantly saving this guy's life, and getting saved, and going right back to being like, “What? I can't stand the guy, are you kidding?”

And banter, really fun, funny banter. At the most high-stakes moments.

And just wanting to keep him safe, wanting to fix his shitty life into something bearable.

And then the nogitsune, and not wanting Ty to see him like that, losing his mind like that.

And just wanting to avoid him, to never see him, never be made to hurt him, please.

And after, Stiles trying to get past it all, trying to get back to the way things were, and it's like Derek turned into this stranger, overnight. Just this, this vaguely familial acquaintance, that's it.

And there's Malia, instead, like this whole time all that shit was in his head, as unreal as one of his nightmares, and now he's awake, he's straight, he's up for it with this random girl he had sex with while they were both in a mental hospital, while he was possessed, and she was just coming out of hibernation.

Dylan, he feels like he knows Stiles pretty well, but maybe he doesn't. Maybe that's really what the dude would go for, if he was real. And Dylan's just piling all this irrelevant personal shit on top of it and creating this entire false persona for the guy that wasn't ever who he was meant to be.

*It doesn't matter who he was meant to be,* Tyler texts. *Derek was supposed to be a bad guy. And 19. And then he wasn't. Nothing's definite.*

19, jeez, Dylan texts back. *makes the whole kate thing a lot darker*

Too dark, Tyler responds. *Especially the way it was played when she came back.*

*so that's why derek doesn't get an age,* Dylan surmises. *it's mtv, not hbo. gotta watch that rating*

*I figured,* Tyler says. *Could be wrong*

*imagine it,* Dylan says. *teen wolf, game of thrones style. they've already got the wolves, and the abuse, what are we missing?*

*Politics,* Tyler sends.

*um no,* Dylan says. *everyone wants power, will do anything to have it, mr i'm the alpha now*

*True,* Tyler says.

*just the chair then,* Dylan sends. *the throne thing*

He can just imagine the pained look on Tyler's face, that Dylan doesn't know what the throne thing is called. He doesn't know the house names either, okay, unless it's Harry Potter. Shame, shame, shame.

*Did we have dragons?* Tyler asks.

*jackson,* Dylan offers.

*He didn't fly,* Tyler says.
and beacon hills isn't called westeros. it's a house of cards, look at it too hard and it all falls apart

I'm not spoiling you for House of Cards, Tyler says, which is hilarious.

dude, so not what I meant

I don't get why you want my opinions on something you haven't even seen. Tyler says.

i've seen enough, Dylan says. dog murder. brutal dog murder. i'm done

He's not supposed to be likeable, Tyler says. That's the whole point, he's complicated

nothing complicated about puppy murder, Dylan says. His heart tugs a little just thinking about it. Helpless sick puppies, how can you feel anything except protective about that? Like, if you have even a shred of humanity, or compassion, or just the absence of absolute shit-dickery where your emotions should be.

Star Wars starts with mass murder and you love it, Tyler points out.

because you're not following the murderer the whole time, Dylan says. there's actual good people to root for. it's not some soul-killing “intricacies of the human psyche/everyone is a depraved asshole deep down” bs. it doesn't make you miserable about the world. it's about hope

Awww, Tyler says.

shut up, Dylan sends back.

Things are almost okay, for a while. Good, even, sometimes. Which just might be the most insane part of it all—how used to being some spastic bedridden invalid Dylan is getting, that a little bit of sexytimes with his stupidly hot boyfriend is all he needs to feel like maybe things could be okay. Touching Tyler all the time, and him reacting, him needing that touch—Dylan gets a little drunk on it, sometimes.

So okay, things are good when Tyler's close, when they're together, but then he's gotta go. Some people still have actual lives, you know. Jobs, responsibilities. It's at least a two-hour drive from the hospital to set. Rumor is they'll be reshooting a bunch of stuff in studio next, and that'll be even further.

“And here I thought the Friday the 13th remake was early,” Dylan jokes, and Tyler flashes a grin, but he's tired. He's tired all the time. Two hour commute and fifteen hour days, the dude's falling apart. Sometimes all he can do is crawl into bed with Dylan, kiss his cheek and settle in against him, before he's down for the night.

And that's always fun. Just this really fun reminder that while Dylan's practically getting bedsores from just staring at the ceiling all day, some people are actually productive members of society. Dylan's biggest accomplishment this week is the ability to retain soup rather than going The Exorcist for the millionth time. And without the meds, he probably wouldn't be able to do that, either.

So. Fun.

And when Dylan's tired? When Ty comes home and he's somehow not exhausted, and Dylan's wiped out from his super jam-packed day of aggressively not Googling himself? That's just
embarrassing. And, and Dylan just referred to this shithole hospital as home, didn't he. Really, he's just firing on all cylinders, these days.

It's not a shithole, it's not. It's actually pretty well maintained. After the first couple days they got their own security in play to hold back the paparazzi, very cool. Dylan was not looking forward to those shots circulating. WOOF! 'TEEN WOLF' STAR LOOKS WORSE THAN WE'VE EVER SEEN HIM (PICS). No thank you. Not that Jesus by the door wasn't massive fun to banter with—Hey, Tyler, do you have a minute to talk about Jesus? I mean Hey-zuice, sorry. My bad.

Dylan's got jokes for days, absolutely. And making a massively no-nonsense dude like that break? So satisfying. But comes a point, a guy watching you stagnate for days at a time, where it just, all of it, just stops being funny. Like, at all.

Plus, sexytimes would definitely be at least twice as awkward with a third party present. Not that Dylan isn't full up on awkward as it is.

“You're so good,” Tyler mumbles, when miracle of miracles, they both have enough stamina to actually do something other than cuddle. “Feel so good.”

And falls asleep inside him.

He's apologetic in the morning, too much. Dylan doesn't wanna hear it.

“You need to slow down,” he says. “Take a breath, okay? Take a day. I'll be fine for a day. Just sleep a full eight hours, or longer. Drink some wine, have a bath. Do you.”

“I don't have time,” Tyler says, already scattered, grabbing his wallet, his keys. His jacket, where's—oh, right. Things got exciting for a second there, now it's under the bed. “I'll text you. I love you.”

He leans in for a quick kiss, and Dylan catches his mouth, works a little tongue in there. You know, just to wake him up a little. Make this a little less old married couple.

“You're trying to get me to leave you alone,” Tyler says, looking a little lost in the best way, “and that's your closing argument? Mixed messages, D.”

He's smirking.


“I really hate my job right now,” Tyler says.

“Love you too,” Dylan says.

Love, love, love.

Sometimes it's alright.
tough break

Tyler's not answering any of Dylan's texts.

It's fine, it's fine, it's just—new. Normally he's on it like tan on Trump, but the dude's got a lot going on in his life, unlike some other people. Plus, didn't Dylan just tell him to give himself a break? He seriously can't win.

But the hours crawl by, without that distraction, that stimuli. Dylan watches five episodes of Friends, ha, remember when he had friends? There's some nostalgia for you. Real throwback moment.

He really doesn't remember the laugh track sounding so judgmental, either. That seems new.

Today's just full of new.

But whatever, it's cool. Ty's taking a day. Good for him. Seriously, Dylan needs to let the dude breathe. Texting every five seconds, could he be more of a desperate clinger? That's always so attractive.

Was Chandler always such an asshole?

Dylan can totally watch ten seasons of this, that's great. That'll take, lets see. Less time than he'll be here, probably. But won't that be an accomplishment? He can finally make a definitive call on the best Christmas episode, that'll be exciting. Dylan's life is a whirlwind of...

[Family Guy cut to the stupid slackjawed look on his face, the total immobility of him. The best part? It's a stop-motion video, but it looks like a still image.]

The video stalls, that little buffering circle thing (bufferer?) just going round and round. Frozen on Chandler, shirtless, kind of shower-damp, and that's—Dylan is a hollow shell of a man, okay, his dick's basically the only part of him that still gets excited about anything.

There's something weirdly masturbatory about getting off to Chandler, besides the obvious masturbatory element of it all, but hey, if that was the weirdest thing about Dylan, he'd be on top of the fucking world.

His brain is just starting to fuzz out nicely, his body almost edging close to happy, when the nurse comes in with lunch.

Dylan's ready to take a nice long bath in lye, it's fine. His skin's crawling, trying to get away from him, from this catastrophically humiliating situation.

The nurse is about sixty, and she kind of looks like Dylan's grandmother, if Dylan was biracial, and his grandmother could ever keep calm under these circumstances. Ha, cir-cum-stances.

Dylan hates himself, he really does.

She sets the tray down like it's nothing, like there's no elephant in the room, nope. Takes off at a totally normal, mind-numbingly glacial pace, seemingly unaffected.

Dylan may never jerk himself off again.
The fire in his face dies down eventually, or maybe he just gets used to it. Watching Friends is obviously impossible, now. Dylan's entire body is made out of cringes, just considering it.

That's cool, Dylan can just sleep. Just sleep for the rest of his life, just end it right here and now, why not?

There's a fun story to share with Tyler, that'll brighten his day. But nope; Dylan resists. Dude gets one day without being bugged by Dylan's everything. One day to veg out in his trailer, hang out with the cast, that friend of his, what's her name, Camille.

She's just twenty, Dylan finds, when he Googles her, out of some kind of semi-suicidal boredom. Has no twitter or facebook, just tumblr and snapchat.

Dylan is twenty-three. He's not supposed to feel so fucking old, suddenly.

He's never even downloaded Snapchat, like, just to check it out. There are too many things to keep up with, okay, you have to draw a line somewhere. And what, what? He sounds like someone's cartoon grandmother.

Some reporter once told Dylan he was big on Tumblr. Like, most reblogged, something. Like two years ago, like before Camille's parents even let her on the internet unsupervised, or before she could even have an account, don't you have to be thirteen, or something? And wow, Dylan is really winning the Not At All Petty Awards. Special guest: Tom Petty. Presented by Alex Pettyfer.

Camille Rodriguez, by the way, has done about fifteen short films with some feminist group. Dylan can't fault that; he'd have HeForShe'd up years ago if he was the kind of guy who made big political statements like that, and not the dude obsessively worrying that his totally bland public persona isn't kid-friendly enough, or something. So the cutest girl Dylan's ever seen also has about four times as much spine, that's fantastic. Dylan's coming out looking great in this comparison.

She's got two projects in development this year alone. That's, for the record, that's two more projects than Dylan's got going. Or ever will again, probably.

Dylan's starting to ferment in his own misery, so he goes back to his writings, his little Sterek stories. Derek and Stiles, Stiles and Derek. We're on a ship, trying not to fucking capsize, or just grab the wheel and steer right toward that iceberg, hit it head on.

Derek's got that perfect stubbly beard back. And glasses, don't worry about why. Some kind of—Orange Juice Moon, or aubergine wolfsbane, now he can't see for shit without them. Stiles has all kinds of sympathy, but also, is practicing all kinds of restraint not jizzing his pants every time he looks up from the, lets say the Argent grimoire he's studying, why not.

Maybe Derek's temporarily human. Sure, okay. And Stiles is trying to fix it, because Deaton's about as helpful as he usually is. Enigmatic all-knowing or possibly incredibly smug but completely faking it bastard, he wants Derek to find the strengths in his new-found humanity rather than being crippled by the weaknesses.

Sure, that sounds legit enough.

But Derek's not accepting that; the dude nearly dies once an episode anyway, and that's when he's got super-healing and the ability to punch through most walls. So he's understandably stressed.

"You're too stressed," Camille says, her hands on Tyler's shoulders, so supportive. And then they're kneading down, working out the knots with incredible precision. She's also a licensed massage therapist, did you know that? Yeah, it's listed in the 'skills' section of her resume,
somewhere between kung fu fighting and competitive poker. And you poor thing, you've been working so hard. Speaking of hard, you know, that happens. My massages feel good, it's totally natural. Don't even worry about it.

Dylan's brain is determined to destroy him.

So he's human, Dylan thinks, tries to think. Human, and vulnerable, and Stiles—

Camille's pretty mouth on Tyler's, on Tyler's dick, “Oh, this? This is just the VIP package. Ha, get it? Package.”

“You're so funny,” Tyler says. “So much funnier than Dylan.”

Her mouth curling, and Tyler spasms, says, “You're so—you feel so—”

That's when all sound devolves into some porn soundtrack.

“He doesn't even wonder why I'm so tired all the time,” Tyler laughs against her throat, after. “All this exercise, with you. He thinks we're running.”

“What a fucking idiot,” Camille says. She's not even a little bit winded; another thing on her list of skills is Olympic Gymnast. You don't even wanna know how bendy.

“We should make a movie,” Tyler says. “You and me. Oh, wait. We're already making a movie.”

“Another movie,” Camille says. “Where we're the hottest new couple, at no risk to our careers. We'll be Fred Astaire and whoever Fred Astaire did all those movies with, we'll be legends.”

“Imagine a feminist remembering the dude's name and not the chick's,” Tyler says. “Dylan can't even come up with believable dialogue anymore. Imagine him trying to write a real movie.”

“Who cares about Dylan,” Camille says. She's so cute Dylan's stomach hurts, little and perky and kind of face-warping into Alessia Cara, now that Dylan thinks about it. “Let's have sex again.”

“Good point,” Tyler says.

Dylan hasn't vomited in a while.

Today's all about making up for that.

Head kind of light, everything kind of weird and off-kilter, Dylan googles “tyler hoechlin camille rodriguez,” because of course he does. And it's too easy: all there, just waiting. There's a million paparazzi photos, they're holding hands. Next one they're even closer. She's practically glued to his side, he's leaning a little against her. Her arm around him for the next few, they're walking.

But Dylan keeps going back to the third one. They're not touching, but it's the way Tyler’s looking at her. He looks lost. Looks like he's just been kissed into another dimension.

And it's not even a surprise, it shouldn't be. Wouldn't be if Dylan wasn't such an idiot. Actually thinking—actually believing, what? That such a ridiculously self-sacrificing guy actually exists, that he'd sacrifice it all for Dylan. For this Dylan, invalid Dylan, Dylan who's obviously completely delusional.
Maybe his heart does something funny, maybe his whole brain changes shape with the realization, but suddenly machines are beeping and people are rushing in, and won't this be fun.

And he's fine, he's fine he's fine he's fine, get a grip, Dyl. So what was the plan, anyway? Lean on him, rely on him? Get so comfortable with him you forget what a collapsing shitshow the rest of your life is, that's a stellar plan. Really, it's incredible that didn't work out.

Medical babble all around him, and a growing sense of numbness, spreading through him.

He stops listening, or maybe everything just stops making a sound.

Posey's his emergency contact, it turns out. He calls Hoechlin but can't reach him. Dylan's done being surprised.

"Don't, don't," he says. Of course his stupid voice makes him sound like a bride who's been left at the altar, and not the actually totally emotionless robot he is right now. "He's—There's this friend of his, Camille. Well actually they're a little more than friends."

"He wouldn't," Posey says. "Hoechlin? The guy's ready to marry you. He acts like you're already married."

"I said don't, for fucks sake," Dylan says, fake-smiling so hard his eyes water. "There's pictures."

"Show me," Posey says. "I wanna see for myself."

"You don't," Dylan says, but he finds them anyway.

"It's just holding hands," Posey says, but he doesn't sound sure. And whatever, whatever. So what if they are, so what if—

"Let him have this," Camille says. Standing in front of Dylan's bed, looking so sincere, selfless. "If you care about him at all."

"Not that I need your permission," Tyler points out.

So what, so what. So what if Dylan just becomes a heroin addict? There, there's a much more acceptable celebrity malady. So much less pathetic than your brain just turning on you, or the revelation that you're so fucking narcissistic, you're unbearable.

"I'll talk to him," Posey says. "Find out. It's gonna be nothing."

"He's not picking up the," Dylan starts, and finds he can't speak over the lump in his throat. Kurt Cobain, everybody liked him. Corey Monteith, so tragic. They didn't physically repulse everyone in their lives, they were these big, romantic figures—and Dylan can't even tolerate that bullshit train of thought for as long as it's stalled in the station. He's not minimizing really fucking miserable people's pain to elevate his own crap, that's insane.

Maybe he's just insane.

"Hey," Posey says. He looks almost angry, but not at Dylan. "It's not gonna be true, okay? And if it is, fuck him. You could have a thousand people hotter than him."
Dylan doesn't even bother reacting to that.

“You could have anyone,” Posey says. Leaning close, his arm around Dylan, Dylan's fighting not to fucking cry. “Anything. You're the only thing that gets in your way.”

Yeah.

Yeah, that's about right.

If not for Dylan, Dylan'd be the fucking president.

“How'd you get out of shooting,” Dylan says. His head's on Posey's chest, they're watching the ceiling. Every so often, the new machine thing the doctors added goes beep, then shuts up for like ten minutes. Then goes beep again.

“I told Jeff to go fuck himself,” Posey says.

“You didn't,” Dylan says, laughing. Posey doesn't say anything. Dylan swerves his head up and around, looks at him. “You didn't. What'd he do?”

“I don't know,” Posey says. “I just left. I haven't called him, or anything.” He lets out an aggravated huff. “I know his job's hard, I know we need to have everything done, like, yesterday, but I can't—Fucking push it off, it doesn't matter. Family emergency, asshole.”

And the emergency's Dylan.

The family's Dylan.

He really is crying now.


“It's not,” Dylan says. “Just.” He shakes his head. More tears spill down. Weird trajectory, too, because he's got his face at a weird angle. Tears are going down to his ears, up his nose and shit. He sniffs, tries to pull himself at least a little bit together. “I missed you.”

“I know,” Posey says seriously. “I mean, me too. Work is bullshit without you.” His arm tucks around Dylan, holds him close. “So's everything else.”

“I thought—” Dylanflushes. He feels like an idiot. “I thought you were glad for the excuse. To get away, you know?”

“Don't be an idiot,” Posey says. “I fucking love you. You think I wanna pretend to be a nudist werewolf rather than be here?”

“Nudist,” Dylan snickers.

“Here's every scene, every single Scott scene this season, I'm serious. You ready? Okay, here goes.”

Dylan waits.

“And that was every scene,” Posey says.
“What?”


“Your pack,” Dylan says. “You're the true alpha.”

“Please, that's not dark enough,” Posey says. “Isaac got all vengeance and murder-happy, with losing Allison, and now Stiles. Like, kill them before they kill us. And obviously Scott's still 'We don't kill people!' so the pack splintered. Most of them went darkside, with him and Peter.”

“Star Wars reference,” Dylan says, a little stunned. “You watched it?”

“Only the new one,” Posey says.

“And...” Dylan says, impatiently.

“I didn't hate it,” Posey says.

“I'm counting that as a win, no takebacks,” Dylan says triumphantly. “And someday you'll watch the others, and you'll understand.”

“Uh huh,” Posey says.

“Not the prequels,” Dylan corrects himself. “Oh god. Not the prequels. But the others.”

“Maybe,” Posey says doubtfully.


“I just don't get it, okay,” Posey says. “Like, everyone admits it's super racist. And the 'Noooo' after the whole 'I'm your father' thing, seriously? It's like a joke.”

“You did watch them,” Dylan says.

“I watched the CinemaSins,” Posey says.

“Dude,” Dylan says. “The whole point of that is to make fun of the shitty parts. He makes The Dark Knight look stupid, Hoechlin hates it.”

Somehow they're back around to Hoechlin again.

“I really don't think he'd cheat on you,” Posey says. His hand's kind of playing through Dylan's hair. It feels nice. “I really don't.”

“Can we just not,” Dylan says.

“I'm just saying, don't blow this up before you know for sure.”

“Sure,” Dylan says, just so Posey'll drop it.

“Come back to the show,” Posey says softly, after a couple moments silence. “It sucks without you.”

“Yeah,” Dylan mutters. “I'm sure Jeff's really clamoring—”
“Fuck Jeff,” Posey says. “Hard. With a Tabasco dildo. We'll go over his head if we have to. MTV wants you back, they can make him.”

“Can't make him write me lines,” Dylan says. “I'll be the new Derek, just—shirtless all the time, looking lost. Or just full-on naked.”

“I already told you, Scott's the new Derek,” Posey says. “Someone's gotta have a line. Besides, he loves writing for you.”

“Just a million Stalia sex scenes,” Dylan says.

“No, man,” Posey says. “Malia's with Isaac now. It's like the new fan favorite. They're both, like, majorly violent. And kind of broken. But sweet together.”


“Um,” Posey says, but Dylan cuts in, “So I'm just innocently jerking off, right? Really starting to get somewhere. And then the door opens, and this nurse comes in, with lunch. And I just kind of freeze, like maybe if I don't move I'll be invisible, like, blend in with the furniture. And she sets down the tray, right, and it kind of vibrates the bed, and I just—come. Everywhere.”

“Oh shit,” Posey says, laughing, and Dylan says, kind of choking in silent laughter, eyes watering, “And she's just staring at me, like, eyes probably popping out of her head, but behind this really serene smile. And she looks just like, literally looks exactly like my grandmother.”

“I can't,” Posey says, gasping. “I can't, that's—My dick would never recover.”

“I know, right?” Dylan says, and they both crack up, falling all over each other, and it's crazy. It's crazy.

Dylan doesn't think he's ever been so happy in his whole life.
“Is it true?” Posey says, scaring the shit out of Tyler right off the bat.

“Is what true,” he says warily. Breathing, just breathing. He's been on edge all day, stuck at work without his phone, without any connection to Dylan at all.

“You,” Posey says. “And Camille Rodriguez.” His eyes are intense, warning. “Don't lie to me.”

“Me and,” Tyler says blankly. “Together?”

“Yes or no,” Posey says, tense.

“No!” Tyler says. “Of course—of course no. Is someone saying—Does Dylan think—?”


“Yeah, we're really close,” Tyler says, a little defensively. Posey looks at him. “Not like that. What pictures,” he says. He's trying not to lean away. Show weakness, or—He doesn't know what he's trying to do.

“We're just friends,” he says. "We're just friends.”

“You were holding her hand,” Posey says.

“No I wasn't,” Tyler says.

“I saw the pictures,” Posey says.

“Then they're fake,” Tyler says, annoyed. “I'm not with her. I just talk to her. I barely even do that, anymore.”

“Gimme a minute,” Posey says, and goes back into Dylan's room. He comes out with Dylan's laptop. “That's fake?

“That's not...” Tyler says, and looks. At him and Camille, holding hands, Camille all against his side, him leaning against her. It really does look like— “Dylan's seen this?”

“You motherfucker,” Posey says, lunging at him; Tyler ducks, backs away and away, hands up like a shield.

“It's not,” he says. “We're not—There isn't a we. I don't know what this is, but it doesn't mean anything.”


“Does it matter?” Tyler asks. “I'm not cheating on him. My whole life is about Dylan. How does that even make sense? As if I'd throw it all away for some—I barely even know her.”

“You said you were close,” Posey says. “Really close.”

“I'm not really close with anyone, these days,” Tyler says testily. “Except Dylan. I'm here every day, every second I can be here. I don't do anything else.”
“You don't sound real thrilled about it,” Posey says.

“Yeah, well maybe I'm not!” Tyler says. “Right now,” he adds, but the damage is done; Posey's looking at him like he just killed a puppy. “Maybe I just don't like being interrogated,” he says, calmer. “I didn't do anything wrong. I can't help what it looks like.”


“I couldn't,” Tyler says.

“So I couldn't tell you he had a heart attack,” Posey says.

Tyler freezes solid.

He can't breathe at all, for the longest time. Can't see, can't think.

“Why the hell,” he says, his face and chest on fire, eyes prickling with tears, “didn't you lead with that?”

“Wasn't sure you'd care,” Posey says.

“Wasn't sure I'd,” Tyler says, and shakes his head, scrubs at his eyes. “He's in the hospital. Under constant surveillance. How could this happen?”

“Stress,” Posey says.

“Stress,” Tyler says. “Like what.” His eyes catch on the laptop, those stupid photos. “Tell me it wasn't—Not over me. Tell me this wasn't about me.”

“I'm sorry,” Posey says.

“I'll quit,” Tyler decides. “I'll—that's it, I'm done. Let them fucking sue.”

“What are you talking about?” Posey says.

“Harvest,” Tyler says. “This idiotic clusterfuck of a movie, it's never-ending. And they'll sue me if I don't finish it, even though it never seems to fucking finish. How did you get out of work?” he demands.

“I told Jeff to go fuck himself,” Posey says.

“I should try that,” Tyler says. He covers his face, leans hard against his palm. “Jesus fucking Christ. I wanna stop this ride. Get him off.”

It's a testament to the seriousness of the situation that Posey isn't in tears at the accidental pun.

“Help me convince him I didn't do this,” Tyler says. “I've—He won't believe me, he never believes me. It's this thing in his head, it's trying to convince him none of us give a shit.”

“You love him?” Posey asks.

“You have no idea,” Tyler says heavily.

“Then tell him,” Posey says. “All the time.”

“Don't you think I've tried that?” Tyler says, incredulous. “He thinks I'm lying. To myself, even.
“Or that it doesn't matter, because I'll get sick of him anyway.”

“We could do an intervention,” Posey suggests. “Not just us. Holland, and, can you get Linden here? And Colton, definitely. I'll do Colton. Maybe even his parents—”

“Not his parents,” Tyler says. “He's pretty much decided that if his parents find out, the world will end.”

“So we show him it won't,” Posey says. “It's like with you, or thinking I couldn't wait to get away. It's not true.”

“We don't know that,” Tyler says. “I've never met them, have you?”

“Is this the part of the movie where we find out his parents never existed?” Posey says. “They're supportive, right? How many times has he said that?”

“Too many,” Tyler says. “We're not going behind his back on this.”

It's almost theater; Tyler walking into Dylan's room like everything's fine, like that talk never happened, like he's just back from work. There's a new machine, beeping. Tyler doesn't know what it means.

He hates that.

“Have you seen my phone?” he says, uber-casually. “I've been looking for it all day.”

“Oh,” Dylan says. There's red around his eyes, he's been crying. Tyler's chest tightens. “Really?”

“Yeah, really,” Tyler says. He's almost angry. More at himself than anyone else, but he can't help the tightness in his voice. “What, you think I'd just stop texting you for a day? Just out of the blue.”

“I told you to take a day,” Dylan says.

“And Jackie keeps telling me to do the same scene forty fucking times, but apparently I can't get that right, either,” Tyler says, and sits by him. Nods at the new machine. “What's that?”

“Some beepy thing,” Dylan says vaguely.

“Wouldn't have guessed.” Tyler tries for a grin, can't manage it.

“I don't know, man,” Dylan says. He's apologetic, too apologetic. Tyler can't stomach it. “I don't know what the fuck's going on with my body. Or my mind. It's just all going to shit.”

“Don't say that,” Tyler says.

“Why not?” Dylan challenges. “It's true. This is like, a breakdown in every sector, simultaneously. I should just go down to the DMV, tick yes for donor, and wait to be chopped for parts.”

“That's not funny,” Tyler says. He means to say it kindly, means a lot of things, but the thought digs down somewhere deep, doesn't let up. And Tyler's breathing, he's focusing on breathing, because if he doesn't, he's gonna forget how.

“The last straw,” Dylan says. “I'm not even funny anymore.”
Tyler exhales sharp. “You know that's not what I meant.”

His breaths keep threatening to catch in his throat.

“What can I do,” Tyler tries. He's breathing, Dylan's breathing. Everything else is immaterial. “To make things better. Make you feel better.”

“Would that you could, man,” Dylan says. “But this isn't a you thing. This is a me thing.”

“It isn't,” Tyler says. “It's just a sickness. It's not who you are.”

“Keep telling yourself that,” Dylan says.

It was a small heart attack, Dylan's doctor says. As if that's possible. As if there's anything small about a heart attack when the man having it is twenty-three.

He's supposed to practice de-stressing techniques. Breathing, affirmations. Being present in the moment. Going to his happy place, when being present is too stressful.

Dylan thinks the whole thing is a joke.

Tyler finds his phone under the bed.


“I turn it off as soon as I get here,” Tyler says. “I barely get to see you as it is. I don't want any interruptions.”

“Oh,” Dylan says. Tyler comes in close, kisses him, then again, softer, slower. Dylan's fingers on his throat, his jaw.

“What's up with your jaw?” Dylan says. “You're clenching it.”

“Just a little—” Tyler’s mouth meets Dylan’s again. “Mad at myself, I guess. Should've... Oh, that's nice.”

Dylan's rubbing Tyler's shoulder, the back of his neck, all down his spine. Smoothing heat into his weary bones.

“Should've checked for my phone,” Tyler manages. He stretches a little, leans into the touch. “Could've avoided—mmmm. Avoided all of this mess.”

Dylan's hands under his shirt, now, Tyler's starting to unravel. And then he's kissing Tyler again, his mouth dragging against Tyler's mouth, catching on his lower lip. Tyler's head goes back, and Dylan's goes down, down his throat, all around his collarbone, and lower. Hands on the edges of Tyler's shirt, pulling it up and over, and Tyler's regretting ever leaving this room, ever...

“I hated,” Tyler breathes, Dylan's mouth in places he can barely speak through, “hated work today. Not being able to text you. Was like I couldn’t—breathe right, or—couldn't relax. Needed to know how you—Oh, oh. Oh. How you were doing. And just—talk to you.”

“You taste weird,” Dylan says, which takes Tyler out of it, just a little.
“Weird how,” Tyler says.

“I don't know,” Dylan says, his voice odd. “Are you using a different soap? Or—”

“I'm not cheating with some girl I barely know, if that's what you're asking,” Tyler says, before he can stop himself.

“Tyler showed you the pictures,” Dylan says.

“I don't even remember that day,” Tyler says. “Or holding her hand, any of it.”

“Must've been in a fugue state,” Dylan says. “This is where you realize you're Brad Pitt as well as Edward Norton.”

“Funny,” Tyler says, but he's not laughing. “I guess it's too much to ask you to trust me.”

“Picture's worth a thousand words,” Dylan says.

“Yeah, and most of them are bullshit,” Tyler says. “You know what we do. You know how easy it is to make things look like something they're not.”

"Forget it," Dylan says, reaching for him again. "Just forget it, okay?"

But the moment's gone, and Tyler's pulled back, and he's cold. He pulls his shirt back on, scrubs at his mouth.

Breathes, breathes, breathes.

“Maybe you should just ask her,” Dylan says. He's lying on his stomach, head in his hands, voice low, muffled. “What you were doing. See if she remembers any better.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says, nodding. He's been reading some side, trying to read some side. As if he can actually go back to work, after this, after a day like this. “Yeah, I will. That's exactly what I'll do.”

Some guy Tyler doesn't know picks up, says, "Who's this?"

His accent's so Scottish it sounds like a joke. Maybe it is.


“Pretty boy,” the guy says. “Anything you wanna tell me, pretty boy?”

“No,” Tyler says.

“There's some pretty pictures,” the guy says. “You and my girl. Real fookin' sweet.”

Tyler swallows.

“Give me the phone, Dave,” Camille shouts, and then she says, “Hi. Sorry about him. Remember when I said I fall in love with assholes, who seem really sweet at first? Case in fucking point,” she says, seemingly to Dave as much as Tyler. “Can you believe I used to think jealousy was cute? Turns out it's just weird and possessive,” she calls throughout the land.
“Right,” Tyler says. “You know what, don't worry about it.”


“You're on speaker,” Tyler says, regretting almost all of his life choices.


Dylan's looking at Tyler like he's never seen him before.

“Those pictures,” Tyler says, kind of wanting to cry, honestly, “what were we doing? I don't remember it. Like, any of it.”

“Oh,” Camille says. Tyler can hear her rolling her eyes. “This is the biggest joke, are you ready? You know that third picture? The one where we look so fucking—well—”

Tyler's jaw is basically one solid cement block.

“You were gonna drive to the hospital yourself,” Camille says. “You could barely walk, dude, it was like you'd been hit over the head. Once you heard what happened to him.”

Oh.

Oh, that day.


“No,” Tyler says, manually dragging his jaw into place, keeping his hand there. “Thanks so much.”

“Well don't I look like an asshole,” Dylan says softly.

“You're not,” Tyler says. His arms around Dylan, he's just breathing. Just feeling their breaths syncing, rising and falling, steady, safe. They're gonna be okay. It's been resolved. That's all that matters. “You're not an asshole. I'd be jealous too. If I thought—”

“Stop making excuses,” Dylan says. “Seriously. I'm not—”

His breaths shudder, his voice breaks.

"There's something seriously wrong with me," he says. He sounds... more than lost, he sounds scared. Tyler holds him, holds him, tries to find some combination of words he might believe. "I mean, no shit, Sherlock, right, but—I'm kind of just realizing it. Like in a serious way, you know? How fucking broken I am.”

“Stop,” Tyler says. He hates this, hates when Dylan gets like this. Up on some ledge, and Tyler can't talk him down. Can't do anything.

“You're not broken,” he says, pointlessly, uselessly. “You're not anything. You're gonna be okay.”
“No, man,” Dylan says. “Like, maybe I should be on something. Meds, or—”

Tyler breathes, breathes, breathes. “Did Dr. Adams say something?”

“Um,” Dylan says. “Yeah? I'm kind of—already on something? Or—more than one.”

“Yes?” Tyler says. He doesn't know how to feel, or what he's feeling. Maybe he's relieved. Maybe it'll work. Maybe that's all Dylan's needed, all this time.

Maybe he's scared to death it'll just make everything worse.


“You don't have,” Tyler starts, but what does he know? What the fuck does he know? With all his extensive medical knowledge, his negative seven degrees. “Is it helping?”

“I don't know,” Dylan says. “No one really sees results this early.”

“Oh,” Tyler says. Right, yeah. Of course they don't.

“I wanna get better,” Dylan says. Low, raw. Tyler hates this. This hopelessness, this helplessness. “I don't wanna be like this,” Dylan says. He sniffs. "Put you through this.”

Tyler rolls closer, crosses his arms over him, hands on his shoulder, his chest. Anchoring, maybe, or maybe just trying to breathe. Keep some kind of control over all of this, some balance.

“Everything's gonna be fine,” he says.
“Are taste hallucinations a thing?” Dylan asks.

“Do you think they're a thing?” Dr. Martin says. There's a too-obvious joke: Doc Martin. And she's got reddish hair, like Lydia. Holland.Whatever.

“Breakfast tasted kinda weird,” Dylan says. “Like, too salty. Like someone just dumped the whole shaker in.”

“Maybe someone dumped the whole shaker in,” Dr. Martin says.

“Yeah, maybe,” Dylan says. “Except, it wasn't just one thing. Like, the syrup was salty.” There were two little individually sealed cuboid cups of the stuff. Both tasted equally like ass.

So did everything else.

“You're taking Effexor, right?”


“Altered sense of taste could be a side effect of Effexor,”” Dr. Martin says.

Other than the red hair, she looks nothing like Lydia. Or Holland. Even the red hair's a different kind of red. Like fake red. But not like punk fake red, but like—Mad Men lady, Christina something, that red. But not really, honestly, the more Dylan looks at it. Mostly it just looks like itself.

“Where did you just go?” Dr. Martin asks.

“What? Nowhere.” Dylan grips the arms of his bed instinctively, like he's making sure.

“In your head,” Dr. Martin says. “Do you have trouble staying in the moment?”


“Does the thought of potential side effects worry you?” Dr. Martin asks.

“Should it?” Dylan asks. What is this, the question game? The doc has glasses. He'd have cast someone without glasses. Less of a cliché.

Or maybe that's not casting, no. That's more of a wardrobe issue. Really easy fix, actually.

Some director he'd be. Firing people for wearing glasses, that's intelligent.

Maybe he'd be more intelligent if he wore glasses.

“What do you do when something worries you?” Dr. Martin asks.

“Um,” Dylan says.

The thing is, he doesn't worry. No, he pointedly doesn't worry at all. Any thoughts about the past,
or the present, or the future are prone to simultaneously humiliate and depress him into a semi-suicidal funk, so he just tries not to think. TV, why not watch some TV? Or a movie, or that spot on the wall. Is it a bug, or just dirt? Who knows? Let's watch and see.

“Not much,” Dylan says.

It's not exactly salt, Dylan decides. It's, like, briny. Kind of sour, kind of sharp.

Maybe he's just having a stroke.

It really occupies a lot of his day, until he tries to stand and realizes gravity no longer applies to him.

“I feel like I'm fucking walking on the moon,” he tells Posey. “When I'm... you know, when I'm walking.”

“ Weird!” Posey says, impressed. “Should I—even call someone?”

“Call Michael Jackson,” Dylan says. “Because this is the real moonwalking, right here.”

“Yeah, I'll get right on that,” Posey says. “You want me to maybe, uh, CC anyone else?”


Or reality as he knows it is breaking down, revealing the Matrix behind it. Everything is code, and gravity is an illusion.

He googles his meds; turns out Respiridone is an anti-psychotic.

Well, it's always good to know where you stand. Especially now that it's more like floating.


“Are you concerned about your medication?” Dr. Martin asks.

“Should I be?” Two can play at this game. Dylan watched that one episode of Whose Line, he's prepped and ready to go.

He'll do a fucking hoedown, if the moment calls for it.

Poor Dylan's got a broken brain but Effexor protects him

If only all these lovely doctors knew how it affects him

He googled and he found

To keep him safe and sound

It'll screw up all his senses and stop him getting erections
Everyone, in unison: *Stop him getting erections!*

Dylan O'Brien, everybody.

In fact, let's go for round two.

*Didn't really feel psychotic, but then maybe that's the point*

*Tell him it's OCD and dose him before he blows up the joint!*

*Now he's floating on cloud nine*

*Like he's done a thousand lines*

*He can't help his reputation but he'd hate to disappoint*

Everyone: *He'd hate to disappoint!*

Except point and disappoint don't really rhyme, do they. Well then, how about—

“Dylan,” Dr. Martin says. “No. Anti-psychotics have a number of uses. Respiridone has been shown to be helpful in treating OCD.”

“I don't even have OCD,” Dylan says. “I'm not organizing my meals by color, I don't have to jerk off a specific number of times for it to be right.”

“No obsessive thoughts?” Dr. Martin asks.

“Define obsessive,” Dylan says. “And even if I do, I don't have the C. Maybe I have OD—look at that, all those people on the internet were sort of right—but not OCD. No compulsive actions.”

“You don't compulsively try to redirect worrying conversations and thoughts with humor?” Dr. Martin asks.

“Come on,” Dylan says. “Who *doesn't* do that. No one wants to actually take shit seriously, that's how people end up—”

“Depressed?” Dr. Martin asks.


“Is that really how you feel?” Dr. Martin says. “That being funny is all you have to offer?”

“Just a second,” Dylan says, and barricades the bathroom door with his foot, and heaves over his toilet. His toilet, he's claimed this toilet, he's the Christopher Columbus of this toilet. It's here, he's here, so it must be his. Time to completely destroy it.

Except nothing comes.

He dry-heaves for a little while, hacks up some thick spit, but that's it. Comes back shamefaced.

New low: now he can't even vomit properly.

“Where did you just go,” Dr. Martin says.

“In your mind,” Dr. Martin says. “Something triggered you, didn't it.”

“Triggered me,” Dylan says, scoffing. “I'm not a gun.”

“That's funny,” Dr. Martin says, completely humorlessly. “What does it mean to you to be funny? Who would you be if you weren't funny?”


“What if you did?” Dr. Martin says.

What if he did? It's a suicidal suggestion. Dylan's bad enough company these days as it is. He doesn't know what's keeping Tyler coming back, either of them, honestly. A little bit of entertainment's the least Dylan can do.

Literally the least, but also... also the most. This is Dylan's thing, you know, the only thing. And why's that even bad? Some people's whole thing is looking like a really attractive mannequin. How's that better? Making Ty laugh, making Posey laugh, actually feeling like he belongs somewhere, for five seconds. When did that become the problem?

What the hell else does he have?

The first teaser for Terminal leaks two weeks early, and Tyler can't steal Dylan's laptop in time.

Alex is good, he's really good. Dylan's not so biased he can't admit that. He's got this really sweet charm, this easiness about him. This quiet, magnetic chemistry between him and Felicity, like old friends that can reconnect after years and years and nothing's changed at all. No fireworks, no insane electricity, but enough to make you go—oh. It's too bad that didn't work out. And feel a little twinge in your gut at every near miss.

Dylan knew Alex had him beat at the chemistry read. He knew that.

He didn't know it like he knows it now, but he knew.

He's really low key in unexpected ways, but it works. It makes sense. Dylan never would've played Micah like this in a thousand years, but he gets it.

And he's fine.

He's fine.

Mostly.

“I'm fine,” Dylan says, for the hundredth time. “I said I was done being an actor anyway. It's just a shame you couldn't do it.”

“You're not done being an actor,” Tyler says.

Dylan looks at him. “Wanna bet?”

“Yeah, I do,” Tyler says. “Sooner or later you're gonna realize your career's bigger than this movie.
Or Teen Wolf. Or Blue fucking Mind.”

“Don't,” Dylan says, his face exploding with heat. Fucking Blue Mind. He should've just done a straight-out porno. At least then someone might've enjoyed it.

“Sorry,” Tyler says. “I still don't think it was that bad.”

“Yeah, and your Disney cartoon, with the dancing pumpkin, and the cartwheels? Some of your best work,” Dylan says.

Tyler's ears are a shade off purple. He puts his hands up in surrender. “You've made your point.”

“I mean, that cartwheel?” Dylan says. He can't resist. “Did you ever consider an Olympic bid?”

“Very briefly,” Tyler says.

Dylan looks at him, open-mouthed. “Seriously?”

“It wasn't,” Tyler starts, still not looking directly at him. “I would've had to—Acting was a better bet. And baseball,” he adds.

“There is a rich history here I am only beginning to plumb the depths of,” Dylan says in his best Indiana Jones voice.

“Shut up,” Tyler says.

Posey's determined, this time. He's got an agenda.

“It's too fucking quiet here,” he says. “I'd lose it in about five seconds. You need music.”

He makes Dylan a mixtape. An actual, honest-to-god mixtape, is this literally 1989? Where did Dylan stash that Walkman he had when he was six, again?

“I didn't wanna just put it on your phone,” Posey says. “Then you're doing all kinds of other shit while you're listening. It ruins it. You have to take away the distractions, man, just enjoy it the way we used to.”

“When we were kids, in the rockin' seventies?” Dylan suggests.

“I mean it,” Posey says. “Here, listen.”

He's got a pair of those massive noise-blocking headphones. No earbuds here.

“It's Blink, isn't it,” Dylan guesses, before he puts them on. “Just thirteen Blink-182 songs.”


“Oh my god, is there a handmade lyric insert?” Dylan says, pulling it out as the first song starts.

“This is amazing.”

“Shut up, shut up,” Posey says urgently. “Just listen.”

“I've never been more serious, dude,” Dylan says, but he obeys anyway. “Holy shit, how have I never heard this before?”
Posey grins. “Thought you’d like him.”

“Seriously, so good,” Dylan says. “Do you have one of those splitter things? You should get to enjoy this.”


“Na, man,” Dylan says, waving him close as the second song starts. “Oh, I know this one. Love it. Come here, come on.”

They put their heads together, shoulders close, Dylan stretching the headphone over to Posey’s ear.

And vibe the hell out.

It's fine, it's fine. It's just that Dylan's fallen into the habit of watching that teaser trailer on a loop, like a crazy person.


Doh-sees.

Because Alex is good, he's really good, it's just—they liked Dylan. They wanted Dylan. They just didn't “know if they could count on him.” Or whatever it was, some version of that.

And even blasting Posey’s mixtape—that awesome Astronautalis track, Kendrick Lamar's depression confession and self-love anthem, that one really good Blink-182 song off their worst record (according to Posey, anyway)—he can't just let that go.

But it does help.

Sort of.

Tyler's going to work, but he's not happy about it. His producers have promised him this is the last batch of new scenes, but he doesn't have much faith in their word at this point.

“I'll be fine,” Dylan says. “I've got meds, I've got music. I've got beepy machines Morse-coding dubious, possibly nefarious machinations. What more could a guy ask for?”

No jokes, right, but it isn't, really. And she can't count sarcasm. He’d have to superglue his mouth shut.

“I love you,” Tyler says.

“I know,” Dylan says, and doesn't even realize what he's quoting until Tyler texts him from the car.

There's a good couple of days. Too good. Dylan's impatient, waiting for the inevitable low to come, knock him flat.
And then it does.

The studio releases the full Terminal trailer in all its glory, and it's glorious. It's exactly right.

In exactly all the ways Dylan would've gotten it wrong.

Micah's quiet, he's easy. He's not some embittered guy just because he and his girl have split, he's got a whole life outside that. He knows pain, but he's not soaked in it, you know? He's got friends, he's got family. A girl he's seeing kind of tentatively—Dylan just rejected that whole side of him, dove deep into the sadness. And it's a subtle sadness, almost a secret. But nothing that dramatic.

He's just a guy, you know? A real guy.

Dylan would've made him a headcase.

And the beauty in this is the progression, how Micah slowly falls apart, how he comes back together, somehow, and builds his little broken family into something less broken, without going all Hollywood about it.

Dylan's completely fucking humiliated at his take on it, now. Seeing this, seeing how fucking perfect this is.

And it's just the fucking trailer.

This movie's gonna fucking kill him. Everywhere he goes, every time he sees a poster, or a teaser, any of the actor's faces, every time he's in a fucking *terminal*, he's gonna remember how bad he blew it.

So that's it, that's a fucking sign. And Dylan doesn't believe in signs, doesn't really believe in anything, but it's never been clearer.

Dylan O'Brien, actor.

There's his funniest fucking joke, right there.

There's a futile attempt to eat, but everything tastes like tin. Chicken soup, fine, maybe that came from a tin, but Jell-o? Apple juice? In a little apple sauce cup, too, not a cup cup. Hospital food's weird as hell. Those little Lorna Doone shortbread cookies, everything's coated in just a fine, subtle aftertaste of metal. A really nuanced, layered flavor of robot food, just under the normal food.

Can't wait to suck Tyler's robot dick. Taste the rusty rainbow.

Okay, that's kinda gross, even for Dylan.

He's feeling itchy, all day, not like scratchy but just—his skin's crawling, whenever anyone comes by. Even Posey, Dylan's not feeling it, even if the look on Posey's face makes him maybe the guiltiest he's ever felt. Sorry, sorry sorry sorry, it doesn't even feel like a real word anymore. Just two syllables to shove at people that hurt less than *get lost*.

So Tyler can just stay at work forever, please. The plan is faking sleep from the moment the door opens, not budging. Dylan used to be an actor, sort of—He can do that much, surely.

Tyler's been texting, all day, and Dylan's been firing back one word replies, or just emojis, trying not to hate him.
And it's a plan, it's a solid plan. Fake sleep, how hard is that? Except Tyler comes through the door when Dylan's listening to the last couple of tracks on Posey's mix again, and Dylan's suddenly swollen with resentment. Why should he have to turn it off, play dead for an age, for as long as it takes Tyler to GTFO?

So he doesn't. He compromises, doesn't look up from the CD player in his hands, that little slice of exposed disc swirling round and round and round. He's just a stone monument of a 90's kid, a literal radiohead. In a whole other world.


And Dylan doesn't mean to, doesn't think it through, just finds himself wrenching off the headphones, saying, “Can't I be my own person for five fucking seconds? Are you the only one who gets a life?”

Tyler just looks at him for a long moment. Then he says, with extreme calm, “What life.”

“I really can't breathe today,” Dylan says, instead of attempting to answer that. “With anyone around, I can't—I just can't.”

“What's going on,” Tyler asks, concern flooding his features, and Dylan really can't take the pity anymore.

“Nothing,” he says. “Nothing's fucking going on with me. Or ever will again.”

“Dylan,” Tyler says, and turns the laptop screen to face him, and nods.

And that's not—he thinks he knows, thinks it's so fucking simple, but it's not.


“Do I look like I'm in a sexy mood,” Dylan starts, but Tyler says, “Hit me.”

Dylan stares at him.

“What? I'm not gonna hit you.”

He knows how he's been lately, what a tool he is on the regular, especially to Tyler, to the last person who could ever deserve it, but that?

“Just do me a favor,” Tyler says. “I'm not asking you to—hurt me. Just—”

“Good,” Dylan says emphatically. “Because that's—I'm not doing that.”

“Why not?” Tyler says. “Terminal was your movie. Your chance.”

“Yeah, no, it wasn't,” Dylan says. “I screwed up the audition. Twice. I'm not gonna beat you for it, god.” Something in his stomach is alive, writhing. “Why would you—Is that—Did Brittany do that?”


Of course. Dylan lets out a long gust of breath. That scene, that stupid Sterek scene. That's all this is.
“I’m not Stiles,” he says.

“You could be,” Tyler says. “I wouldn’t mind. It might—help.”

“Stiles was an abusive jackass,” Dylan says. He can't exactly breathe. Or even begin to understand this. “Derek should have had some—some freaking self respect.”

“Maybe Derek thought it was worth it,” Tyler says. “Being there for Stiles. Any way he could.”

“Yeah, well, well that's,” Dylan says. Tries to say. His chin is trembling, face twisting into tears with or without him. “Why would—why would anyone care that much.”

“Why wouldn't they?” Tyler says, and Dylan can't—can't look at him. Can't breathe through the lump in his throat, can't see.

“Because he's a tool,” Dylan manages, voice tight, unsteady. “Because he doesn't deserve—anything. Or anybody, he's just this screwed up, this narcissistic, self-absorbed headcase—”

“Narcissistic and self absorbed,” Tyler says, faintly amused, but Dylan's stupid body makes a sobby sound despite him and Tyler goes serious again. “You really believe that?”

“What's not to believe,” Dylan says, blinking wetly at blurry nothing.

“Should I start from the beginning?” Tyler says. “I know you're hard on yourself, but this is—”

“Don't, don't,” Dylan says, frustrated. “Don't turn this around on me, this isn't some, some tragic sob story, like any minute now I'm gonna start just openly weeping about being bullied as a kid, and you're gonna go, see, that's why you see yourself this way, you're like that cartoon of an anorexic girl seeing a mountain in the mirror—”

“Dylan,” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “No, shut up, this is bullshit. Cue the freaking violins, and the choir of little kids, okay, just stop it. Just stop—”

“Hit me,” Tyler says.

“Will you—” Dylan pushes the air near Tyler's side, says, “There, your shadow's gonna be crooked for the rest of your life. Look, it's all disoriented. Hope you're happy.”

“Really go for it,” Tyler says. “Hard. I want you to.”

“I don't wanna fucking—” Dylan says, and stands, and shoves him, and stumbles.

Tyler catches him, catches him by the shoulders, pulls him close. And Dylan, by some stupid, unthinking instinct Dylan latches on to him, can't let go. And he's shaking, he's shaking, he can't stop.

Tyler's hands on his shoulders, all down his back, he's speaking softly. And they did this scene. They wrote this scene, Tyler wrote this scene, it means—it's Stiles, finally losing control, and accepting it. It's Derek, saying, lean on me. Just lean on me. I want you to.

However I can help you, whatever I can be for you, I'm here. I'm here.

And that's one thing you can always be sure of.

But wordless, it's all implicit, Stiles just shaking, his fists no longer fighting, Derek's healing and holding him, and just muttering, “It's okay. It's okay.”
And it shouldn't be like finally breathing, it shouldn't feel like everything, but it does.

It does.

Chapter End Notes

posey's mixtape:

1. oceanwalk - astronautalis
2. i - kendrick lamar
3. after midnight - blink 182
4. car radio (triple layered) - twenty one pilots
5. all these things i've done - the killers
6. S.I.N.G. - my chemical romance
7. architects - rise against
8. all i want - the offspring
9. hood party - fat tony ft kool a.d. & despot
10. umbrella - all time low
11. prove it - divided by friday
12. surrender - angels & airwaves
13. the river, the woods - astronautalis

or listen on 8tracks
They're watching old Flight of the Conchords videos on YouTube when Dylan goes still.

“Oh shit,” he says.

Tyler lifts his head from Dylan's shoulder, looks at him muzzily, then the screen.

“Oh shit, oh shit,” Dylan is saying, kind of bouncing a little, grabbing his phone.

“What,” Tyler says, because he's kind of been half-sleeping for the past ten minutes, and for all he knows it's the fucking rapture. Dylan's definitely excited about it, whatever it is.

Good, good. Tyler likes when Dylan's excited. Doesn't really matter over what. Nice to just see his eyes light up, and his—everything about him just changes, all at once. And he's happy.

Tyler loves it when Dylan's happy.

He's texting someone, and then he isn't, he's dropping his phone in his lap and kissing Tyler full on the mouth, eyes shining.

“What,” Tyler says when he pulls back, barely impatient. The answer can be anything, Tyler already likes it.

“I know what I want our movie to be about,” Dylan says.

“So my guy writes these little dumb funny songs, it's nothing,” Dylan says. “Just amusing himself, just amusing your dude. There's a bunch of little, funny parodies, maybe a couple of semi-sincere songs, you know. Random little lines of nothing. And your dude Vines a couple of them, and it blows up.”

“And not just because I can't sing,” Tyler clarifies.

“Oh, funny,” Dylan says. “You'll be great, think of, think of that Why you always lyin' dude.”

Tyler looks at him blankly.

“It's this Vine thing, here—” Dylan grabs his phone again.

And gives Tyler an education.

“And there's this, like, festival thing, this musical comedy festival thing, and you're contacted about it,” Dylan says. “And you like, pressure my dude to do it with you. And he's like no, no way, massive anxiety. But he gets like, really drunk, and does it, and I don't know, it's a thing. Weird drunk off-key comedy shit, I don't know. Maybe it's not—Forget it.”

And he's dimming, shrinking back into himself, and Tyler can't reassure him fast enough.

“No, it'll be funny,” he says. “Like this stuff, these guys, who would've ever thought—But it's
hilarious.”

“Right?” Dylan says, perking up again.

“They should reform,” Tyler says. “Like, we could make an actual musical comedy festival. How hard can it be? And get a bunch of guest stars that way.”


“They're not gonna turn down a movie,” Tyler says.

“What? Max is on TV more than fucking I am this year,” Dylan says. “Like two minutes away from racking up awards and shit. And Hunter thinks I'm this aloof, overrated prick, so... I don't really know what they would or wouldn't do,” Dylan says. “I'm pretty sure they all hate me now.”

“Even Rachel Bloom?” Tyler jokes, badly.

“Shut up, you know what I...” Dylan shakes his head. “I'm such a tool. Just like, this ivory tower cliché.”

“You're not,” Tyler says. “You're not. You didn't cut them out of your life on purpose. You just built it up in your head. Like with Tyler, or your parents, or—me, even. Like I was just gonna fight you, or hate you, or you'd do something wrong and I'd—it's not true.”


“I'm serious,” Tyler says, trying not to flinch. He's not even thirty yet, he's not—Even if he looks forty, which is apparently the general consensus.

Even if he doesn't know anything about Vine. Or tumblr, any of it. Any of the other ones.

“Yeah, no, I know,” Dylan says. “I'm working on it. Not having a joke for everything. And not—getting in my head, all the time. Self sabotaging.”

Maybe Tyler's just ancient now. For real. He's aged out of the core ad demographic, he knows that. Mad Men taught him that.

Camille's always talking about something Tyler's never heard of like it's the most obvious thing, and when he tries to return the favor, something he saw on Twitter, or Instagram, she just laughs and goes, “Oh, I forgot about that. That's from like four years ago, wow. Like when I was in high school.”

And it's not—She's twenty, of course it's not the same. But Colton's just as aware of everything. So really, Tyler has no excuse.


His hand on Tyler's shoulder, his arm, bringing him back to now.

But Tyler hasn't been to the gym in months, hasn't been in anything but this purgatorial horror movie in months, and all at once he can feel himself fading.

“I was thinking like a baseball player,” Dylan says. “Or, or an Olympic gymnast, dream big, right?"

It shouldn't sting. Tyler doesn't even know why it bothers him at all. They're great suggestions.

“So my guy, right, he's, he's like this physical therapist. And your guy can have some sports injury, like... I don't know, some sports injury. We'll figure it out. So that's how he meets my guy, you know? And his life's kind of at this standstill.”

“Who's,” Tyler says, maybe a little woodenly. It's fine, he's fine. It's just—there's this thing, about Dylan's jokes, and his stories.

They're always a little bit true.

And maybe Tyler's just been blocking out every indication that he's this aging guy who's not going anywhere in his life, who has all these sad fading dreams and nothing to show for it, but that obviously hasn't stopped Dylan making a note of it.

Tyler could've done Terminal, he could've—He's had opportunities. Could've played baseball, chose differently. It's not like anyone but him ever cut him off at the knees.

But maybe that doesn't matter, in the end. Because besides for you, no one else really remembers the history.

They just see the result.

“Well my guy's been stalled kind of all of his life,” Dylan says. “Like he has this job, it's a good job, he's good at it, it's just not—You know, you start telling people what you think you might wanna do with your life, they're not always gonna throw you a party about it, first thing. So he kind of went with the, you know, the practical option.”


“This isn't my autobiography,” Dylan says. “That would be so lame. I'm twenty-four. Might as well hand myself a lifetime achievement award and a muzzle in the mouth, in that case.”

“My mistake,” Tyler mutters. Dylan looks at him.

“What's up with you?” he asks, and his palm's back on Tyler's shoulder, his thumb rubbing up and down like the world's tiniest massage.

“Nothing,” Tyler says, and can't help the tension in his voice.

“You don't like it,” Dylan realizes. His whole body shape changes like a Transformer, hands to himself, shoulders sinking small. “We'll do something else,” he says. “We could do something else, we could do—You had a better idea, anyway. With the undercover—”

“I didn't say anything,” Tyler says. He's so sick of this, walking on eggshells like this. “Stop reading into everything I do. Everything's fine. Your idea's great.”

“It's stupid,” Dylan says. He's not even looking at Tyler anymore. “You should be the main character, I'm not even—I'll just be behind the camera. Maybe be an extra or something, some crowd scene.”
“Stop,” Tyler grinds out. “For five fucking seconds, Jesus, let something not be about you.”

Dylan goes still.

Then he's nodding, nodding, nodding. “Yeah,” he says. “Yeah, sorry. Forget it.”

And faking fine, and he isn't, he's miserable again.

More than miserable, he's—Eyes darting, like he's been cornered, like he's trapped, and then he says, “I'm just—Forget it,” and bolts to the bathroom.

And he's not being sick, he's not, but it's small consolation, when he comes back too long after, red-eyed, too casual.

“Dylan,” Tyler says, sick at himself.

“No, don’t,” Dylan says. “We don't—you don't have to do anything. You're—I'm just being an idiot. Over—” But he stops, swallows hard. “I'm just a crazy person, you know,” he says, grinning horribly. “Taking everything out of context, in the worst way. Same old, same old.”

“You're not,” Tyler says heavily. “I'm being passive aggressive. It's not fair to expect—You can't read my mind.”

“Feels like I can,” Dylan says. “Feels so fucking obvious, all the time.”

“Well that's not me,” Tyler says. “That voice in your head, making you feel like shit? That's not me. I don't think like that.”

“You're allowed to not like my ideas,” Dylan says, his voice small.

“Yeah, I know,” Tyler says. “Doesn't change the fact that I do. Pretty much all the time. Newsflash, when your brain's not trying to kill you, it's pretty fucking smart. And funny.”

“Yeah, I don't know,” Dylan says. “I start feeling like I'm making progress, like I'm actually almost sane for two consecutive seconds, and then—And here I go, writing my fucking autobiography after all. And that's a joke,” he adds, “and I'm not supposed to. I'm supposed to stay in the shitty moment. Just really sink my teeth into it. So here goes.”

“I was just thinking,” Tyler says, into the too silent silence, Dylan stuck in some bad thought, alone. “About... baseball. And Terminal. And everything else.”

“Should've made you do Terminal,” Dylan says.

“You tried,” Tyler says. “It was my decision. It was always my decision. Baseball, the fucking Olympics. Everything. I could've went for it. I didn't. There's no one else to blame.”

“If I wasn't such a—” Dylan starts, and Tyler says, “There's no one else to blame. It's my life. My responsibility to go after something if I want it. And I guess I thought I was doing that, but maybe I was just...”

It's strange, being so confessional. Being so confessional sober. Tyler's really not used to it.

Still, maybe it's time he took a turn.

“Maybe I was just dodging,” Tyler says. “Any kind of big gamble, or uncertainty. Anything without a back-up plan.”
“Ty,” Dylan says, soft.

“It's okay,” Tyler says. “It just kind of... puts things in a new light. Maybe not such a positive one.”

“But you like acting,” Dylan says. “Don't you?”

“Of course,” Tyler says. “Just—maybe not as much as other things. That I just sort of... gave up on, without even really realizing it.”

“So don't,” Dylan says. “Do it now.”

“Yeah, I'll just get on that,” Tyler says. “Major Leagues, here I come. Or, or the Olympics. Why wouldn't they let one thirty year old in with all the teenagers?”

“I mean it,” Dylan says, and stops. “You're not thirty. You're not even twenty-ei—Did I miss your birthday? September, right?”

“We both know I'm basically forty,” Tyler says. He smirks, eyebrows high. It feels a little plastic. “At least that's what you young people seem to be saying.”

“Shut up,” Dylan says, smacking Tyler's chest. Keeping his hand there, though, warm and steady. “I didn't mean it like that. I meant—you know, the beard, and the confidence. Like you had the whole world figured out for decades, while I was just—scrambling. Falling on my face half the time. It's intimidating.”

“And Camille, she's really intimidated too,” Tyler says.

“Fuck Camille,” Dylan says. “She's like ten. It's like when I was a kid, I had this babysitter, and I thought he was like, thirty. A real adult, you know? Turns out he was like seventeen. Some idiot high school kid, what high school guy even babysits? But what did I know? I was like four. He was really tall and a Mets fan and knew the answer to pretty much anything my four-year-old brain could throw at him. So I just assumed. Camille's twenty,” Dylan says. “Thirty's like, a million years away from twenty. In terms of fear factor. You know, everyone's trying to stay young forever. Especially around here.”

“Hospitals,” Tyler says, nodding.

“Mental health clinics, sure,” Dylan says, but he's laughing. “You know, maybe we're all a little crazy. And like, insecure. No matter how well we're doing. There's always that tick tick tick, like, 'oh shit, is this how it ends? Is it all downhill from here? Shit. I'm too young to die. Or get old. Or whatever. And I didn't even get close to where I wanted to go, shit! It's all pointless.'”

“Whoa,” Tyler says, more breath than sound.

“And we're in our fucking twenties, and we're wasting it,” Dylan says. “Just freaking out about how other people see us. And like, our stature in life, and how far up this stupid nonexistent ladder we are. You know? I'm babbling,” he says, covering his face.

“You're not,” Tyler says. “You're not.” It's like things are finally starting to slot into place. “We should use this.”

“Use this,” Dylan says, lost.

“God,” Dylan says, his ears pinking behind his hand. “You think?”

“Definitely,” Tyler says. “Your guy, he's stuck, right? He's afraid to move, or take a risk. And my guy, that's all he's done, all his life, and now it's out of his hands. He's injured, he can't keep moving up that ladder. And he's watching his competitors just rise and rise, and he can't handle it. And they maybe have to—try each other's methods, for once. It's like that AA saying. Accept the things I cannot change, have courage to change the things you can. Except less preachy,” Tyler clarifies. “It shouldn't be preachy. Just—they help each other.”


“And musical comedy,” Tyler says, nodding. “Yeah, yeah. This could be good. Like really, really good.”

“Time to open up Final Draft?” Dylan suggests.

“Do it,” Tyler says, and goes for his glasses.

The last week of Harvest is the hardest, the end so close, but still so uncertain. Tyler's starting to have waking nightmares about finally making it through that last day, only to be slapped with a new pile of sides on his way out. A burst of horror music plays, and the camera pulls away as Tyler falls to his knees, screaming, “Nooooooo!” at a length that would put Garth Marenghi’s Darkplace's pilot episode to shame. And there's a show Tyler would never have heard about, ever, but Dylan found it somehow, and it's incredible. Incredibly, cringingly bad acting, but brilliant somehow.

“I'll sext you,” Dylan says as Tyler leaves, four infinitely long days left, and Tyler's sure he's heard wrong until his phone vibrates in the car, and it's—fucking filthy, but exactly—and it's Tyler's car, it's Tyler's car. What he does in his car, windows up, no one watching, is his own business.

He starts to get really affected by just the vibration of his phone, knowing it's Dylan, knowing it's probably—and then reading it, choking a little bit, excusing himself and finding some private place, the first—his trailer, or the honey-wagons, anywhere, this close to already gone. Heat flooding through him, dick twitching, he barely has time to get his hands on himself before—

And then catching his breath, floating in it, half a dozen pulses pounding and pounding and everything but Dylan turning as irrelevant as fiction.

I love you, he texts, when there's feeling in his trembling fingers, blood rushing back slowly.

SAME! Dylan responds—they’ve been watching Arrested Development.

And Tyler's mind is so clear, he's never been surer. In his bed in his trailer, holding his phone, that stupid joke shaking his shoulders, it's the most obvious thing in the world.

Tyler never wants to not have this.

He goes back to set, eventually, when he can fix his breathing almost ordinary; goes back to being Tommy, the bleeding, sweaty, shirtless ghost-with-an-ax-to-grind, pun not intended. Gets through it, moves past it.

Goes back to Dylan, goes home.
Chapter End Notes

the hobrien song, by flight of the conchords
"Alright, this has gone on long enough," Ian says, stealing the wine. Tyler frowns at him, kind of reaches out to fight him when a phone is thrust in his face.

Tyler's reflection blinks at him glumly.

"Are you seeing what I'm seeing?" Ian says. "That is not the face of a man who is not drowning in sex. Not in any civilized nation."

"I don't..." Tyler starts, but it's not worth the effort. Once Ian's got a point to make, it's near impossible to change the subject.

"You're in the prime of your life," Ian tells him, not for the first time. "Physically, emotionally. Sexually," he adds, and Tyler's not looking, but he can imagine what Ian's face is doing.

"Emotionally," Tyler says, instead of encouraging him. "I don't feel anything. At all." Drunk, maybe. If he can wrest the bottle back, definitely.

"Exactly," Ian says. "You're a man now. Mazel tov."

Tyler rolls his eyes.

"You're young," Ian says in Tyler's trailer, apropos of nothing. They were just running lines, but sure, lets have this conversation. "Breakups still feel like the end of the world. But it's not the end."

Tyler can practically hear the inspirational music being added in post.

"It's the beginning," Ian says, completely devoid of irony. "This is a good thing."

"First day of the rest of my life," Tyler says, dry.

"That's it," Ian says. "Think about it: You weren't happy. No, really," he says, before Tyler can get a word out. "I know, I know it's Dylan, I know he's sugar and spice and everything nice, but he didn't know what he had."

"And what's that," Tyler says, if only to get to the end of this pep talk without a homicide.

"You could have anyone," Ian says. "Male, female... in between. At once, or one after the other. You just say how high," he says dramatically. "The floor'll tremble with all the people jumping."

"It doesn't matter," Tyler says. There's really nothing else he can say to that. "I don't... That's not how I am."

"I didn't say that," Tyler says, flushing.

"Abstinence is the number one cause of teen pregnancy," Ian says, and if there's one conversation Tyler wants to have even less than one about his break up, it's politics.

"Funny," he says flatly, and stands. "Let me get you a drink."


"You're a dick," Tyler says.

"Why don't you just try," Ian starts, and Tyler says, "Why don't you?"

He sounds like a child.

He face-palms, doesn't look up. Ian pats his shoulder commiseratingly.

Dylan used to do that.

"I'm not gonna go on a date with someone I don't even know," Tyler says, eventually.

"It's not a date," Ian says. "It's coffee. You're an actor, he's an actor. You can always just network."

"My favorite," Tyler says.

"Or you can fuck," Ian says. He taps at his screen, puts his phone in Tyler's face. Tyler bats it away ineffectively. "Spartacus," he says proudly.

"Am I supposed to know..." Tyler says, but he's seen that face before. "He's gay?" he says.

"Straight men don't take gay roles," Ian says.

Like he's done studies, confirmed the stats.

"You don't know that," Tyler says.

"Oh, I do," Ian says, and all at once Tyler's sure he has done the research.

In his own way.

"Jake Gyllenhaal," Tyler tries.

"Really?" Ian says. "That's your response. That's the exception."

"Heath Ledger," Tyler says, but he's suddenly doubting everything he ever thought he knew. About the sexuality of strangers.

Honestly, Tyler doesn't really understand himself, sometimes.

"Forget it," he says. Gay or not, it doesn't matter. Nothing's gonna happen with this—with anyone. There's a scene, Tyler has a scene with Dylan in it, in two episodes. He's not gonna start looking around with things still so up in the air.
Maybe we shouldn't, Tyler said, just trying to have a conversation. Just a little sick of Dylan acting like Tyler's this incredible, unattainable thing, until Posey shows up, and it's a giant joke again.

He didn't mean it as an attack, or a fight, however Dylan took it. Whatever made him look like he'd been slapped, in the second before he said, "No, yeah, absolutely," and just—cut Tyler out of his life. And refused to even admit it, that that's what it was, that they were done. Just extended that public persona he put on for Posey and everyone else to private, acted like that was all there ever was.

And then there wasn't anything private, ever. Which—He's a busy guy; it's probably not even an excuse, most of the time. But he always made time, before.

Made an effort.

Whatever, whatever. Tyler's getting a headache. And Ian's still waiting, tapping through Google Images to show him the full reel of Spartacus' attributes. Tyler nods and hums enough to get the phone out of his face, doesn't think about it much. It's probably not representative, anyway. Tyler couldn't look like his best shots without an hour in hair and makeup, some kind of fitting, the perfect blend of lights and filters, and about a thousand readjustments between takes. And he lost most of the bulk he put on for the alpha storyline, now that Derek's a beta again.

Not that he actually thinks that's what did it, but maybe... He can hit the gym, see what he can do. Can't hurt, right? And it's good to have goals, as long as they're healthy.

So, okay. He'll figure it out, what he had before, what he's missing. And just go in like nothing's different, just get right back to where they were. Come up with some scene, maybe, some Sterek thing; Dylan always likes that.

And just ignore this, Ian's hedonistic philosophies, everything he thinks he knows, he doesn't.

No one ever accomplished anything being negative.

He puts on some weight between then and now, a little muscle. Doesn't come close to season two, obviously, but it's not like he really expected to. He did his best, that's what's important.

It's fine.

It's hard to tell if Dylan notices; at first, he seems to be trying not to look at Tyler at all. Even when he touches him, Tyler untensing at just the hint, it's barely momentary, and he's still talking to Sprayberry, not really addressing Tyler at all.

"So the scene," Dylan says finally, when it's unavoidable. Hands to himself, stiff at his sides.

"The scene," Tyler echoes, and then that's all he can think to say, except, "Seems pretty straightforward."

Riveting.

" Yep," Dylan says, and that's it; that's all. A couple hours being Derek, and then they've got nothing connecting them, ever again.

"How've you been?" Tyler can't tell if he sounds as desperate as he feels. He's trying to be cool, blasé. He's trying.
"Great," Dylan says, and it's that talking-to-strangers voice. "So great," he adds, nodding. "I can actually sleep most days now, so, you know, that's a plus."

"You weren't sleeping?" Tyler says. He didn't know that. Dylan gets insomnia sometimes, with any big bout of nerves, but he's been doing really well for a while now. Or Tyler thought so, anyway.

"That's the job," Dylan says, but it's not. When Dylan's overworked, he's out like a light in a second. Instant REM. Just add pillow.

Tyler misses whatever Dylan's still saying, caught on the lie. Not that it's even any of his business, anymore, but that doesn't mean he can just stop caring on a whim.

"Yeah, I don't even know," Dylan says. "I think I like, permanently scrambled my brain with all the physical stuff for the movie." He's getting more and more nervous the longer this goes, fidgeting anxiously. Tyler doesn't know what he's doing, how to stop, but clearly small talk isn't helping.

"I bet it'll look awesome, though," he says, just to end the conversation, get back to the scene. He can—think of something funny, try to, or—or just stop trying so hard. That's it, that's why everything feels so forced and awful, they're both doing it. Dylan's just mirroring him.

But the moment never comes, any kind of real opportunity, and then it's too late. Dylan heads back to his trailer, and Tyler follows him for a few steps, falters when Dylan looks back. He throws up a weird wave, like a peace sign with extra fingers, and turns back around, and that's it. It's over, Tyler's been dismissed.

He finds his breath, his car, his phone. Not necessarily in that order. Calls Ian, just to stop feeling so unsteady.

"How'd it," Ian starts, and Tyler says, "Fine. Yeah, I'm in."

His hands settle at ten and two, and he drives until Sail comes on the radio, and then he just turns it up and keeps driving.

"Let me guess," Dan says. "You wanted out. He didn't."

He ordered before Tyler got to the table, greeted him with a wide grin. Ian's right, he's attractive, and Tyler thinks maybe—Maybe that's all he needs right now. Maybe everything else is just some kind of masochistic joke, where you can never feel confident in anything. Try to have one conversation, and the whole thing just slips through your fingers. Then you get to feel like shit forever, get high and resentful and drunk and sorry, and none of it changes anything. So you can have empty sex and control, or you can be idealistic and fuck up and come up empty. Pick a card, any card, but the whole deck's stacked against you regardless.

So why even bother?

"Alright, it's not a guess," Dan says. His accent's nice. Distracting, and Tyler needs distracting. "I'll admit, I Googled you. There's this thing, this blog, Gossip King. It lit up like a firecracker."

Nothing makes Tyler's hackles rise more than tabloids, or anything with gossip in the title. Anything that makes a life out of peddling people's privacy, turning the people they trust into sources, distorting the truth and extorting anyone who can be threatened by bad press.

"If you ask me, honestly, you dodged a bullet," Dan says.
Tyler's pretty sure he didn't ask, actually. Not that Dan seems to notice.

"He was bringing you down, mate," Dan goes on. "Only looking out for number one. And that sure wasn't you."

"Stop," Tyler says, too softly.

"People like that are all too common in this business," Dan says. "It's so hard to really make a lasting connection. All this complication... coming out, staying in... the egos involved are just astronomical."

"You don't know," Tyler says, shaking his head, "you don't know him." It's Ian, but worse. This guy isn't his friend. He doesn't know the first thing about Tyler's life he didn't get off the internet.

Dan laughs. "You've still got his blinders on."

"You don't know him," Tyler says, more firmly. "Some blog sure as hell doesn't."

"I'm on your side," Dan says, hands up. "Do you choose your partner, or social pressure? I've never let a PR threat stop me from investing in something I cared about. I don't care if I'm—pigeon holed," he says, and there's that laugh again. It's really not a laugh at all. "My life, my loves, my business, is my business. No one works my mouth but me."

It is a butt, Tyler realizes. The sound when he laughs, it's not a laugh at all. It's a throat fart.

Once he's worked it out, it's almost funny. More than anything, Tyler wants to text Dylan, or see him, tell him about it. Hear Dylan's laugh, an actual laugh, the best one.

But he can't. And all at once, he can't stomach any of this. He can't shake the sick, drowning feeling he's made the biggest mistake he could. upended the best thing, for what? For this? Empty dates and empty conversations, everything he hates combined into one presumptive package, and the knowledge that he might've let it go, his preferences and hang ups, assumed this is all there is. He might've never known what an actual connection feels like. If not for Dylan, this would just be another day. Just another bleak realization: come on, T. You can't be so idealistic. Or do you like being alone?

"What did I tell you?" Ian says, later. "He's not just attractive. He's *Spartacus* attractive."

"Yeah," Tyler says blandly.

"You're in the prime of your life," Ian says again. "You could have anyone."

That feeling Dylan once tried to explain, the walls closing in. Tyler's never understood it like this before. Like the rest of his life is a sped-up scene with no cuts, just one winding take. One long line of anyones, none of them the right one. Because he had the right one.

"So?" Ian prods. He's smirking, proud. "Are you gonna see him again?"

"No," Tyler says, sure. Ian laughs, slaps him on the back.

"That's my boy," he says.
Tyler's up too abruptly, tense and illogically caught up in something he knows is—over, done and dealt with. The dream already fading into nothing, just the residual emotions lingering even with the evidence to the contrary already calming the reasonable part of him down.

“Whssamatter,” Dylan says, patting at him drowsily.

“Nothing,” Tyler says. Just reaching out, touching him, being touched, like its nothing. Just talking, not having to worry about what to say. Or having to say anything at all. “I love you.”


“I know,” Tyler says.

“Star W'rs?” Dylan says.

“That too,” Tyler says, and earns Dylan's hand over his face, shushing him. Stilling, waking up in increments.

“Nooo,” Dylan says, scrubbing at his eyes. “No, hold up, Ty, hey. What's going on?”

“What,” Tyler says, blinking at him.

“Nightmare?” Dylan asks. Somehow all the blankets always end up on his side; he fixes them around Tyler, only to change his mind and push them away to nuzzle at Tyler's shoulder.

“Something like that,” Tyler says.

“Wanna talk?” Dylan says.

“Not... really,” Tyler hedges.

“It’s just,” Dylan says. “You were crying.”

“Oh,” Tyler says.

Dylan's faltering, going quiet, taking his hands back, and Tyler doesn't like that at all.

“No, no,” he says. “Just... missed you. Last year.”

“Boo, last year,” Dylan agrees.

“I think I knew, by then,” Tyler says. Kind of—nervous to go back to sleep, stupidly. To lose this, or feel like it. “That it was you. That no one else was gonna come close.”

Dylan nods, nods, his hair tickling Tyler's throat. It feels good to be so close, to have this nice steady weight, this security. To not even notice it, most of the time, now, just settle into it without a thought.

“So when...” Tyler says, but he doesn’t wanna say it. “It was just hard.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says.

“But that's the past,” Tyler says. “That's—We're good.”

“Real good,” Dylan says; he's starting to relax again. Good, good. “Engaged.”
“Getting married,” Tyler says, smiling just saying it. Turning to Dylan, grinning at him.

He's already out like a light.

It's just a little more complicated than Tyler expected, juggling arrangements and all that, and the movie—and Dylan's directing, too. His debut. That's enough to scramble anyone's schedule.

And he doesn't mind it, not really. Tyler doesn't believe in the, whatever the cliché is, that it all has some big, deeper meaning. That every off thing is some omen, is somehow representative.

A couple missed tastings, that doesn't matter. A couple lost deposits, it's nothing. Everything’s gonna be fine.

Better, better than fine.

Everything’s gonna be amazing.

Chapter End Notes

the prime time of your life - daft punk (this song may make you hyperventilate)

no offense to rl spartacus guy, but his laugh is truly the worst
“Dylan, hey,” Jonathan Trotter says. No biggie, just a dude with the freaking *New York Times*. Totally fine if Dylan blows this. “How are you?”

And that, that used to just be a question. Simple, obvious small talk, but now...

Now Dylan can't shake the feeling that someone *knows*. That everyone's talking about it, just quiet enough for him to miss it. Yeah, after he got fired? And tried that desperate little YouTube audition? Guy had a nervous breakdown. Just—completely, completely lost it.

“Great, you know,” he says, fighting to keep his fidget-frantic fingers to themselves. “Yeah, it's been a little crazy, with...”

Shit, he didn't mean to... That's not what he meant, at all. He laughs nervously, laughs harder.

“You know, it's a little nerve-wracking, directing. But I couldn't ask for a better cast,” he jokes, practically begging Trotter to pick up what he's laying down, head down the obvious road.

“Some familiar faces, for Teen Wolf fans,” Trotter says, and Dylan tries not to look too obviously relieved.

“Yeah, yeah yeah,” he says, nodding. “Tyler, he's incredible. I mean, I don't know if you saw—”

But Dylan's put his foot in it again, bringing up Terminal, and all the questions that come with it. “That Terminal audition,” he decides. “How amazing he was. He's like, the dream guy to write for. And with.”

“What was that like?” Trotter asks. “As writing partners. Was that fifty-fifty? Or was it your vision, with contributions.”

“Oh man,” Dylan says, kind of grabbing the back of his neck for leverage before he even really realizes it. “Uh. A little of everything? Like, I had this basic idea, but Tyler, he really fleshed it out, in ways I could've never... You know, turned it around and saw it in this whole other, deeper way. And we both kept coming back with stuff, until it was just, its own thing. Not him, not me, just... And that's, that's the weirdest feeling. But also the best, oh my god.”

“So it's like your baby,” Trotter says.

“Ha, yeah,” Dylan says, before his brain takes that a whole other way, and boggles a little bit. “Uh, wow. Yeah, yeah.”

“Subtle transition,” Trotter says. “Now Tyler, he's not just your writing partner.”

“Nope,” Dylan agrees. “Also, also my... partner, partner.” And why, why does Dylan ever try to speak, seriously. *Partner partner*. Is he twelve? Because he's gonna sound twelve, in this. In this *New York Times profile piece*.

And since when does the New York Times even profile random actors, or directors? That doesn't even feel like a real thing. This whole thing has to be some kind of setup.
But then: “Did you always know?” Trotter asks, and everything gets too clear, all at once.

Because Dylan's not some random actor, or director. No, no.

He's some random gay actor, or director, or who gives a fuck, and who he's fucking is the only thing that matters about him.

“Fine,” he tells Tyler at home, “it was fine, it was...” But he gives up the act too easy, at the expectant look on Tyler's face. They're past lying about this kind of bullshit.

“It was,” he says, and sinks to slouching on the couch. Grabs at Tyler's hands on the way, pulls him down with him. “You know, basic smash-grab garbage. Portrait of a gay dude, so fun. So original.”

“That bad?” Tyler says, rearranging Dylan's limbs over his more comfortably.

“Probably not,” Dylan says. “My head, right? Probably blowing it all out of proportion.”

“Come on,” Tyler says, and then he doesn't say anything, for a while. Just kneads at Dylan's shoulder, his side, this inscrutable expression on his face.

Tyler's not a big sharer.

Is it weird, that Dylan's just noticing this now that they live together? It feels weird. They lived together before, they were together before, all the time. So how did Dylan miss it?

Tyler's not a big sharer, with anything real. Anything in Dylan's head, or life, or deepest, darkest fears, Tyler's the first guy ready to dive in. But his own stuff, his own inner monologues, or anything he'd be urging Dylan to talk about if it was his, he'd never volunteer any of it, unless he was trying to relate. Or fighting every instinct, because Dylan's insecure and needy, and Tyler's too relenting, about everything.

He had this nightmare, got really shook up, and he wouldn't've said a word about it. Dylan felt Ty's tears on his palm and the guy still acted like it was nothing, like Dylan shouldn't even be bothered.

And it's just—Has he always been like this?

Dylan can't remember.

Sure, Posey was a buffer, before. Now that Dylan's thinking about it, Posey was this massive, massive blind spot when it came to taking Tyler seriously, as anything. And part of it was Dylan's own nerves, his obsessive need to play down anything that might be important to him, to anyone who might think it's dumb. Like, that guy, seriously? Come on. Like forget he's a guy, forget he's, what he looks like. Or who he's worked with, or knows, or his whole, the whole package. Just—you can't have sentiments like that, for a coworker. That's just... you gotta reign yourself in. But especially in this job, with what comes with it, the scrutiny, and the notoriety, and the pre-teen viewership. And even beyond all that, just back at home base, you don't need that. Being some obvious, obvious clinger like that, just like, swooning at the first pleasant interaction. Or taking something nice, making it weird.

But then with Posey, he just took Dylan's awkward nervous jokes about it and ran with it. Like,
Tyler's out somewhere, what's he doing? Just, roiding out, and like, sweeping entire bars of women into his hotel room. Not even as a sexual thing, just like, to work on his stamina. Chugging the whole top shelf and never going limp-dicked, and then the one who survives is his girlfriend, except none of them ever do. Just a million new cases of instant, friction-based spontaneous combustion. Or like, sexiness based. And that's what really started the Hale fire.

And it was the fucking dumbest, jokiest thing. Even then, Dylan knew Ty wasn't like that. He drank wine, okay, not like, shots, and was all about this incredibly active healthy lifestyle. And binging on pizza and video games, and talking smack like Dylan's gonna be intimidated by a guy who chooses Mario every time, doesn't even think about it. And recording like a million separate videos of Dylan getting scared shitless on his phone, never getting tired of it, until he caught Dylan freaking out, like, really freaking out, and got, like, the most sober Dylan'd ever seen him out of character, and sorry. And just stayed with him, kind of patting at his arm, not trying to say anything. Just deleting them, one by one, until Dylan was like, no, it's funny, it's just... You know, you know that feeling? Like, that trapped feeling. Like one of those old Windows screen-savers, that one with the never-ending maze, just turning corners. And it's just, dizzying. You can feel it, you know, the walls closing in.

Until it turned out Tyler didn't know, and Dylan was just this weird, neurotic guy who just assumed those anxieties were as universal as the feeling of fingernails on a chalkboard.

But he tried, though. Tried to get it. Wasn't a dick about it, when he could've been.

Just, Dylan said, press, and cameras, and fans. And being expected to be... on, all the time. Entertaining all the time, this really personable, fun, funny guy all the time. Just, Stiles, all the time. Or else it's disappointing, you know? Came all this way to see him, and Dylan’s just—a guy. Just talking, whatever comes to mind, and it’s not—There’s no punchline, most of the time, no like, shareable moment. People crying just seeing your face up close, Stiles’ face. And then you open your mouth and it's just, the biggest letdown.

“That's not,” Tyler said, shaking his head. “I'm never not entertained, talking to you.”

“Well this is, I bet,” Dylan said, feeling sickeningly vulnerable, overexposed. Already getting jokey again, trying to put his Stiles face on. “Best scare yet. Too bad you didn’t get all of this on your phone, that'd be...”

“I wouldn't do that,” Tyler said. “Do I really—You really think I’m like that?”

“No,” Dylan admitted. “I mean, probably.”

“I wouldn't,” Tyler swore. Looking a little sick, then upset. “And anyone who would's an asshole.”

He was angry, almost.

And after that, he kept finding Dylan, by interviews. Or all press things, all those nightmare events with a million cameras, and everyone trying to get a quote, or ask the same four questions.

Kept just sneaking up next to him, behind him, at his side. And just hanging out, distracting him. But the best kind of distraction.

And then Dylan was returning the favor, without even thinking about it. Or at a party, just instinctively looking for him. And feeling so, so relieved just to see him through a crowd. Just to have a destination, you know, some place he could breathe. And Tyler'd wind his arm around him, without even looking, like he could feel Dylan's nervous energy. And just, take it.
And then there was Sterek, not the romance but the relationship, Stiles and Derek. In season two, all these scenes, suddenly. And Tyler got really excited about it, and had all these ideas about it, different takes, and beyond that. And it was so much better, collaborating, than just pitching every second thought, and then everyone expects it, all the time. Was like—all the best parts of it, but more.

And Dylan didn't even see it as a thing, like a romantic thing, at all. Just good, just something that just felt good, that he wanted to keep doing. Like, there was that side to it, obviously, on his end, but it wasn't—Dylan was good at ignoring it, mostly.

And then, and then it was a thing. With a name, and people—shipping it, or whatever. And Dylan kind of freaked out without freaking out, thinking, is it that obvious? And Tyler thought it was hilarious, and went all in. With the 50/50 comment, with everything.

Then Posey got wind of it, and he and Colton went deep, came back with the most explicit, the most terrifying shit. Like, amazing, the level of talent to it, and effort, but just—Dylan really, really wasn't ready for it. Like, confronting that side of himself, or that version.

So, fine, it was a joke, so he let it be a joke, hilarious. And Tyler was the first one to start laughing, wasn't he? So fine, fantastic. Dylan's cracking up, he's so confused, and mindblown, that people could think that. That anyone could ever even come away with that impression.

But Tyler kept being there, and being brilliant, taking every inch Jeff gave him and turning it into a real, true moment, figuring in all these experiences, and this historical background, and how he was raised and what happened to his dad and with Kate and all of it impacting him in these different ways, shaping his instincts, and thought patterns, and reactions. Little details, this one torn sleeve on a leather jacket Derek wore in one scene, and it probably just snagged on something and wardrobe didn't even realize it, but Tyler had a whole other explanation. Like Dylan's just like, how would Stiles feel, or see or react to this, while Tyler's building this whole world around him.

All that, and then Jeff just ignored all his ideas, and cherry-picked his most wooden takes, and redirected and redirected to keep getting them.

And forget everything, all the different perceptions off set, okay; that just pissed Dylan off. So what if it's not your vision, who cares? Tyler's was better. So why couldn't anyone else see that?

So Dylan said, Why don't we just try it? Just these little, little things, just acknowledging. You know, for the fans.

And they had it, they had scenes: Stiles finding Derek in the elevator, and snapping at him about Jennifer and Derek lets him, and Derek's soft with him. And little touches, just comforting. After Cora, after Boyd.

And then Tyler had bigger ideas, not just looks or intonation, or motive, but actual scenes. Actual whole interactions, what if we... What if Stiles...

And after that, Jeff just—shut it down.

And Tyler, he just retreated. Just nodded, yeah, sure. Every new script with nothing, without any of his suggestions taken into account, he was just over it.

But Dylan wasn't. He couldn't be. All that time, all that genius, and then all Tyler gets is some dream sequence. Dylan gets this whole massive dark arc, and Tyler just gets, gets left behind.
So Dylan couldn't help it, he couldn't stop venting. To Posey, mostly, who finally burst out, “Why do you care? So much,” he added, and Dylan couldn't even start to explain it.

“So tell him,” Posey said, when Dylan tried. And: “Fuck!! I’m so bored. Of all this bullshit.”

Dylan kind of looked at him, trying to, to read what was underneath. Gut kind of twisting, world kind of spinning too fast. And Posey was like, “What?” Almost weirdly defensively. “I just—Dude. I don’t care.”

And, almost an afterthought, “You two can circle-jerk without me.”

“Not much of a circle, then,” Dylan joked, but Posey didn’t answer, or respond at all, so he just dropped it. Just grabbed at his beer, and kept drinking, just to be doing something with his hands.

Til there was nothing left, just stifling silence, and Posey said, “You want him, right? So just fucking go already. Or you can sit here masturbating his shadow, I don’t know. And then I’m here cleaning cum off the walls, like ectoplasm.”

And Dylan figured out up, and basic movements, like the first go at new character controls, and ended up back in his trailer, head too quiet, body too calm.

And buckled, dry-gagging his heart out.

“What if it wasn't,” Dylan says. “Getting fired, or the break up. And my time line’s just way, way off.”

It's always weird, these sessions. Just, talking away, forever. The whole hour, just monologuing. But forgetting that's how it is, and stopping, constantly, trying to gauge a response.

Dr. Martin just waits.

“You know, what if I...” Dylan tries, and gives up. On whatever kind of introduction he's trying to do. Narration, he hates movies with pointless narration. Trying to tie everything together, all matchy-matchy. The clumsiest, cheesiest reincorporation ever: Just echoing that line back, verbatim, with maybe the slightest addition, or altered emphasis. When really the whole thing would've been a lot slicker without any of it. Or, really? The whole time, you're gonna be reading letters? Or recapping the movie instead of showing it, great. Shut up.

“Dylan,” Dr. Martin says, reminding. “Are you here?”

*Are you here.* How is—and he's trying, okay, he's trying not to just dismiss all of this, laugh it off instinctively, but—How's he supposed to take that seriously? Sitting in this little room, white noise going so he can just start violently sobbing if he wants to, or have a tantrum, or whatever freakish shit he's supposed to be doing, here. Anything goes, really, as long as it's here, in the moment. But getting caught on a tangent, trying to find the words for something he's never tried to put words to outside his own mind, just percolating—no. No, that's where we draw the line.

“I'm just,” he tries again. “What if I, what if it all turned to shit months before I thought? And I just missed it.”

It took so long to even register, but now... Dylan feels like an idiot.

Like the worst, the worst friend in the world.
Because Tyler isn’t a big sharer. He isn't, he never was.

But Posey used to be.

Dylan’s first thought is to text him, but that's always his first thought. With everything, it's the easiest way.

But that's—No, that's the point. That's the problem. Here's Dylan bumbling along, thinking everything’s resolved, when he's still avoiding any actual, face-to-face interaction.

So, set visit. Potential level of awkwardness? Astronomical. For so, so many reasons. But too bad. Too bad, this is happening.

Except he finds Holland, first, and she says, “You don't know?”

And the whole floor under Dylan just evaporates, just falls away.

“What'd I do,” he says, when Posey finally opens the door. “I messed up, I know, I just... I thought we were better. Stupid,” he adds, fighting not to claw at his face, his already stinging eyes.

“What are you talking about,” Posey says.


Posey looks at him. Pulls out his phone.

“You sent me forty texts about that OTP song.”

“No, I don't...” Dylan tries, tries again. “Yeah, we do. About random nothing, sure.”

Posey's still scrolling, barely listening.

“Hey, c'mon,” Dylan says. His gut's kind of grinding itself into a paste. “Can I—Please.”

There's something off in his voice, something rattling loose. Posey looks up.

“What is it,” he says. “Hoechlin, did he do something? Or—”

“What?” Dylan says, lost for a second. “No, this isn't—it's nothing to do with him. It's—You and me, I thought—I’m an idiot.”

“You're not,” Posey says, a little monotone.

“Yeah, no, of course not,” Dylan says. “So you just decided not to tell me about the biggest, craziest thing going on with you, but we're cool. We're texting about inane viral bullshit, that's what really matters, right?”

“What are you talking about?” Posey asks.

“You got,” Dylan says, and stops. “They let you go,” he says. “MTV. After all that time, for nothing.”

“It doesn't matter,” Posey says. “I hated it for years. I was just too chickenshit to quit. I wanna... I
wanna actually do something real. Produce, or... Not just be some fucking hand puppet.”

“I would've,” Dylan says. “I would've put you in the movie longer, if I thought you were free. Like, as co-writer.”


“Yeah, okay,” Posey says, too flat.

“They don't,” Dylan says. Feeling dizzy, seasick. “I didn't mean—Praising Hoechlin all the time, that wasn't, a... a comparison.”

Dylan's such a fucking jackass, he can't believe himself.

“I'm just obsessed with him,” Dylan says. “You know how it is. You get, like, tunnel vision.”

“Yeah, I know,” Posey says. “Except, no I don't. I kind of, don't care about anything? At all. For ages. Or,” he adds, “I think I do. And then it's gone, and whatever. World keeps on spinning.”

“I brought Stella,” Dylan says, and holds it up. “We can just...”

“Yeah, okay,” Posey says, and lets him in.

“Couldn't get a fucking tattoo without him signing off on it,” Posey says. Draining his first, reaching for another. “You know Arden's gone? For getting Shadowhunters. Wasn't a scheduling conflict, wasn't fucking—anything. He's just that much of a control freak.”

“Shit,” Dylan says feelingly.

“And she was like, the last person on set I could actually...” Posey shakes his head. “It's all bullshit.”

“Yeah it is,” Dylan says, tipping his beer at him in agreement. So he's not supposed to drink on meds, so what? He missed this.

“No,” Posey says. “Not just that, not just... Jeff. Everything.”

“Teen Wolf,” Dylan says.


“What the fuck happened to you?” Dylan says. Everything's kind of starting to rattle at the edges, his heart's going too fast.

“What the fuck didn't,” Posey says, and laughs, and falls over laughing.

“I know, I know I fucked up,” Dylan says. Unwrapping from around Posey's collar, his side. “We went out, we didn’t...” Shaking his head to clear it, and just making everything so much worse.

“Me and Tyler,” he says. “I forgot, man, I’m sorry.”
On the phone, Tyler isn't even more than annoyed, he's over it. In a second, he's already recalibrating. Moving on. Dylan knows how fucking fake that is. And he's letting it happen, because it's easier. Because he's got a dry mouth and a tender skull and because half of the world's two most important people are going through something he didn’t have the balls yesterday to even vaguely detect. Until it was just—obvious.

“I really am sorry,” he says, softer. “I'll—I'll talk to them, okay? Try to smooth things over. Or cover the deposit, at least.” And there he goes again, just treading on exposed nerves, never even thinking about it until after the fact. “No, no no no,” he interjects. “Because—because I’m an idiot. Yeah I am,” he says. “I’m just, I just blanked on it. And you were waiting, and that's a shitty feeling.” Scrubbing at his eyes, his jaw, trying to sit up without upsetting some core intestinal mechanism. “I don't like being shitty to you.”

Posey groans, twitches vaguely.

Dylan pats at his shoulder.

“I’m gonna make it up to you,” he tells Tyler. “I’m... I will, I swear. This isn't gonna be a thing, with us.”

Famous last words, right?

“I’m a shithead,” Dylan tells Tyler on Posey's porch, hugging him. He's a little tense, but he settles in Dylan's arms, urges him closer.

“I had, like, two beers. Not even,” Dylan corrects. “I just forgot how quick it hits, now.”

“You sure it's safe? Mixing,” Tyler says. His voice is warm, not an inch of judgment. Just concern.

Dylan is the suckiest, suckiest boyfriend. Fiancé, fuck.

Or fiancee? Who even knows.

“Love you,” he tells Tyler's shoulder. “Hate disappointing you.”

“You didn't...” Tyler starts, but he did, he obviously did. Just thinking about it, about Tyler just waiting there for him, it's the saddest thing in the world. “Hey. Hey, it's okay.”

“It's not,” Dylan says, fighting not to cry. “It's not, you're important. You're important to me.”

“I know,” Tyler says soothingly. “I know, D, it's okay.”

“Shouldn't be,” Dylan says.

“They let him go,” he tells Tyler, in the car. Handing back his water bottle, trying not to cry again. At how good he is, Tyler. At everything. “MTV,” he says, when the lump in his throat recedes. “Or Jeff, I don't know. Half a dozen of one, six of the other.”

“Permanently?” Tyler says. His hand on Dylan's back, just rubbing the beds of his fingers up and down, his thumb massaging in small circles. “I thought it was just a, a break. That's how they're spinning it.”
Of course, of course Tyler already knows.

“He didn't mention an end date,” Dylan says.

“Wow,” Tyler says.

“How can they just do that?” Dylan demands. “Just cut him off, like it's nothing. From his own show.”

“Wouldn't be the first time,” Tyler says.

It takes Dylan a minute.

“That's not the same,” he says, finally. “I was an oversensitive, condescending prick, people hated me.”

“Nobody hated you,” Tyler says. “Everyone has a bad day, once in a while. It shouldn't have been that easy.”

“Yeah, well he didn't do anything,” Dylan says. “Or, or Arden? She just booked something else. Pricked his paper-thin ego, that was it.”

“Arden's gone?” Tyler says. He shakes his head. “I'm glad I got out when I did.”

“Yeah, that wasn't right either,” Dylan says. “So you had an alternate thought, so what? We're not just bobble-heads.”

Tyler laughs.

“Honestly?” he says, after some consideration. “Maybe he was jealous.”

“Of your ideas,” Dylan says, nodding. “That's actually not that...”

“Of this,” Tyler says, and kisses him.

“So, um,” Dylan says, between interviews. “I wanna prove it to you. Prove I'm taking this seriously.”

“You don't have to prove anything,” Tyler says.


“Figure out the guest list?” Tyler suggests. “It's breaking my brain, just a little bit.”


“Fourteen, wow,” Dylan says. “What's the big...”

“So management, fine,” Tyler says. “And family, and friends. And before you know it, we don't fit in the venue. And I know you don't want,” he adds. “You don't like big parties. So I keep trying to like, narrow it down. And it just kind of mutates, all on its own.”

“Evolves, like a Pokemon,” Dylan says. Lays his hand on the back of Tyler's neck, scratches at his
hair. “Yeah, I can do that. You got it.”

“I love you,” Tyler mumbles, kind of squirming into the touch.


Lifting his hand, dragging his mouth just lightly there.

“Like you didn’t know that,” Tyler breathes, on a completely different planet.

Dylan laughs.

It's the worst feeling, coming out of these perfect moments. Remembering the look on Posey's face, the way he said, being a person. Like he gets it, understands it too exactly, what the come down of this high feels like.

Maybe without ever feeling the high at all.

Dylan's buried under thirty-four pages of Tyler's diligent notes, just trying not to lose it for the third time in a day. All this dedicated, detailed planning, and Dylan's just tripping through everything, barely even looking down at who he's stepping on. Tyler's not even taking this opportunity to relax, take a breath; no, he's cooking. He's been watching all these YouTube tutorials, getting more and more impressive all the time. And it's not like Dylan can't make a connection, the studiousness there, and how he's constantly looking to Dylan, after, at his plate, keeping an eye out.

Making sure he's eating.

And just, and just. How can Dylan even start to compare to that? Even come close to that level, that much effort, just to... Just to play it down, act like that little bit of praise at the end of it is more than he could ever ask for.

There's this pressure on Dylan's chest. This tightness, this mounting, mounting dread that he's gonna let Tyler down. He's gonna relapse, have a bad patch again, and Tyler's gonna pull himself apart trying to do everything, fix everything, when he can't. When he inherently, inherently can't.

This list, all fourteen near-identical versions of it, he's already doing it. Shedding everything, everything that's anything to him, trying to make Dylan happy.

Every list, every one, his friends are the ones crossed out. Brittany, Colton, Camille, gone. And Ian, his closest fucking friend, Ian—his Posey—isn't even on the list to begin with.

Because You don't like big parties, he didn't even ask. Didn't even reconsider once.

And what, what, what the fuck is Dylan doing? Cutting into him, getting between his—everything. His whole life, he's throwing away his whole life for this.

Isn't that what an abusive relationship is? Or, or a cult, something. Something dangerous, something inescapable.

And Dylan's just supposed to let him do that?

“Do you not actually have friends?” Dylan asks, and immediately feels like a tool. Tyler made
chicken tacos, the soft kind, no boxed shells, no seasoning packet cheats. Chicken tacos, and this salad with fucking—mandarin oranges in it, and Dylan opens his mouth and it's to ask Tyler if he has friends.

He feels like a tool, but he can't stop thinking about it. When has Tyler actually flaked on him, for anything? Had a night out, did something for himself, with someone else. “I mean, besides me,” he adds, later than a missed period. At least he's not counting himself out of the line-up too, god.

“I have friends,” Tyler says, and doesn't elaborate.

“But not Ian,” Dylan says. He should drop this, really, but he can’t. “And not, not Camille, or Brittany. What about Colton, you like Colton, or—or Linden—”

“What are you saying?” Tyler says.

“You're like the friendliest guy!” Dylan says, a little desperately. “Like, the nicest, charmingest—most charming guy,” he corrects.

“You're not that bad yourself,” Tyler offers. “Outside this conversation.”

“No, no,” Dylan says. “You... Back when we lived together, with Posey, we had people over all the time.”

“Yes,” Tyler says patiently.

“And like, you love parties,” Dylan goes on. “And just—being a team player, being...”

Tyler's looking at Dylan like he's crazy. He feels, he feels crazy.

“Is my memory just broken?” Dylan asks. “Have I just mixed you up, like, swapped you for some completely other guy in terms of social life?”

“I like being social,” Tyler agrees, bemused. “So what?”

“So... but you're not,” Dylan says. “I don't like doing anything, or, or interacting outside of work, or you or Posey. It makes sense that I'm this, this homebody.”

“Is that what I am?” Tyler asks, smiling a little too pleasantly.

“I don't know,” Dylan says, kind of—rocked to his core. “I don't...”

But he can't explain it.

“Is anyone actually okay?” Dylan asks. “Like, in the world. Is being happy even really a thing? On any kind of regular, dependable basis, I mean. Or is everyone just faking it, for everyone else.”

“What do you think?” Dr. Martin asks.

“I don't know,” Dylan says. “Like, I'm depressed, right? Supposedly. Supposedly there's some baseline of contentment I'm not hitting, that everyone else is.”

“That's one way to put it,” Dr. Martin says.

“But like, who actually is everybody?” Dylan says. “What does it even look like? Are they just
fucking giddy all the time? You can't function.”

“And you can,” Dr. Martin says.

“I don’t know,” Dylan says. “Sometimes, most of the time. By what standard? Maybe I have to be, like, going out, all the time, eagerly hoping to run into cameras, or fans, or whoever the fuck. While getting groceries, or meds. Or literally mid-piss, how about that? Just, no shred of privacy. And that's it, that's what I'm supposed to want.”

“There's nothing wrong with having boundaries,” Dr. Martin says.

“Yeah, tell that to the girls threatening to kill themselves if I don't answer them on Twitter.” Dylan scrubs at his face. “The way I see it? The whole world's a joke. Not even a good one.”

“Dylan,” Dr. Martin says. “Are you a danger to yourself?”


“This isn't about me,” Dr. Martin says.

“See?” Dylan says, pointing. “And you're the expert, on all of this.”

“Dylan,” Dr. Martin says. “I'm not depressed. What you're feeling isn't rational, or permanent. Try to remember that.”

“Yeah, I'll make a note of it,” Dylan says.

And realizes something.

“You didn't say you were happy,” he points out.

“Happiness is a state,” Dr. Martin. “It comes, and it goes. Just like fear, or sadness, or what I'm feeling, right now. But depression takes all that, and distorts it. Makes the good seem too fleeting, and the bad... endless. Insurmountable. It's not true,” she says. “I know it can feel... obvious, and unshakable, but that's not reality. And that's what we're fighting.”

“What's your head like?” Dylan asks. Quiet enough not to startle him, if he's anywhere close to sleep.

Tyler blinks at him blearily. He's taken his glasses off, it's weird. Dylan's getting so used to them. “What? It's fine.”

“No, I mean,” Dylan says, and tries to put it into words. “Like, what's your baseline. Mood-wise.”


“I don't know,” Dylan says. “Who says I'm even depressed?” he asks. “This feels—normal.”

“Could be,” Dylan says, his fingers awkward and needy again. They find Tyler's shoulder, slowly settle. “Yeah,” he says, giving up trying to figure it out. Just mapping Tyler's skin under his, just breathing. “Yeah, yeah yeah. I bet you're right.”

Chapter End Notes

oh you, careless eyes
oh you, happy bones
oh you, milk soft hands
oh, you, neatly combed
i'm never right
i'm never right
i'm never right
i'm never right, i hope
i'm never right, i hope
(i felt my heart sink, i think you fell head over heels only to be let down)

i'm never right - astronautalis ft isaiah
idk what to do man when it comes to longass memories. i hate when like half a chapter is in italics so i guess i'm just trusting that you're smart? but also feel free to ask if it turns out you can't read my mind

alternatively, [bloopety bloopety bloop *screen ripples*]

It doesn't mean anything, it doesn't. That Dylan's fifteen minutes late to another wedding thing, looking cornered as soon as he finally gives up trying to apologize for it, settles into a chair.

It's—It's cake tasting. It's food, it's a sensitive subject. That's all it is.

Except Tyler can't help thinking about that line, that Stiles line, if one is an instance and two is a coincidence...

It's stupid. It's stupid to take this much direction from a TV show. A TV show where Tyler's primary role was standing twenty feet from the camera, glaring, and wearing tight jeans and not much else. Maybe writhing a little, for variety. Every once in a while, just when the role would start to feel like some really convoluted practical joke, Jeff would change it up, just a little bit. And Dylan pushed for it, got Tyler more than he ever could've...

But it wasn't enough. Nothing ever is. Tyler had to keep pushing, keep prodding, until Jeff started rolling his eyes and turning away just on seeing Tyler approaching.

That's not gonna happen here.

Cake tasting, it's cake. To Tyler, it's the easiest thing in the world. But Dylan's a different person, with different needs. So why is it so hard for Tyler to just accept that? Just let him breathe. Who even needs a cake, God. Or needs him at this consultation, when he'll eat it or he won't eat it, all the same, regardless.

It's just that Tyler had this idea. Before. How this would go, how all wedding planning would go. That it would be—stressful, yeah, but fun, too. Same as co-writing their movie, just collaborating together. Just goofing off, having a good time, and then enjoying the result.

But that's not—it doesn't matter. What the picture in his head looked like, that's some fantasy. Some stupid, childish...

The reality is Dylan hates this, all of it. Party planning, the million inane details, doing anything private in public. Being the focus of a crowd, having eyes on him.

So what the hell is the point of putting him through this, exactly?

I don't need, Tyler thinks, thinks of saying. The fourteenth minute watching the door, trying takes in his head. We don't have to do a real... No, no. It doesn't have to be some big production. It's just us.
Just us, just some religious formality. All the rest of this is just... scene dressing.

*It doesn't matter. I don't care.*

Except he does. Idiotically, childishly, Tyler does. He wants—not some detail-perfect dream wedding, he can recognize a naïve fantasy and dismiss it, but... something. Something he can remember, the next time Dylan's falling all over himself trying to apologize, and it's temporarily not enough.

The truth is, the truth is Tyler's a romantic. Always has been, always... And giving things up can be romantic, so maybe he just needs to recenter, appreciate what he actually has. But part of him, a real, true part of him wants to just celebrate. Celebrate them, where they are. After everything that's happened, he just really, really wants to put his arm around Dylan and walk past a crowd of heretics who thought they knew better, and not even look in their direction. That super saccharine image, the Just Married balloons and streamers flying from the back of the car, the closing credits. The whole thing.

But Dylan would hate that, every detail. So Tyler strikes the doubters off the list, again, again. And Ian never makes it on at all.

That never takes a second's hesitation.

“The scene,” Tyler said, and blanked, ruined any chance at anything. Too conscious of the time slipping by already. Nothing in his head, no commentary to add; he just stood there, just proving...

Not like he needed to be on Dylan's level, not like he actually thought he could, but he knew as soon as it was over, as soon as he couldn't fit it to a conversation anymore, it'd come, and keep coming. Everything he could've said, instead of, “Seems pretty straightforward.”

Just driving, clearing his head days later, he can't stop thinking about it. That scene, and the million ways he could've taken it apart, put it back together better.

Like, Derek trusts Stiles now, when did that happen? Unquestioningly trusts his opinions, and decisions, goes along with his ideas. And maybe that's a post-Nogitsune thing, going easier on him, maybe—maybe everyone around him is walking on eggshells, and more than anything he wants those little fights with Derek back, that bickering, that little bit of resistance, or friction. It's just that the awkward place they're in won't allow it: there's Malia, there's this sudden, unbreachable distance between them. And they both think that's how the other wants it, so they never even try to get back to where they were. Just playing fine, and they're not, but they're resigned to it. To feeling miserable until they don't, until time fades it, or Malia, Braeden, anyone, anything else.

When they could just *talk* to each other. When either one of them could just admit what they're feeling, and they wouldn't have to play this stupid game anymore.

And what's—what's the worst thing that could happen, then? They're already barely civil, barely acquaintances. Practically strangers. What could be worse than that?

And that's... Tyler's not stupid, he knows what he's doing. Going down two lanes at once, finding the moral in everything. Some kind of takeaway, some lesson.

There's a convention, a Teen Wolf convention, Dylan's last. Tyler can't imagine the way Dylan sees them. Can't wrap his head around seeing them as anything but the easiest thing in the world, just talking. Just hanging out, goofing around. And occasionally you're funny, or charming, but
even when you're not, you're just a blank canvas. Just something for people to project onto, this character that matters, really matters to people, no matter how meaningless it feels when you watch it back scene by scene, and just think of everything you wish you could've added. But it's not about you, it's about this world, this world that's bigger than Tyler or Dylan or even Jeff or the original movie. It's the world where that's just the tip of the iceberg. Where any offhand thought about Derek, or Stiles, hunters or werewolves or anything, is just as legitimate as anything actually on the show. Where your ideas don't have to be Jeff-approved to matter.

But Dylan doesn't see it like that. The fans'll love him no matter what, but for him, it's just pressure, and expectations. He'll say one dumb thing and get in his head about it, convince himself he'll never live it down. Even if Tyler's said four dumb things in less time, and face-palmed and forgot about it, Dylan's different. He can't get out of the spiral himself, he needs a distraction.

And Tyler, he used to be that. He's glad to be that for him. That's why Dylan committed to a joint panel, him and Tyler, back when things were solid between them. Back when he actually relaxed around Tyler, said, “I'd do—I'd do any interview with him, he's the best at them.”

There's one more convention with Dylan, and this time Tyler's not gonna get distracted by—weigh ins, or fat to muscle ratios. Dylan doesn't care about that. He'll just talk to him, through the panel, and after, they'll just talk. And Tyler won't hold back, won't play it cool—that's what nearly killed them last time. His whole approach made no sense. I miss you, so let me show you how awkward and stilted our interactions could be, and never dare touch you, and leave without even trying to explain. And somehow it didn't end in some amazing showing of love on Dylan's part, some big romantic finale. Who would've guessed. That just standing there like an idiot, trying to look attractive, wouldn't have Dylan falling into his arms.

It's scary, it really is, how that could've been the end. Could've been their last scene, on camera or off, and Tyler wasted it with some typical Hollywood mentality strategy, that the way to win back your ex is with a movie-star makeover. Scary that Tyler fell for that, that he forgot how Dylan's nothing like that. Looks, yeah, great, but what separates you from a Kardashian? Plastic and fake and shallow, and not worth starting a conversation with. And Tyler could've fit right in with it, tailoring himself to this pervasive, perfection-obsessed culture. It's, it's eye-opening. How you don't even realize you're buying into it, even as you mock it in your head.

Dylan, he's more than that. He's always been more than that, he's never changed. Kept his head, kept his sense of humor about it, the ridiculous standards and expectations here. It's the reason, one of the million reasons Tyler fell for him in the first place.

So how could he just forget that? Just lose sight, of everything. Everything that's important.

Tyler can't make sense of it.

“'She's a former Victoria's Secret model,’” Ian says, with such gravitas Tyler face-palms for a flat minute. “Dropped out, couldn't take the pressure. You know what that means?”

“I'm not...” Tyler tries, shaking his head. “I'm not seeing anyone, I told you.”


“I have plans.” Tyler says. Kind of grimacing just contemplating it, what Ian’s suggesting. “And that's... I don't wanna be that person.”
“A hot blooded, American male?” Ian says.

“A creep,” Tyler says. “Who, who takes advantage—”

“Where exactly is this holier-than-thou attitude supposed to get you?” Ian says. “A near year without touching another human being, that's healthy. I'm sure Dylan's sworn off sex too. Unless... Could it be? He's a popular millennial who hasn't dedicated the rest of his life to staying in and moping.”

“Shut up,” Tyler says, trying not to think about it. Even if it's true, that's not... They're not actually together. It doesn't mean they won't be, if Dylan has some... if there's someone else, in between. His head is starting to throb.

“All she's asking for is a chance,” Ian says loftily. “You could be the one who finally—”

“Just stop,” Tyler snaps. “Just—I don't want to. So just drop it, okay? Don't be an asshole.”

“Your loss,” Ian says, but he shuts up, after that.

There's work, and it's good, a good distraction. And baseball at work, which has to be the best of both worlds. Even with most scenes off the field, in locker rooms and college dorms, it's just nice. Feels familiar; feels more like home than home has for a long time. That perfect combination of competition and support, that's family. Until you turn out to be something they didn't expect, and you lose it all, can't go back.

Ken's a hard worker, throws himself into all of it: the game, school, practice. And something's gotta give, something always does. Things come to a head, it all falls away.

Now what?

Your whole life resets, the map you worked out as a kid, kept refining and refining, and taking every success as proof, that you're on the right path. That this is it. This is what your life is supposed to be.

And then it isn't, it can't be. There's nowhere to go but back. Back home, back to the drawing board, trying to find some kind of new direction that doesn't feel like failure. You can be a former baseball player, is that what you want? All your life, nothing but looking backwards, and regrets. Missing everything that could ever come afterward, seeing it all through the same narrow lens.

What else is there?

That's Ken's head in this scene, that loss, that emptiness. Where do you go from being so certain, about everything?

It's maybe ten lines total, but that's never mattered. Not really.

If he's real, there's always more. Doesn't matter what breaks through the page, what gets left behind.

Tyler never wants to do anything halfway.
Shippers of these two aren't gonna like this, Tyler reads from the iPad in Ian’s hands. He stops, looks up, eyebrows high. “This crap again?”

“But is it crap?” Ian says. “True or not, someone must be saying it. Aren't you curious who the source is?”

“It's nobody,” Tyler says. “Some blogger without a life of his own. I don't care.”

“It's Tyler Posey,” Ian says.

Tyler rolls his eyes. “No it's not.”

“You didn’t even read it,” Ian says.

“Because I’m smarter than you,” Tyler says, only half joking, but he can't help but glance down for a few seconds, his eyes catching on... something.

Y: [Twink Wolf] was worried.

X: About [Teen DILF]?

Y: About what [TD] kept doing. Hanging all over him, hamming it up for the cameras. And ... fans. Trying to make himself relevant.

“People understand this?” Tyler says. But he's playing dumb. Of course there are nicknames, and of course they're equally obvious and ridiculous; what do you expect? And of course it's some horrible claim—that Dylan felt trapped, that Tyler's a famewhore. Nothing gets internet traction faster. “I'm not even a,” he starts, shaking his head, but it's not worth it. It's some internet joke. It always is.

Tyler pushes the tablet away.

“A DILF? Of course you are,” Ian says. “You haven't seen the story? Fic, excuse me.”

“Just stop,” Tyler says. “You're enjoying this too much.”

“Your fifteen minutes of shame,” Ian says. “I’m as outraged as you. That's why I want answers.”

“There aren't any,” Tyler says. He doesn't know why he bothers.

It's all so idiotic.

“Tyler Posey,” Ian says. “Can't you just hear him say those words?”

“Stop,” Tyler bites out, almost Derek-like. “This isn't funny. It's my life.” He's starting to lose it, just trying to explain. “I don't... You can't live like that. Second guessing people all the time. Trying to figure out what they're thinking. I don't need to know.”

“Unless it's the truth,” Ian says. “And you're about to make the biggest mistake of your life. I’m trying to keep you from that humiliation.”

Of course, of course. Tyler doesn't know what he was thinking, sharing his plans, his resolutions. That Dylan's the priority, and the goal, and the only thing that matters, really, at all, like Ian’s ever gonna understand, or approve. When Ian wants nothing more or less than Tyler signing up for the Bachelor. Or some other revolving door of meaningless conversations, or something with no need for talking at all.
“I’ve already made my biggest mistake,” Tyler says. Tiredly, he's just tired. “I’m just trying to fix it.”

He nods along for Ian’s sake, for his own sake, just to stop the lectures, but when Tyler sees Dylan at Kitsunecon, when Dylan looks at him, it's exactly the same as all those parties and interviews a million years ago. That rushing relief, thank god. Thank god, I’m not alone in this.

Tyler stops pretending to be rational or careful, just threads through the spotty crowd to him, puts a hand on his shoulder, and another, just stays. Dylan warm and settling under him exactly like old times, and gravitating closer, and Tyler can't speak. Doesn't trust his own throat, right now.

But then Dylan goes still, backs up, puts his arm up between them, a clear boundary. Looks at Tyler like he's seeing him for the first time, or remembering the last, and they're nothing to each other.

And Tyler... Tyler has to step back, has to rush off, check on his bag. Ian's hand catching his shoulder, he shrugs it off. He needs to find his bag, make sure everything’s there, where he put it, that he didn’t forget.

In his hotel room, he can't stop reading it all off his phone. Everything tagged with those stupid names. All those horrible rumors, that Tyler knows Dylan would never actually, actually...

But does he, really? Does he really know anything?

He loves Dylan, but how would Dylan know that? He's never said it. Just tried to show it, tried to express it in easier ways, touch, and compliments. And got moody when Dylan didn’t wanna be out in public, public in public. Got this idea in his head that that's something you can deserve. If you matter enough to a person. When really, really Dylan could've been testing him, what is this? Am I what you really want? Or just the fame by association.

And Tyler chose, and that's it. Game over.

Tyler doesn't know where to begin, how to fix it, now. But he has to, he has to. More than just for himself, his own loneliness, if he hurt Dylan. Made him feel used, made him feel...

And it is happening, he was right. Right to check and double check, because here it comes again, at the worst possible time. Tyler's last chance.

If he wrote it out, if he got it down, maybe it would be easier. Figuring out what he wants to say, and what doesn't matter, and how exactly to express it so it comes out right this time. So Dylan understands. Exactly how incredible he is, and what Tyler thinks of him, how he feels. How he would never, never put his career ahead of what they had. And he's sorry, he's sorry for ever making it seem any other way.

But there isn’t time, it just slips away. There's just notes, pages and pages, none of them right. One last chance to explain, to really give it everything, before he can start to think about what a good life might look like without him. I used to have Dylan, and everything, but now I have... Whatever, whatever's left.

Tyler's trying not to think about it.

And then it's showtime.
It's easy, too easy, this time. With an audience full of questions, all the pressure off Tyler to supply the conversation. He's just answering, just genuinely reminiscing, getting lost in it.

But he looks at Dylan, the millionth caught gaze, it keeps happening, and Dylan swallows hard, looks down and away, and he's...

Tyler can't remember what he said, what the question was, his own middle name.

“Dylan,” he says, low. Reaching out, trying to—comfort him, reassure him, get some kind of response. Patting at his shoulder, his neck, keeping his hands there. “Are you okay?”

“Fine,” Dylan says. His voice flat, shoulders tense. “Don’t even—don’t, don’t let it concern you.”

“What?” Tyler says. Trying to understand, trying to keep nodding, smiling, at all the people on the other side of this. “I don’t... What?”

“’s cool,” Dylan says, looking just past him. Tears on his lashes. Tyler's head starts to pound. “I don’t need—I mean, it doesn’t matter.”

“Dylan,” Tyler says. He doesn't know how, or why, he just knows he's ruining this. With everything he can't say in public, that Dylan won't trust in public. “Let’s, let’s not do this here.”

“Or at all,” Dylan offers. “Whatever. Let’s just spend another nine months wondering what the fuck—” His voice catches, and it's a few seconds before he says, voice tight, “Yeah, let’s not.”

The rest of the panel is torture, Tyler scared to death. Of every stupid word here being their last, of never getting to make it right.

Tyler's glued to his side, he's not budging. After, Dylan darts off somewhere, but Tyler finds him, finds his side, holds his palm up, stop, please. Leans in close, says, “I think we should talk. Privately.”

“Nah, I think we're done talking,” Dylan says. He won't make eye contact, he won't look up at all. “Why don’t you go talk to some supermodel. If you can stand limiting yourself to just one.”

“You keep saying that,” Tyler says. He can't make sense of it. “Why do you... I don’t know any models.”

“Maybe you should get to know them,” Dylan suggests. “You know, before you sleep with them.”

Tyler stares at him.

“Is that...” That can't be it, it can't be as simple as that. ”You think I’m seeing somebody?”

“Just one?” Dylan asks. Scoffing, not quite managing it. Scuffing his sneaker into the carpet. The back of Tyler's neck tinges a little bit. “No, nope. I think you found the buffet. The full smorgasbord.”

“I’m,” Tyler says, staggered. After all this, every semiconscious thing he thought he could've done, it's disconcertingly simple. “I haven’t... There was one date. Ian thought it would be...” He shakes his head. “I was miserable.”

“Yeah, that’s not what Ian says,” Dylan says tightly.
"God." Tyler doesn't even wanna know. How Ian was playing both sides of this, just amusing himself. Never mind the consequences.

“What’d he say to you?” Tyler asks. “I told him I didn’t...” He shakes his head, keeps shaking. “There hasn’t been anybody.”

“Then what,” Dylan says. “I’m just too much of a spaz to, to bother—” His voice cracking, and Tyler's fighting himself, fighting every instinct telling him to touch Dylan, help him feel better. He can't, not until he's sure.

“You’re the one who can’t stand me touching you in public,” Tyler says. It's a question more than anything else. A plea, even. “You’re the one who said it was all just a funny joke. Fanservice.”

“No,” Dylan says, looking up, looking lost. Alarmed, suddenly. “No, that wasn’t—I had to say that crap. Posey doesn’t get it, okay? And I didn’t want things to be weird—”

“Well,” Tyler says, and that's exactly when it kicks in, keeps kicking.

“What,” Dylan says. His eyes fixed on Tyler now, exactly the worst time. “That’s it, that’s why—You could’ve told me.”

“I tried to,” Tyler says, just a little stronger than he means to. This is it, they're solving it, he can't risk this for anything. “You just agreed. So.”

“I didn’t think it mattered what I wanted,” Dylan says. “You made up your mind.”

“No!” Tyler says. Trying, trying, but his head's spinning. His control's slipping away. “I didn’t! I didn’t want to... I just...” He can't think. “It wasn’t a joke to me.”

“That’s not what it was,” Dylan says. Eyes wide, voice soft. “It’s just... some people don’t get it.”

“So explain it,” Tyler says. “Or don’t. Don’t... Just don’t,” he says, pleading. Barely about this, anymore. “It was never a joke to me.”

“So I screwed up,” Dylan says. Voice oddly cold, but there's no mistaking the look on his face. “My bad.”

Tyler can't argue anymore, he can't speak. It's a fight just keeping his eyes open.

Quiet, he says, “I hate fighting with you.” Slings his arm around Dylan’s shoulders, like its nothing, like he doesn't need the support.

Dylan curls close against him. Tyler could cry.

“We’re okay?” Dylan asks, and Tyler nods, but that's a mistake. Any sound, any movement now is.

“More than,” he manages, and presses his forehead to Dylan's shoulder, eyes squeezed shut.

He blames jet lag, blame himself, he's just tired. Just exhausted, just forgot how exhausting these things can be.

And Dylan gets it, more than gets it, lets him sleep. It's an easier one, the pill kicking in early, and Tyler wakes up almost back to normal, Dylan on his side the next bed over, just watching him, a soft look on his face.
Tyler’s feeling a lot better, really. Really, he is.

“It’s a big bed,” he offers, gesturing at the length of it. Sitting up, patting the space beside him.

“You're a big guy,” Dylan says.

Tyler raises an eyebrow.

There’s a panel with Ian the next day. Tyler doesn’t have words.

“So that model,” Ian says, after.

“What did you say to him?” Tyler bursts out. “Dylan, you told him... what?” He doesn’t think he's ever been so physically angry. In such a visceral, inescapable way. “That I’m happy? He doesn’t matter? Or, or that he should move on. Forget about us, there never was one.”

“What are you talking about?” Ian says. Like it's nothing, like he can't even remember the moment he completely fucked with the best part of Tyler's life.

“You told Dylan I was seeing people,” Tyler says. He's lightheaded, he's shaking. “I never asked you to do that. I wasn't.”

“We never spoke,” Ian says. “Not about you. I spoke to Tyler Posey.”

“Not this again,” Tyler says, disgusted. “I don't care who it was. You playing with his head like that? With my life?” He shakes his head. “You're gonna stop,” he says. “Making decisions for me, and him, and playing out these little mind games, thinking you can control the result. You can’t.”

It takes a minute just to catch his breath, calm down. Ian just watches him.

“I take it you're back together, then,” he says.

“Yeah, we are,” Tyler says. Defiant: See? You don’t know everything. You don't know anything about us.

“Funny,” Ian muses. He's infuriatingly unaffected. “You'd think you'd be happier.”

“I am,” Tyler says, but Ian always gets the last word. In the long term, in Tyler's head, regardless. And it's not worth it. He's not worth another second of Tyler's time. Or thoughts, or anything.

Tyler takes off, leaves him alone.

“Do you not actually have friends?” Dylan asks, a year later, and really, Tyler should have known this was coming.

“I have friends,” he says.

“But not Ian,” he says, and Tyler all but nods.

No one needs a friend like that.
Tyler has friends, he does. Could have added people to his guest list. Camille, she was there for him, that worst day, all the others. India, too, with the advice. And Brittany. They all had all this advice, about Dylan.

_You can't reward bad behavior. Grow a little backbone._

_Oh, honey, he's not sick. He's throwing a tantrum._

_You really wanna be thirty and still living a lie?_

There's still Colton. But now he and Ian are... something, some kind of package deal. So it's both or none. So it's none.

It shouldn't matter what number it all adds up to. How many spots on a list, that's not what's important. Quality over quantity. Tyler has Dylan, and then there's everyone else. And everyone else is fine, and Tyler's social, he likes being social. But Dylan's the only one he really needs. If Maslow's hierarchy was rewritten with Tyler in mind, it would be Dylan, and then everything else.

It's just that Tyler knows how that sounds. And Dylan, he scares easy.

The last thing Tyler ever wants to do is scare Dylan away.

They're fine, they're _fine_. It's just getting harder. Every stumbling-in apology is starting to blur together with the last. And there's a thousand things that need doing, and Dylan swears he's done editing and re-editing the cut they already settled on, the one they went back and watched another two times between near-identical placebos, trying to find the best one blind. He swears he's done, but three in the morning Tyler snaps awake to find Dylan half-curled away, watching discarded takes on his laptop, taking notes on his phone.

“Nightmare?” Dylan asks, somehow alerting to Tyler's eyes on him without taking his off the screen. Turning to Tyler then, palm flattening the laptop lid shut before Tyler shakes his head. “Did I wake you? I'm sorry.”

Apologies. Tyler's sick of apologies. But they come with Dylan's hands on him, his gaze soft, undistracted, and that's all Tyler really needs.

For a while, anyway.

Tyler always feels it before it comes.

Feels it, and stops it, and that's the end of it, but this time Tyler fucks up. This time Tyler gets distracted by the million other things he needs to lock down, and ends up staring like an idiot at the empty orange bottle between his fingers, trying to remember what piled on top of him last time that made him put off getting a refill to now, in the car three minutes from the goddamn airport.

“You okay?” Dylan says, craning his neck to see. Tyler doesn't know what he's doing, how it's so obvious to Dylan, the panic he's choking down. The little lies he tells himself, trying to move past caring: Maybe it won't be so bad, this time. He'll drink water, he'll cover his eyes. A coffee for caffeine, Tylenol, sometimes—that used to work, sometimes.

Except planes make it worse, he knows this. Planes make it worse; the thin air, and the noise,
turbulence, lack of space. Lack of control, over everything. Just trapped in a shuddering metal box full of obnoxious people, seriously considering just Hulking the door open and taking his chances between the propeller blades and the long drop to oblivion.

Fine, he thinks, doesn't trust himself enough to try to say. He nods vaguely, already almost feeling it, pushes his glasses up to massage the bridge of his nose.

“You didn't drink,” Dylan says.

Of course. Of course now has to be exactly when he starts trying to figure it out.

“Just a little nauseous,” Tyler says. Dehydration, his mind supplies, after too long, but there's no place left in the already-moving conversation.


“It's not your driving,” Tyler says. But this is how it is, with Dylan, he blames himself. Takes every mildly uncomfortable moment around him and takes responsibility. And tries to save everyone by running, by leaving them alone. Where they'll be safer, presumably, but in reality, it's just miserable, and lonely. On top of whatever else.

It's not like Tyler would've said anything if things were different. If Dylan was different. It wouldn't matter.

He's never told anyone. Why start now?

It gets worse before they even leave the runway. Tyler knew it would, sooner or later, but knowing and trying to prepare, and actually getting hit with it, are two very different things.

Dylan's alarmed, of course he is, without Tyler making a sound, just looking stiffly past everything, trying to breathe normally. Those little exercises he used to try, mindfulness, meditation. It's not crap, it can work. It's just next to impossible to actually make it make any kind of meaningful difference.

“Tyler,” Dylan says. His hand high on Tyler's cheek, cool palm pressed against Tyler's forehead. “Ty? Talk to me.”

“I can't.” Tyler manages. There's a certain amount of effort in swallowing back the sound itching to explode every time he opens his mouth. The extra inch of unsteady breath, the near-inevitable trapped whimper. And he can't let it go, start the whole thing that comes with it, when he turns powerless. That's absolutely not on the table.

“If it's that bad,” Dylan says, like he has any idea, and Tyler grits out, “Just leave it alone.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says, but he shakes his head. “Yeah, I can't really... I can't just sit here and do nothing.”

“So you'll just annoy the vomit out of me,” Tyler says, but the pride of the retort does help, somehow. “Thanks so much.”

“Ty,” Dylan says. And searches Tyler's face for something, and swallows, swallows. “I will get us the fuck off this plane. If it's that—”
“It’s not that bad,” Tyler cuts him off. Not even entirely sure why.

“We’re not in the air,” Dylan says. “We can—we can go back home. Get a private—”

“Stop,” Tyler says. It’s frustratingly tempting, the easy out. “Please, just... I just need quiet.”
Dylan quiets.

It doesn’t get better, and then it really hits, and Tyler doesn’t know who he was kidding, before, pretending the training montage was the fight scene. It’s worse than Tyler remembers, and he can’t... can’t exactly stifle it, the sound fighting up his throat. The caught breaths, trying to hold it back.

“Tyler,” Dylan says. “Tyler, hey, are you—Can you breathe?”

But Tyler can’t speak, and by the time he can, Dylan’s already half out of his seat, arm high, stabbing at buttons. People turning all around them, conferring with each other, phones coming out in droves.

“Yeah, I don't know,” Dylan says, to some someone. Tyler's trying not to actually absorb any sound at all.

“He's just...” Dylan's hands on him, too tentative, searching. “Something’s wrong. I don't know,” he says. He's freaking out. “I don't know, I don't know what's happening. Tyler? C'mon, talk to me. Or—or don't, god, just...”

He takes a breath, lets it out. Says, quiet, “What do you need?”

“It's,” Tyler manages, and for a moment that has to be enough. “Headache,” he says, with some effort. “Just a bad...” But it's building, still building somehow. He shuts his mouth hard, tries not to physically exist as much as possible.

“But like,” Dylan says. His fingers on Tyler's wrist like he's tracking a pulse. “Like, a headache headache? Or like a... numbness, or like a, like a really sudden stabbing pain—”

“Headache,” Tyler says. Eyes stinging, he's fighting just to breathe.

“Someone'll have Tylenol,” Dylan says, determined, about to rise from his seat again, make some announcement. Tyler's already tensing, preparing to shield his ears.

Dylan's cupping his hands around his mouth.

“D,” Tyler says. Tears in his eyes, he's fighting not to sob. “Please, don't.”


He gags on nothing. On hot spinning air, on the back of his own dry throat.

“Yeah?” Dylan asks, already reaching up, feeling for Tyler’s bag in the overhead compartment. diggin through it. “Where—”
“Ran out,” Tyler says. Defeated, after all this time. All that work he put into training, and then he messes up in the first real inning.

Tyler can't think, can't stop thinking: Five hour flight. It's a five hour flight, there'll be hours of this. Of finally, finally being exposed, as nothing like Dylan’s fantasy of him at all. How are you real, and Tyler isn't, he's just hiding. Just choking it down, letting Dylan fill in the blanks with all these overblown flattering conclusions.

“We'll get more,” Dylan says. Already gathering his things, Tyler's things in his arms, strapping bags over bags, leaning back slightly against the weight. “We'll get a refill, we'll go private. Or we'll miss it, whatever. C'mon, before we can't.”

“It's already been too,” Tyler says, when he can speak without fear of sobbing. “It won't... It's too late.”


Tyler’s impossibly tense already, just bracing. For what, he doesn't know.

But Dylan's hands just settle on Tyler's arm, the back of Tyler's neck. Just cool, just steady.

“What helps?” he asks, quiet. Barely a whisper, fingers gentling through Tyler's hair. Tyler curls against Dylan’s hoodie, eyes shut tight, stinging. Dylan’s palm just soothing across his shoulders.

Tyler loves, he loves him.

“Dark,” Tyler says, when he can. “Quiet.”

Dylan builds their combined mess of bags into a steady monument across his thighs. Pulls his pillow from behind him and lays it over the top, lets Tyler just hide his face. A steady hand on his back, fingers threading through his.

“Don't be afraid to squeeze, okay?” Dylan says, low. “Really go for it.” A flash of a grin, even now. Tyler can hear it. “I want you to.”

It settles into something almost manageable, after a while, Tyler breathing out the pain in just little shudders, small sounds. The airline blanket overhead, Dylan's massive headphones. Dylan’s constant touch, soothing, wherever it goes.

But of course there's turbulence, and Tyler barely makes it to the bathroom before he's sick, dry gagging, throat scraped raw. He grabs at the wall for support outside, just leans for a little while, lightheaded and unsteady.

He forgot, forgot how awful it is, choking on your own throat, feeling shaky and hot and cold, tears streaming. Dylan had a whole month of this, longer, all while playing peppy, making jokes. Tyler’s shivering and miserable and angry at his own stupid body for doing this, for getting like this. He can't imagine being witty right now, can't imagine fooling anyone into thinking he's okay, even for a minute. Barely trusts himself to keep upright without a wall as backup.

But Dylan’s already coming up behind him, already reaching out, hugging an arm under Tyler’s, easing him back to their seats. He's got water and a hot towel and the pillow again, everything and everything and then some. Tissues, earplugs, Coke, a warm wet towel. A towel filled with a Ziploc bag filled with ice.

“I Googled,” he says. “And... Mel, the flight attendant.” He half-gestures to her, somewhere past
Tyler's line of vision. “She's seen it all.”

“You're,” Tyler says, and near-gags again. The ice helps, kind of numbs it, and the warm towel unlocks his stiff jaw, but he can't talk, not unless he wants to paint the place orange.

“Don't worry about it now,” Dylan says, rubbing his shoulder. “We'll just get through this flight, and find our hotel. Or, whatever. Whatever you need. Just try to... sleep, maybe. If that's even...”

It's not. Tyler's record is a little over two days, and by then he was just about homicidal. It helped, for once, playing the monosyllabic, sunglasses-wearing patron saint of irritation and barely controlled temper. He got one weird look from Posey, that was it. Dylan thought the whole thing was one long, method-acting joke. As much as Tyler ever not being perfect is a joke to him.

“No I didn't,” Dylan says in the hotel. There's weed, it—helps. “I thought—My head, right?” He keeps saying this, tempering all his feelings with this. “I thought you hated me.”

“Why would I,” Tyler starts, and Dylan says, “I didn't know why. Does there have to be a reason? Or just one.”


“Yeah, well, I underestimated your kind heart,” Dylan says. He's half-grinning, but it's Tyler's least-favorite kind of joke.

“How do you still not get this,” Tyler says. “I'm in love with you. I'm not nice, I’m not...” He can't think of the name. The, the charity cliché. “Mother Teresa,” he says, eventually. “It's not sympathy, it's not a fucking... favor. You're the best part of my life.”

“The only part, these days,” Dylan says, and seems more surprised to hear it aloud than Tyler is. “Shit, I didn’t...”

“I have a life,” Tyler says. Apparently it needs to be said. “You're a really big part of it,” he agrees. “But... so what? I love you,” he says again. “We're writing partners,” he ticks off on his fingers. “We're friends, we're really close. We're making a movie. We're getting married.” Dylan looks down at his hands. “Aren't we?”

“What?” Dylan's looking at him, suddenly, he looks stricken. “Of—of course we are.”

“It's just,” and all at once Tyler can't exactly look at him. “Doesn't seem like you're really that happy about it.”

“You get migraines from stress,” Dylan says, after a stifling silence. “Right? And lack of, lack of sleep, or not eating, or or exercising the way your body's used to.”

“I just get them,” Tyler says.

“And you never told me,” Dylan says. “Even... that night, that night in the hospital. I was a moody bitch, and you started crying. Even then, you didn’t tell me.”

“That wasn't,” Tyler tries. Trying to find the connection. “It wasn't relevant.”

“Oooh, relevant,” Dylan says. “No, yeah. I'm stressing you out to the point of tears, and you're having nightmares about me, and that crappy year, and what I put you through, but sure. It's not relevant. That your head fucking attacks you, like on a regular basis, that you're taking over the
counter medication trying to deal with it, and we're getting married and this is what I am, this is what I do, I make everything worse. Is that relevant enough for you?”

He's crying.

“No you don't,” Tyler says. A little dumbly, a little paralyzed, and then his mind starts working again, and he manages to take Dylan's hand, to curl enough fingers under his jaw, behind his ear, to tip his forehead against Tyler's shoulder, so the tears hit hot, soak through his skin. “No you don't, you don't. Not for me.”


“You can't take that on,” Tyler says. “What's going on with them, that's them. That's not something you could've...”

“They were so fucking happy,” Dylan says. “Before me, before... And when I was a kid. Everything started with me.”

“That's not true,” Tyler says. God, god. “He admitted, it wasn't the first time. He admitted that.”

“I kept having panic attacks,” Dylan says. “As a kid, for no reason. He got stressed out, he got...”

“That's not the reason,” Tyler says.


“You said it yourself,” Tyler says. “You get migraines from stress. But yeah, no, sure. My childhood was a fairytale.”


“Hoechlins don't really talk,” Tyler says. “Sarcasm, maybe.”

“You're taking my name, then,” Dylan says.

“Yeah?” Tyler says. But it's decided, it's the best decision. “Yeah, definitely.”

“After my serial cheater dad,” Dylan says, he's smirking. That kind of joke again.

“After the love of my life,” Tyler says, barely even blushing hearing himself say it.


“Shut up,” Tyler says, pushing him. Too far, he lands on his back, just lies there like that, grinning up at nothing. Then reaches out, pulling Tyler down on top of him.

“I don't wanna let you down,” Dylan says, really seriously.

“You couldn't,” Tyler says.
“So no one ever found out,” Dylan says. “In fifteen years, no one.”

He's strangely—angry, about it. Tyler thought they were done with this, but as it turns out, Dylan's just picked up a second wind. Found this one thing where Tyler's powerless, even if, for the most part, he doesn't let himself be. He handles it, deals with it, it's nobody else's problem. It doesn't have to be a problem.

Dylan, he's got hell in his head, constantly. Tyler doesn't need to add to it.

It's just that this one time, he didn't have a choice. Powering through wasn't an option, or stopped being an option. And Dylan saw him. The real him, the—not real. He's not lying, he's not faking. He just has all these things he has to do, and he does them. Usually gladly. Until he can't.

It's just that usually, if he really can't, he doesn't really share about it. Turn it into some kind of viewable experience, some kind of big song and dance for everyone to comment on.

He's, he's mindful. Of the effect it would have on people. And it isn't necessary, to start all that, so why would he—


“You don't tell people,” Tyler says. “What's, what you went through. Your parents still don't—”

“I tell you,” Dylan says. “You'd want me to tell you. If something, like, came back. Or started up again. Even if I could handle it. Right?”

Looking too weirdly uneasy, and Tyler looks at him.

“Is it back?”

“Don't change the subject,” Dylan says, waving a hand, and Tyler isn't. He's not, it's directly—it's directly related to what Dylan just said. About it starting up again, that's not just a casual comment. He wouldn't just use that as a talking point. Not unless he was already worried about it.

“Obviously it's a possibility,” Dylan says, not looking at him, and immediately adds, “but, dude, this is exactly... Like, focus on yourself. For two seconds, holy shit.”

“Fine,” Tyler says, but there's no way he's not following up on that later. “Go, hit me. What.”

“Migraines,” Dylan says. “Or, migraine headaches, is the more correct terminology. They're like, the fucking worst experience.”

“I don't know about worst,” Tyler says.


“Not usually,” Tyler says.

“When they are,” Dylan says. “When the meds fail, or whatever. It's gonna happen sometimes.”

“So?” Tyler says.
“So why not tell somebody,” Dylan says. “Not like, the whole world, but somebody. Over the course of your life, there's not one person you could actually count on and trust enough to—”

“It's not about trust,” Tyler says.

“Then count on,” Dylan says. “I know I'm a flake, but what about—Ian, you used to love him. Or Brittany, you were so close...”

“Were,” Tyler says, uncomprehending. “We still are. Nothing's different.”

“Oh, so you just left her off the guest list for nothing?”

And... oh.

That.

“I was being petty,” Tyler says. “It was stupid. Of course she's invited.”

“Really,” Dylan says. “So, so she knows, then.”

Tyler exhales, rubs at his brow. “You know she doesn't.”

“Because she'd be flaky about it,” Dylan guesses, and immediately changes his mind. “Or, or she'd overreact.”

“No,” Tyler says, then, “I don't know. I just—it doesn't matter.”

“I'd figure it out,” Tyler says. “It's not... It passes.” Shaking his head, disbelieving. “It's not like she's gonna start, what, following me around, making sure—She's not my mom.”

He can tell, from Dylan's expression then, that he thinks that means something. That he's figured something out, some deep, psychological revelation.

“I'm just saying,” he says, but he can't help his face heating up. “We're professional people. We can handle ourselves.”

“Yeah, I know,” Dylan says. “Trust me, I know how good you are at being dependable. But, dude. That was fucking torture for you. Why not give me a heads up? Give yourself a back-up plan.”

“Like you wouldn't research everything about it,” Tyler says. “And, and be worried about it, constantly.”

“Maybe I would be,” Dylan says. “So what?”

“So what,” Tyler says dumbly. “So, so maybe I don't want to make you crazy, over some stupid thing that barely even—”

He catches it too late, what he said, Dylan's eyes darkening. “I didn't mean that.”

“I don't give a fuck what you meant,” Dylan says. “That's how it's gonna be? You keeping shit to yourself, 'cause I'm too fragile to handle it.”

“Not crazy,” Tyler says. “Not crazy, I just meant, it's an expression. It's the same with everybody.”
“Yeah, well, I know now,” Dylan says. “So you're just gonna have to deal with it. With me giving a shit about you.”

“It's not that I don't want you to—” Tyler gives up, sighs. “I just, it doesn't make sense. To make a whole issue out of it. When it's barely... I mean, it happened twice, in all the time I've known you.”

“Twice,” Dylan says.

“Three times,” Tyler corrects. “Counting this one. The point still stands.”

“Yeah?” Dylan says. “You don't think I would've wanted to know about that? The first time.”

“No,” Tyler says, it feels obvious. “Why would you want—It was two days, we barely spoke. I barely spoke.”

“Yeah, I'm sure I didn't take that personally, either,” Dylan says. “I'm really so dependable that way.”

“You're not a flake,” Tyler says. He should have said that earlier. He was meaning to, he just got distracted. “You're not a flake, you're always there. When I need you to be.”

“Yeah, that's the thing,” Dylan says. “I'm starting to think I'm not the best judge of that. You needing me. I just kind of assume you don't, unless it's like, the most obvious thing. You crying in the hospital, it shouldn't have—I should've picked it up way before that.”

“No,” Tyler says. “That's not fair, you had a lot on your plate. I'm, I don't even know what happened that night. It's not on you.”

“I can't believe I thought you were, like,” Dylan says. “This beacon of health, and wellness. When really you're just that fucking repressed. Are you serious?” Eyebrows raising, shaking his head. “News flash, me having a problem doesn't mean you have to be superhuman. You're a person. Stress happens. And that was a fucking stressful situation. Even without me acting like a bitch.”

“You weren't acting like,” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “It doesn't matter. I'm not the only fucking thing that gets to matter in your life!”

Wide eyed, desperate, and Tyler really doesn't know what he's supposed to say, here. What Dylan wants, what would just, fix this.

“I hate fighting,” he says. There, that's an emotion. “Why are we fighting? I don't wanna fight with you.”

“I'm not loving it either,” Dylan says. “I just, you're doing all this extra shit, trying to, like, save me. Shutting down your whole outside life, like it's just this, distraction. Dude, you're making a cult out of me.”

“What?” Tyler says, fully lost now, and Dylan says, “Being so... devotional. Like, so completely... like, no shit, I'm part of your life. A big part, yeah, no one's arguing. But you're getting, like, swallowed up by me. By just trying to do everything, all the time.”

“So I should stop doing things for you,” Tyler says. “That'd make you happy?”

“I am!” Tyler says. “I mean, not now, obviously, but—with you. All the time.”


They just stare each other down for a while. It's a little ridiculous, when Tyler breaks out of it. When he realizes what they're actually fighting about.

“This is stupid,” he says. “You were sick. We're getting married. Obviously I'm gonna focus on you.”

“Tyler, I don't even...” Dylan says, and rubs at his eyes. “Yeah, too much conflict for one night. Don't worry about it. I love you.”

“No, wait,” Tyler says. It's like everything else, Dylan wouldn't mention it so seriously. He wouldn't bring it up as an issue, and go on about it like this, unless it was really bothering him. “Other avenues, like what? Like...”

“Like literally anything,” Dylan says. “Something fun, that has nothing to do with me. Or creative, or relaxing.”

“That's it,” Tyler says. “Pick up a hobby. That's all you want from me.”


“Why,” Tyler says cautiously, and Dylan says, “Yeah, you're going to therapy.”

“I don't like talking,” Tyler says. “I mean, about myself.”

“Exactly,” Dylan says, like that just proves something, but it doesn't.

“Because I don't have anything to say,” Tyler says. “I don't... It's not some interview, she doesn't care about my job.”

“Not really about what she cares about,” Dylan says. “Kind of the total opposite, in every fathomable way.”

“Fathomable,” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “Whoa, no. I am the distraction king. You're not redirecting that easily. It's actually incredibly simple, okay? Therapy is about you. It is the most one-sided relationship.”

“Nothing's one-sided,” Tyler says. “She's not, she's a person. There's expectations.”

“Oh my god,” Dylan says, almost laughing. But looking kind of horrified, at the same time.

“I just mean,” Tyler says, rolling his eyes, “I should have something to say, you know. And I don't. Except, ‘Dylan sent me.’”


“Dylan sent me, and I don't know what I'm doing,” Tyler says. “He just, it seems important to him.”

“You're calling me dude a lot lately,” Tyler says.

“Picked up on that, huh?” Dylan says. “Course you did.”

“So it means something,” Tyler says.

“How did I ever miss this,” Dylan says. Still touching him from the hit, and now he slides an arm around him, leans close. “It's not anything bad, I swear.”

“Somehow I don't find that entirely comforting,” Tyler says.

“Ooh, admission of discomfort,” Dylan says, snuggling into his shoulder. “See, you're doing so good already.”

“I'm not a robot,” Tyler says, smarting a little. “I'm not... You know I have feelings.”

“Yeah, but do you know,” Dylan says, like that's the deepest statement in the world. “That's the question.”

“Is it?” Tyler says.

“Dylan sent me,” Tyler says. “And I don't—Dylan's my partner.”

Face heating, he can't believe he messed that up already.

“Fiancé,” he corrects. “Fiancé, actually.”

“And he sent you,” the therapist says, and Tyler doesn't actually know her name.

“Sorry, I didn't ask your name,” he says. “Or do any kind of introduction, I'm so sorry. Hi, I'm Tyler.”

“Jessica,” says Jessica. “Thomas. So you can call me Dr. Thomas, or just be informal.”

“Right,” Tyler says. “Uh, either one's fine by me.”

“Up to you,” she says.


“How was it?” Dylan says. Touching his arm, and Tyler's not sure how to respond. He just hums, leans a little into Dylan's space. Drops his forehead to Dylan's shoulder. “That bad, huh.”

“It wasn't bad,” Tyler says. “I just didn't... It's just weird. Unexpected.”

“Yeah?” Dylan says.

“I ended up saying all this stuff,” Tyler says, “that I wasn't even... I don't know.”

“That you weren't planning to say,” Dylan says, and Tyler nods a little, and he's sweating. Wiping sweat on Dylan's shoulder. He straightens up.
“Whoa, don't run away on me,” Dylan says. Soft, crowding close again. “Sorry, no, that's not... You okay?”

“Yeah!” Tyler says automatically, and considers. “Yeah, it's just... a lot.” Lifting his head again, looking at him. “Is it always, this, like... intense?”

“Depends,” Dylan says. “On where it goes, you know. And how perceptive she is.”

“She's very,” Tyler says. “Um, very perceptive. I mean, I don't know,” he says, shaking his head. “I kind of feel like I was... hypnotized, or something. Not actually hypnotized,” he adds quickly. “Not, like, with the watch, and feeling sleepy... But, yeah.”

“Mind-read,” Dylan says.


“Subconscious-read,” Dylan offers, and Tyler says, “Maybe.”

He's a little more prepared, the second session. A little less caught off guard by everything. He's still dizzy on his way out. Or not dizzy, but like, buzzing. Weirdly on edge, weirdly emotional.


“Hi,” Tyler says, pulling back just enough to speak, and smiles at him.

“Hi,” Dylan says. “Um, good session?”

He's flushed, kind of shaky. Tyler laughs.

“I think so,” he says.
what you really, really want

Dylan calling him hot. Tyler never got used to it.

So it's, it was a crush on him, or a joke. It's hard to say. Hard to pin down, exactly.

He's always the one to diffuse the tension, if there is any. Any situation, on set or off, Dylan just says something, gets everybody laughing. Or just breathing out, just letting go of it, realizing it's not such a big deal.

Both of them under pressure together, trying to represent the show to a roomful of skeptics. Who just, did not want to hear about it.

Tyler's neck tensing up, his shoulders, he's just trying to stay calm.

And Dylan, he just looks at Tyler for a second. Kind of grins at him, a little crookedly, and says—Tyler can't even remember. Something, some something about him, and the atmosphere changed in a second. Everyone shifting, kind of relaxing. Actually giving them a chance.

It was like—magic, or something. And after, Dylan retelling it, he made it hilarious, somehow. Like it was never terrifying, just ridiculous. This whole auditorium of people furious over an MTV show.

And all Tyler can think of is that look, that little look Dylan gave him, and all the tension draining away.

Dylan's so good at that.

At everything.

Just seeing, just being with him, makes Tyler feel good, and seen, and—safe. Tyler's face heating up, he knows what that sounds like. He normally never would have said it.

“Why not?” she asks, and Tyler can't answer that. Can't deconstruct it any further, it's just—how it is. How things are. You're not supposed to care about stuff like that. Or think that deeply about it, it makes people uncomfortable.

“Dylan would be uncomfortable?” she asks, and that's not... Maybe a little. No one says things like that to each other in real life. You have to filter it.

“Sounds like you have a lot of rules for yourself,” she says.

It takes a few seconds to digest that. To, to formulate any kind of response.

“Everyone does,” Tyler says, finally. “Everyone does, everyone—No one just says what they're thinking all the time.”

“What if you did?”

Tyler laughs. “I'd lose my job, for one thing,” he says. “In a second.”

“At home, then.”

“Oh, even worse,” Tyler says, before he realizes what she meant. “Oh, you mean with Dylan?”
“Either,” she says, so that was a mistake.

“With Dylan,” he says, trying to think. “With Dylan... I don't know.”

“Worst case scenario,” she says, and Tyler says, “It's not that... It just doesn't come out right. It's not about saying anything specific. I just, it's just different. In my head. I don't think in words, do you think in words? No. You have to translate it.”

“What you're feeling,” she says, and Tyler nods.

“Like, safe,” he says. “It's not like, safe. You know? Like some really big, really dramatic... But I don't know how to better explain it.”

“Secure,” she says.

“Maybe,” Tyler says. “That's, yeah, definitely an improvement.”

“You need a thesaurus,” she says, and Tyler laughs.

“Yeah, that might help.”

“Or maybe you just need practice,” she says. Tyler looks at her. “Talking's a skill. Like anything else.”

“I do talk,” Tyler says. “I wouldn't be very good at my job, if I didn't.”

“That's true,” she says. “No, you're very charming. But what about... expressing yourself. Not just anticipating the right answer, or what other people want you to say. Or what you think you're allowed to.”

“Okay,” Tyler says. “So, the most socially inappropriate option. That's the goal here.”

“You like Stiles, don't you?”

Tyler looking at her, looking at her. “Really?”

“He's very expressive,” she says.


“And very likable,” she says.

“Yeah, but he wouldn't be,” Tyler says. “In real life. It's a show, it's funny.” He laughs, a little incredulous. “Frank Underwood's interesting, that doesn't mean—”

“Dylan, then,” she says. “He's expressive.”

“Sometimes,” Tyler admits.

“And you like him,” she says. “A lot, if I've been hearing you right.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “But he's... It's different.”

He's not, it's not normal. What he can do.

Tyler can keep up with it sometimes, he can participate. He can't... start it. On his own.
It wouldn't work.

Laughing on set doesn't work unless you're Dylan. Or being serious, when everyone else is laughing. Dylan can change up the tone of anything, and everyone will just follow him without questioning. With Tyler, they'd just look at him. Like, What are you doing? What are you talking about? Nobody cares about that. Why are you changing the subject?

Or they'd just ignore him, talk over him. And repeating doesn't help, talking louder doesn't help. More enthusiastically, it doesn't matter.

He's just not an interesting person.

“And Dylan is,” she says, and Tyler says, “You don't think so?” Like, come on. There's no one, there's no way. He's amazing.

There's no one who doesn't think that.

“He's funny,” she agrees, and Tyler says, “Funny.” That's not even—that's only the start of it. The first, the most obvious part.

“You really think a lot of him,” she says, and Tyler stares at her.

“It's not me.”

“He's very impressive,” she says. “So are you.”

“Thank you,” Tyler says.

“You are,” she says. “I think you know that.”

“I'm good at my job,” Tyler says. “I'm good at—being what people want.”

“Just not as yourself,” she says. Tyler shrugs.

“Maybe not,” he says.

It's not like it really matters. Not like Tyler thinks this is some, some unique condition. Social norms exist the way they do for a reason. Manners, convention, all of it. People are only gonna like each other so much.

Yeah, maybe if you're, if you're some kind of master conversationalist, you don't have to follow the rules as much. If you're everyone's favorite person, but that's the exception. It doesn't help anyone, trying to act like an exception when that's just not the case.

Tyler's a high achiever, but he knows his limits. If he could do something about it, he would. But he can't, so he doesn't.

It's really not that complicated.

Even Dylan's careful. That's the truth: Dylan's not even different. Actually, that was one of the first things Tyler noticed about him. How in tune he was, with anyone feeling bad, anyone even mildly uncomfortable. And how quick he was to respond. Just by being there, just by being... in it. With
you, no matter what.

So Tyler doesn't need to talk. To be more expressive, it won't make a difference. Dylan already knows everything about him.

Some interview, one in a blur of them, this really long day. The end of a really long day, and Dylan's starting to visibly sag. He's allowed to, it's fine. It's just part of his charm, him being so genuine.

Some interview, and some offhand comment, and Tyler barely even blinks at it, but Dylan straightens up so fast. Gives this look to the interviewer, like, Are you serious? Are you fucking serious right now?

Dylan, patting his side, just putting his arm up around him, and Tyler ducking under it. Never making a big thing of it, it was just normal. Just this fraction of a section of movement, that Tyler responded to, and half the tension melted away. This tension Tyler barely even realized was there, until it wasn't. By Dylan just being there, noticing.

And that would've been enough, Tyler would've remembered it anyway. but after, with the cameras off, after everything died down. Dylan said, “What a massive tool.”

Still hugging Tyler’s shoulder, looking at him. Angry, really quietly apologetic and angry about a comment Tyler barely even reacted to.

“Like he even knows anything about baseball,” Dylan said. “Have you seen him? He’s like, he’s an actual alien. He doesn’t know anything. Barely, like, maintaining this cover identity, without arousing suspicion. Like, the coldblooded side keeps comin’ out.”

“It was your choice,” he said. “It was your choice. So screw him.”

“You could do anything you fucking want.”

The same interviewer showed up a few times, over the years. Dylan never forgot about him. Stayed sharp-tongued, reacting sarcastically, and laughed it off like he didn't mean it, but he did. Stayed close to Tyler, riled up, angry.

It shouldn't have felt as good as it did.

All his scenes, too, Dylan's always interested. In all of Tyler's ideas. Gaping at him, calling him a genius. Nobody else does that.

So why wouldn't Tyler be obsessed with him? With the one person who actually, actually...

Jeff couldn't give less of a shit. Couldn't pretend to care if you paid him. But Dylan just did.

And came with him, and pitched it.

And really pressed the issue, wouldn't let it go. No, we're gonna go again, I'm gonna explain... It's such a killer scene, dude, he's gonna love it. People are gonna love it. Not just the shippers, everyone.

“Like with George Lucas,” he said, after. After staying close, apologetic, what, I don't know what just happened. What he's missing, how he doesn't get...
“Like with George Lucas, he doesn't want adlibs, you know?” Dylan said. “So Harrison Ford, he just did it. He didn't ask beforehand, he just ran the scene. And it made it in.”

And Tyler couldn't speak, he didn't want to. If it was up to him, he wouldn't have said anything for a week.

Dylan hugging him, hugging him. “I'm so sorry, dude. He's a fucking idiot.”

He tells her, he tells her. The next time he sees her, he tells her how it really is.

He didn't explain it right before at all.

It's not like Dylan's psychic; he's just sensitive. He's always looking out, he always wants to know. And he really cares, all the time, about everything. It's not about social mores, he just really, genuinely cares.

“And you don't?” she says.

“I do,” Tyler says. “Just not—the way he does. All the time.”

That's not the point. That's not the point, Tyler's not saying... Of course it matters. But to Dylan, it's... He gets sick about it. About someone else feeling bad over something. He can't think about anything else.

None of this is the point. It's not the direction Tyler was trying to go.

“It's not healthy,” he realizes. “It can't be. Caring that much.”

Still not the point, but it's starting to be, because it makes it stronger.

“I'm not depressed,” he says. “I'm... I don't get anxious. Not like that.”

“Your system works for you,” she says.

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “Yeah, exactly.”

“Okay,” she says. Like it's over, like it's that simple. You made your case, you win. You were right.

It's really not how Tyler expected this to go.

“So I'm fine,” he says.

“Are you?” she says.

“Uh,” Tyler says.

“It's not a trick question,” she says. “There's no right answer. Do you think you're fine?”

“Shouldn't you be deciding that?” Tyler says. “You're the... the professional.”
He's not sure if that's the word he means.

“You're like,” he says. “I mean, this is your job. You're the expert.”

“I can't tell you how you feel,” she says.

“Really,” Tyler says. “Seemed to be doing a pretty good job of it until now.”

“I'm sorry it felt that way,” she says. “But I don't know anything about you that you didn't tell me.”

“So this is,” Tyler says, he can't understand. “What's the point of it?”

“What do you think?” she says.

“I think,” he says slowly. “I think... This is you proving I can't make decisions. You told me to call you Jessica,” he adds. “Or Dr. Thomas, it was my choice. That was on purpose. Because you knew I wouldn't be able to. If it wasn't... If you didn't have a preference.”

“Just pick one,” she says. “Nothing bad is going to happen.”


“Hi,” Jessica says.

“I just never know,” Tyler says. “I mean, there is a right answer. Usually.”

“And if you get it wrong,” Jessica says. “Then what.”

Tyler grimaces. “It's not great. Obviously.”

“Okay,” Jessica says. “What happens?”

“It's just not good,” Tyler says. “Not a good idea.”

“With Dylan?” Jessica says. “Because he's sensitive.”

“No!” Tyler says. “No, not at all. He's the opposite.”

“Okay,” Jessica says. “Then who?”

Tyler swallows.

“It won't help,” he says. “Talking about it, it won't help. Try something else.”

“Something other than talking,” Jessica says, and Tyler rolls his eyes.

“Talking about something else,” he says. “This isn't... It's not gonna change. Trust me.”

“Okay,” Jessica says. “You're the boss.”

Tyler raises an eyebrow.
“So, the opposite,” Jessica says. “What's that like.”


“Yeah, I think you've said,” Jessica says, laughing.

“Well he is,” Tyler says. “I don't know how else to explain it.”

“Try,” Jessica says.

“He's just,” Tyler says. “He's always there. Always—even when he's wrong about it, how someone's feeling, he's still…”

The time Tyler was trapped on set, trying to just get through it. Feeling it building, and knowing it's just gonna get worse, and just trying to get through the next take, the next one after that.

Dylan didn’t even have a scene that day. He was just observing. And he thought it was funny, at first. method acting. Tyler being Derek, just gritting his teeth and keeping his sunglasses on, trying not to see the lights at all.

Thought it was funny, and said, “Dude, you are in the zone today. Like, so beyond committed.”

And Tyler couldn’t talk to him, he couldn’t talk. Couldn’t unclench his jaw.

“Whoa,” Dylan said, and stepped back a little, and came back again. “Tyler.” Reaching out, a little anxiously, touching his arm. And pulling back, saying, “Sorry, I’m always, like... I’m always just touching you. Without any, without even like... Just, just gratuitously... Like, all this unnecessary contact. That you maybe don’t even…”

Voice soft, so sorry.

And it’s fine, it’s finer than fine, Tyler never minds it. Less than never, it feels good. He would’ve told Dylan that.

He just couldn’t open his mouth.

“I’m really sorry,” Dylan said. “I don’t know why I’m like... Like, everything’s a prop to me.”

And he’d never, it’s never been that way, not once. Tyler almost moved, almost said something. Almost managed to open his mouth and say something.

“I’ll just, um,” Dylan said. “I don’t even know what I’m doing here. Just like, nosing around, getting in the way. Sorry,” he said again, and Tyler wanted to just take a breath, start over. “You were really good today,” Dylan said, and kind of darted off behind him, almost patting him on the back. Eyes widening, kind of grabbing the back of his head instead, looking horrified.

Tyler kind of cried, for a while, when he was gone. Hiding in his trailer, trying to just not be real.

And the next day, Dylan just wasn’t there.

He had scenes on Thursday, and it was over by then. Tyler made a beeline for him, said, “I don’t mind you touching me.”

“You don’t have to say that, you know,” Dylan said. “It’s not... It’s your fucking body. I don’t have a right.”
“It feels good,” Tyler said, and blushed. “Nice,” he supplanted. “I don’t—if I had a problem with it, I would tell you.”

“Sometimes you can’t, though,” Dylan said. “People, like... freeze up. Or just, think they have to put up with it. And you don’t,” he said. “You don’t, you shouldn’t have to.”

And there’s been, there’s been times like that. Sure.

But not with Dylan.

“I’d miss it,” Tyler said. “If you stopped.”

“Oh,” Dylan said, eyes widening. “Really?”

“I just had,” Tyler said. “Like, I don’t even know. I just—couldn't talk.”

“Scary,” Dylan said, and touched his arm, kind of tentatively. “Like, aphasia or something. Oh my god. Are you okay? Do you, like, need...”

Tyler moving in closer, and Dylan hugging him, saying, “You just tell me, if you need anything. Or like, indicate. Oh my god,” sounding so horrified. “Oh my god, I'm really sorry I didn't realize. Just like, monologuing in front of you, just... Just totally, totally blind.”

“It's fine,” Tyler said. “It’s just, it's a passing thing.”

“God,” Dylan said. “That's, like. I would be traumatized.”

“Wasn’t fun,” Tyler agreed, and Dylan put an arm around him, rubbed his shoulder.

“Thought you were method acting,” he said. “Just, really feelin’ the moment. Making it count.”

“I’d still talk to you,” Tyler said. “I always want to.”

“Aww,” Dylan said, smiling soft, pressing his hand to his heart. “Makin' my day, here.”

“Like it’s a surprise,” Tyler said, rolling his eyes, but in hindsight, he knows it was.

It just always felt so obvious.

There have been times like that, times that actually do feel like that. Where Tyler thinks about moving, and doesn’t. Just makes a face, or a little comment, Oh, this is happening. Or just kind of smiles tightly, eyebrows raising, tries to get past it.

He doesn’t like conflict, or making a scene. Dylan’s right. It never feels worth it, it wouldn’t end well.

But Dylan’s always been a welcome distraction.

Dylan, who picks up on it in a second. Across a room, he’s a speeding bullet. Getting in there, being his Dylanest, kind of patting Tyler’s back, You okay? This guy. And Tyler just absorbing him, just moving into his space, back and back into it. And Dylan getting in the way, when they try to follow. Saying, Whoa, hey, sorry, but not actually budging at all. Hey, cool camera! Hey, tell me about it.
It’s not like it’s ever that serious. It’s just easier. And he’s so good at it, they don’t even notice. If Tyler would just back up, or say something, he’d never hear the end of it. He doesn’t even think like that, he can’t.

It’s just part of it. Part of the job. Something you get used to.

It’s fine, unless it doesn’t have to be.

Tyler behind Dylan, sometimes he’s doing something. Some interview, and Tyler just finds a place behind him, leans on him a little. Dylan just barely rocking, making space for him. Bringing him into the conversation, making it feel natural. Even if Tyler can’t speak, and he’s just barely nodding, just barely standing straight, even with the support.

Dylan’s the best place to be. The best everything.

Tyler’s so, so lucky to have him.

“So, I don't know,” Tyler says. “Yeah. There's not a lot else to say about it.”

Just that Dylan's always been there. Even when he kept saying all this stuff about him, how together Tyler was, he was sensitive to it. To Tyler feeling self-conscious, or trapped, or uncomfortable. Or offended, even if Tyler didn't even react at all. He just knew. He found him, he saw him. Defended him, or got angry for him, or just put a hand to his arm. Like, I've got you.

It just keeps coming, it just all tumbles out. How huge that is, how much that means to him. Dylan seeing him, Dylan...

“Taking control,” she says.

And Tyler raises, Tyler means to raise his eyebrows.

But... Yeah.

Yeah, that's what it is.

They talk a little more, and then she gives him an assignment: ask for something. Ask Dylan for something, it could be anything. Something he wants from him.

But he has to ask.

He didn't realize how fucking hard that would be. How he'd be shaking, looking away, and Dylan would say, “Whoa, what's going on?”

“I'm supposed to,” Tyler says, he feels so stupid. “Ask for something that I want.” He's flinching just hearing his own voice. It doesn't sound anything like him.

“Okay,” Dylan says. Voice quiet, a little hoarse. “Do you know what it is? What you...”

“Yeah,” Tyler says. His skin's prickling, he's too aware. Of everything.

“I'm not gonna judge,” Dylan says. “Whatever it is. I'm, like... I've seriously seen everything.” Laughing, a little. “I'm all about a comprehensive education.”
“It's not a sex thing,” Tyler says. “Or, not only...” He shakes his head. His face is flaming, this is impossible.

“Whatever it is,” Dylan says. “No judging. I swear.”

And Tyler says, “You hit me once.”

“Oh,” Dylan says. “So now you're like, worried...”

“No,” Tyler says. Too low, too serious. He doesn't know how he'll come back from this, if it doesn't...

He doesn't know what he's doing.

But it's too late, it doesn't matter. He's already too far into it to just drop it again. Dylan's not gonna just forget about it.

He should really be drunker than this.

“No,” he says again. “You were really... really worked up. In the scene. You were really...”

God, this is impossible.

“Like, upset,” he says. “Not at Derek, or me. But... I don't know, desperate.”

Everything he says just sounds worse and worse.

“Trying to get him up,” Tyler says. “Trying to... It was a really, really tense scene, you were trying everything.”

Dylan's just watching him. Kind of looking like Stiles, when he's serious. When things get really serious.

Tyler swallows.

“It's not like you wanted to hurt him,” he says. “Or Stiles did. It's not about that.” Shaking his head, sweat stinging his eyes. “He was just trying to, you know. Get him back. Any way he could.” In a rush, he adds, “because he really, really...”

“Cares about him,” Dylan says.

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “But also, also...”

And Dylan doesn't try to fill in the blank this time, he's just listening. Just watching him, Stiles-eyed and still.

“Or in the first season,” Tyler says. “When he passes out, and Stiles thinks he's dying.”

“The wolfsbane bullet,” Dylan says, and Tyler nods.

“And he's like... There's nothing he can do about it,” Tyler says. “If Derek's dying, he can't... But he tries to. And he's just, there. I don't know. He just tries everything.”

None of this is coming out right. Outside his head, none of it makes any sense.

“So you hit me,” Tyler says. One more, one more try. “And then, but you were sorry about it. You
snapped out of it in a second. And just hugged me.”


“What if,” Tyler says, not looking at anything. Looking at one specific spot of nothing, as hard as he can. “What if I want you to.”

“Oh, wow,” Dylan says.

“Forget it,” Tyler says immediately. “Forget it, I didn't mean... I'm just fucking with you.”

Face flaming, eyes burning. He can't believe he fucking did this.


“But not as,” Tyler says. “Some, some weird—”

“As anything,” Dylan says. “It's this huge, huge feeling. That you can't get anywhere else.”

Tyler darts a glance at him. He's serious.

He looks serious.

“It's not a sex thing,” Tyler says again.

“Doesn't have to be,” Dylan says. “I know.”

“The hug was good too,” Tyler says. It doesn't really matter, at this point. “After.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says. “Yeah, I'd need that. If I just... Yeah, for sure.”

“It's just taking control,” Tyler says. “That's what Jessica called it. And I didn't... But it made sense.”


“I didn't talk about Stiles to her,” Tyler says.

“When do I,” Dylan says. “Or, when have I...”

“It happens,” Tyler says. “It happens.”

“Like, when I'm a dick to you,” Dylan says. “Trampling all over you, that's...”

“No,” Tyler says. “It's not... It's the opposite.”


Tyler nods.

“So not... being cold to you,” Dylan says. “Or pushing you around. Just giving a shit. Visibly.”

Tyler doesn't say anything.
“And, like, amplifying it,” Dylan says. “Like a scene.”

“I didn't want,” Tyler says, tries to roll his itching eyes. “I wasn't gonna say anything.”

“I want you to,” Dylan says, soft. “I... Tyler. This is such a fucking basic thing. It's not this, you know, this insane, out there request. That you have to worry about, holy crap. And be like, nervous to tell me.”

“I really like fucking you,” he adds, really casually. “Having you under me. People like different things.”

“That's not,” Tyler says, blushing furiously. “Uh, I like that too.”

“You're such a dork,” Dylan says fondly. “You know we're getting married, right? Giving a shit's kind of a big part of that.”

“It's weird, though,” Tyler says. “Other people would think it's weird. To focus on.”

He's pretty sure about that.

“It's sweet,” Dylan says. “It's like, the sweetest kink ever. The most endearing.”

“It's not a kink,” Tyler says. “It's not—”

“Not a sex thing, I know,” Dylan says. Shrugs. “It could be.”

Tyler stares at him.

“I mean, no pressure,” Dylan says. “But yeah. I can definitely see that working for me.”

“Really,” Tyler says, nonchalant. “Interesting.”

“Isn't it?” Dylan says. Eyebrows high, he's smirking.

“Something to think about,” Tyler says.

“Really puzzle over,” Dylan says. “Examine from, you know, every angle.”

“I hate you,” Tyler says, shaking his head.

“Yeah?” Dylan says. “We'll see.”
the comeback

Being stressed out all the time on Teen Wolf, just thinking about his audition. Knowing he did badly. And the only reason he got another chance was that he had the look for it. The... whatever, the pilot character description, the smoldering sexuality. Jeff thought he was hot, that's all.

And he wasn't gonna say anything. He just had him back, he just pretended he thought Tyler knew what he was doing. And somehow he booked it, eventually, but it never stopped stinging. Never stopped needling the back of his brain, you don't belong here. If Jeff weren't gay, if it wasn't this kind of show, you never would have gotten it.

Tyler's never really had a problem with confidence. He knows what he's good at. He works very, very hard on it. That's really the only way about it. You work hard, you have something to show for it. That's how it is.

Teen Wolf was the first time it didn't feel like that.

Dylan, he watched Dylan. Dylan, who did everything right, instantly. His first acting job, and every instinct he has is perfect. Every choice he makes, it makes so much sense. But Tyler never would've thought of it.

And then he steps back, and he's all critical about it. Questioning, sure he messed up somehow. Some little half blink somewhere he didn't mean to do. He looked toward his mark for a second, his very first day on set. Nobody noticed, Dylan noticed.

He didn't think he was funny. Every time people laughed, he'd just look startled by it. Flattered, in a confused way. Like, Are you sure? Okay, wow. Wow, thanks.

So touched by it, any little compliment, or deserved praise. Really skeptical, but appreciative. And people really responded to that. To everything about him, he couldn't be more likable. Couldn't be more empathetic, or understanding. Any easier to talk to, or be around. His whole presence was just a huge relief. Jeff not scrutinizing Tyler as hard, because Dylan more than commanded the attention. Tyler not getting in his head, in their scenes together, because Dylan acted like he knew what he was doing. Like Tyler was actually still good at this, like it wasn't some big mistake.

Mistakes never mattered as much as on that show. Stepping out of frame, messing up his delivery. He never would've liked it, but it happens. On that show, it just felt like proof.

There's scenes he still thinks about, if he lets himself think about it. And it's not productive, so most of the time, he doesn't. Just shooting Harvest, some endless scene he can't act his way out of, it comes back. That one stiff delivery, and cutting himself off, ready to go again. Getting more and more frustrated, until Jeff just gives up on him. Just stops, just settles for some take Tyler knows isn't good. That Jeff doesn't like, and he's just gonna use it anyway. Because Tyler can't do better. Not in time, not without giving him a million extra chances.

With Dylan, everything was easier.

And his body mattered, was a big part of it, so he worked on that. Something he couldn't mess up, couldn't freeze up and ruin. And Dylan couldn't believe it, or Tyler, how committed he was to it, how he always had more energy. How he never lost his motivation.
“Dude,” Dylan says, wiping sleep from his eyes, and kind of slumping down again, dazed to be awake already. Tyler's been up for hours, been to the gym and back, and he's too revved up to take a break. He just wants to get to work, to get started already. He feels good about it, it's gonna be a good day. “You are a machine, holy shit.”

But it was part of it. It was part of it, it was something he could do. When everything else felt... It was just something he was good at.

Tyler Posey waking up last, and coming into the kitchen looking stoned, grabbing cereal a little blindly, then turning to where Tyler was, sitting at the table ready to go, and looking at him like he didn't make any sense.

“He's been to the gym already,” Dylan tells him. “At like, five.”

“What!!” Posey says, eyes widening. “Dude!! That's crazy!!”

It didn't feel crazy. It felt obvious. It was important. Doing your best is important. You're part of a team, they're counting on you. It's not just you you're letting down.

There's no point doing anything halfway.

“Sounds like that job was pretty demoralizing,” Jessica says.

“It was good,” Tyler says. “Not everything's... It was a good experience. Informative.”

“Watching Dylan?” Jessica says, and that's not it. That was good, but it's not that.

“Not everything's gonna be easy,” Tyler says. “It's a good lesson. And not everything's about you.”

“Humbling,” Jessica says, and Tyler shrugs.

“It's part of being a team,” he says. “You're not always gonna be the star guy, every time. There's nothing wrong with that.”

“Very mature,” Jessica says, and Tyler laughs.

“I'm twenty-nine!”

“You weren't then,” she says.

Being in Atlanta, too. Kind of isolated from family, and friends, and having to figure it all out from scratch.

But the cast felt like family, soon enough. That's the truth. That's the truth.

It was a good experience. Good to try new things, expand your horizons.

“How's Hailey trying to adjust?” Jessica says.

“She's fine. They're finding their own way...”

“Do one thing every day that scares you,” Jessica says, and Tyler looks at her.

“Was that sarcasm?”

He never knows, he never knows. People make fun of him, they don't even realize it. Don't even
recognize they're doing it.

“"A little bit," Jessica admits. "I'm sorry."

Tyler's eyebrows rise, but he gets them down again. Eventually.

It's not mean-spirited. It's just...

He doesn't know, he says things. He says things that sound a way to people. That just trigger it.

“No,” Jessica says. “I'm sorry. That wasn't fair.”

Tyler shrugs.

“It wasn't sarcasm,” Jessica says, “exactly. But I shouldn't have said it.”

“It's a joke,” Tyler says. “People make jokes.”

“It's hurtful,” Jessica says, and Tyler shrugs again. “Not getting taken seriously.”

“It happens,” Tyler says.

“Can't feel good,” Jessica says, and Tyler says, “Not everything always does. It's fine.”

Dylan being so good, and such a relief, and the best thing ever.

Unless he was with Tyler Posey.

Unless Tyler Posey was around, then he was different. Quieter, more reserved. Or just as excitable, but only in Posey's direction. Or noticing Tyler, but less so.

And it was fine, it was fine. He was a popular guy. He already had a best friend.

They were teenagers. Tyler wasn't, anymore.

He understands.

Tyler Posey. Tyler likes him. In the hospital, that night. All that icy panic, and guilt, and just standing there powerless, looking at Dylan, Dylan just lying there, and Tyler Posey saved his life. He was, he was the one. He would've died, he wasn't breathing and he would've died if his best friend didn't give up waiting and go find him.

Tyler frozen with that, the unshakable reality of that, he couldn't break out of it. Looking at Dylan, thinking, thinking. I almost, I almost. I did.

It would've killed him, I would've killed him. If not.

Just standing there, and Posey's been crying. He's been scared to fucking death, he's. Tyler can't even imagine.

Just standing there, and Posey put his arm around him. Around his shoulders, hugged his side.

Said, “He's gonna be okay.”
“He's strong.”

He's been through—a lot. More than Tyler ever has. And he still cares about other people. Even people he doesn't really like.

“You think he doesn't like you?” Jessica says, and that's not—Tyler never said that. That's not what he's saying.

“Do you think he does?” Jessica asks, and... Tyler doesn't know. He doesn't know. Dylan, Posey loves Dylan. And Tyler got in the way of that. He was—competition.

They get along fine. It's fine. But Tyler can't shake the feeling that Posey would be a lot happier if he just wasn't there. If it was just him and Dylan, forever.

If Dylan likes Tyler, Posey tries to. That's how it is. That's what Tyler thinks. It's not, he's always trying. He can't help what he's feeling.

If Dylan's mad at him, Posey hates him more than anything, but if Dylan's happy, they're fine. If Dylan's hurt, and they're both just worried about him, then none of the rest of it matters.

That's how it is.

But Tyler wasn't a real person to him, the first season. He was a joke. A joke about the gym, a joke about protein shakes. A joke about how sexy he was, it wasn't a compliment. He took the word from Dylan, twisted it around.

He was older, by four years, and that became the biggest punchline. How mature and aloof and responsible Tyler supposedly was, how he wasn't anything like them. He was like a babysitter, or something. Some removed older relative, just standing off to the side, eyebrows raised. Legally able to drink, like that made such a fucking difference. Like that wasn't brand new to him. Like the two of them were amateurs when it came to that, or anything else. Like Tyler wasn't the one catching up.

Tyler breathing, catching his breath, he doesn't know where that came from. He doesn't even know who that was, just now.

“You,” Jessica says. “Expressing yourself.”

“I don't like it.” Tyler says. He's too hot, his chest is tight. It takes a little too much exertion just to breathe normally.

“It gets easier,” Jessica says. “With practice.”

“No thanks,” Tyler says. He feels like shit. There's nothing good about it.

“Okay,” Jessica says. “Is there something else you'd rather talk about?”

Tyler staring at her, staring at her.

This never goes how he expects.

Dylan's out with Posey when Tyler gets home, and then they're both staggering in. And Tyler—it
shouldn't bother him, they're just having fun together. They're best friends, they do that.

Posey digging a beer out of their fridge, handing another one off to Dylan. Tyler's just standing there.

In his own fucking apartment, his and his fiancé's apartment, he's just standing there.

He can't even open his mouth.

He should just back away. Let his eyebrows rise, and back away, head off his own way, leave them alone.

He should, he should do that.

He kind of clears his throat, just barely, and Dylan startles, does a near Stiles-esque stumble toward him. “Tyler!” he says. “Ty, hey, I didn't see you.” Coming close, into his space, Tyler's breath is already starting to slow with the contact. Not even contact yet, just proximity. Just knowing.

“Hey,” Dylan says, looking close at him. “You okay?” Touching his chest. Going in closer, and glancing down at the beer in his hand, getting in the way. Holding it out, like that was the plan from the beginning. “Hey, you want this?”

“Yeah,” Tyler says. Weirdly, weirdly worked up, he just takes it. “Thanks.”


“Had an appointment,” Tyler says, only a little stiffly, and Dylan says, “Yeah, of course. We'll work around it, then.” Rubbing his shoulder, saying, “Was it okay? I should've been here.”

It's fine, Tyler should say. It's what he always fucking says.

“I don't like,” he hears himself say. “Feeling, like—like an outsider. From the two of you.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says. “Yeah, of course not.”

“I'm not that much older,” he says. “Than either of you. I'm not... It doesn't matter.”

“Yeah, no kidding,” Dylan says. “You're like, the youngest of any of us. In a lot of ways.”

That's not really better.

“It shouldn't fucking matter,” Tyler says. “You're my family. He's... It's not complicated.”

“We're family,” Dylan agrees. Tyler breathes out, leans against him. “I didn't, I didn't realize... I'm really sorry I left you out.”

“It's not you,” Tyler says.

Therapy, when and if he has to say anything, it's his choice. Not like, “Well, we're doing it anyway, because you're wrong. It's gonna be good for you, you'll see.” Not like that.

It's his choice. To stop, or put it down, or just give up on it, mid-conversation. If it feels bad, if he doesn't... He doesn't owe it to her, to keep going. He doesn't owe it to anyone.

Not like you signed on, you signed on and now you have to follow through, for people. People took you at your word, they made plans based around it. You can't just go back. Just tell them to shove off, tell them they don't matter. Because you're the big guy, who makes the decisions, and just eff all of them, right?

You sign up to do a job, it doesn't matter how you feel about it. You think a big CEO can just go home if he's tired? If he doesn't feel well, if his head hurts or something.

You push through it.

“Oh,” Jessica says, she's sorry. She's sorry about that.

“You're not like that, I'm saying,” Tyler says.

“Yeah,” Jessica says. “That sounds... Really hard.”

“No,” Tyler says. “It's good. I'm telling you, it's good.”

“When it is like that,” she says.

It's something.

It's, it's just how things are. Just how things have to be, as an adult. As someone in an adult profession, you can't...

You don't get to just be a selfish little kid about it.

It's not, maybe it sounds bad, but that's how it has to be. Serious sets, serious expectations. It's not just clowning around time, it's serious money. Serious stakes. People's whole livelihoods on the line, their reputations. His reputation, you really wanna be known as a quitter? As some difficult guy to work with, who thinks he's better than everyone else. Thinks his time's more important than anyone else. They can just, whatever. They can just sit there and wait. While he gets over himself. While he decides what's more important, doing a good job or being a little more comfortable.

And says sorry, sorry. Sorry, I just matter more than you do. So my word just means nothing. I just do what I want. If I'm comfortable, great, it's the greatest time. But as soon as it gets hard, forget it. Forget it, I changed my mind. It's not fun anymore.

You can't do that.

“That doesn't sound like you,” Jessica says, and Tyler looks at her.

“Yeah, well,” he says. “Maybe it's not—Not always me, talking.”

“Your mom,” she says.

And Tyler, Tyler doesn't say anything.

Tyler loves his mom. More than, more than almost anything. She's always been there, she's always
been... She's just always been really good, to turn to. She's really smart. And strong, and... You know the thing, the whole, strong female character thing? Tyler's mom is the strongest female character he knows.

Not character, not character. She's a real person. With really strong morals, and a really clear view of everything. She knows what's really important. Family, and taking things seriously. If you work hard, you can do anything. You just keep pushing, nothing can stop you.

He doesn't know where he'd be, without her.

Not here, that's for sure. Not an actor, even slightly successfully. If he just went on his own instincts, and gave up with the first bad audition. Like, Forget it, I'm just not cut out for this. I feel stupid, I don't like being watched.

You push yourself, you keep pushing. That's the only way to get anywhere. Everything's gonna be hard, at some point. What, are you just gonna turn around? Oh, you don't like me? Oh, well that's all that matters, then. I guess it's over, then. Sorry for wasting your time.

Oh, I'm not good yet, I'm not ready yet? Well I'm not gonna put the work in. That's how this works, for me, things get handed to me. And otherwise, forget it. It's just not meant to be.

Tyler can't think like that.

But he used to.

“You really think that's true?” Jessica says. “You've been doing this since you were a kid. You think adult you would've felt that way?”

“Why not?” Tyler says. “You only learn from experience. If I didn't challenge myself, if I didn't try...”

“You liked baseball,” Jessica says. “You wouldn't have done that?”

Tyler frowning, frowning. Brow creasing, that doesn't make sense.

“Of course I would've,” he says. “That's the first thing I ever wanted to do.”

“Before acting,” Jessica says.

“Before anything,” Tyler says. “That's... I was just good at it. I was really, really good at it. And I just love the game.”

“So you wouldn't have,” Jessica says. “Given up on it. If it didn't... If it wasn't easy.”

“Of course not,” Tyler says. “Of course not, are you kidding? That's all I wanted to do!”

And Jessica just looks at him.

Just looks at him, and it feels like...

Like nothing makes sense anymore.

“So you're saying,” he says. It's a little hard to think. “You're saying I would've pushed myself anyway. If it was something I really wanted.”
“What do you think?” Jessica says, and he can't think. Tyler can't think, that's the point.

“I don't know,” he says, but it feels too obvious. Too... “How's this gonna help? Reframing everything like this.”

It's the same feeling, the same awful feeling. This tension in his chest, and neck, and back, this... anger, in him.

It can't help, holding onto that. Shaping your life around that, he's played characters like that. It never turns out well.

“I think it's helpful,” Jessica says. “Understanding yourself. Understanding how much you've accomplished. But we can stop right now.”

“It's too late,” Tyler says. “It's too late already. I can't...”

His head, his head's spinning. And there's this picture, there's this picture of him. Who he wanted to be, who he really, really wanted to be. What he wanted.

It's never felt this clear before.

He could've done it, too. That injury, it didn't take him out. It just sidelined him for a while. And he wasn't used to sitting around doing nothing, so he went in for more jobs. Did more auditions, just to have something to do. Just to not feel stalled at the gate.

He's never, never taken it easy.

And his coach was like, listen, you can't do both. You can't do both, you have to choose.

But he never would've, he never would've chosen...

It was a good choice. It was a good choice. It was, it was okay.

It got him Dylan, it got him this life. He can't overlook that. Can't play that down, that's huge. That's so important.

He has money, he's doing better monetarily than he would've been. He has more freedom, he can set his own schedule.

Try out for a million fucking jobs he doesn't want to do, just to get a chance at the ones he does. Get judged, get stared at. Really looked up and down, really... taken in. And it's just part of it, it's just part of it.

It's just another thing to put up with.

“How do I stop this?” he says. “How do I—put it back? I'm gonna lose my fucking job.”

He's gonna, forget it. If he can't keep a handle on it, he won't be able to do any of it. Not without everything spilling out.

“That depends,” Jessica says. “What do you wanna do about it?”

“I don't know,” Tyler says. “I don't know, I don't know!” Looking around a little wildly. “I don't, I've never...” Shaking his head, he can't believe he's saying this. That it just popped into his head. “I'm not the one who decides.”
“What if you were?” Jessica says.

Coming home from that, Dylan picks it up immediately. He knows, he knows something’s not right.

“What happened?” he says. Touching Tyler, and Tyler's almost too tense to feel it. He can't speak, he can't breathe.

“Now,” Tyler says. “I need, I need it—now.”

Dylan's eyes widening, he nods. And drags Tyler into a hug, into a Stiles hug. Oh my god, you almost died hug. That was fucking terrifying, and I just, I just...

Tyler holding on hard, squeezing his eyes shut. And breathing, and breathing.

“I love you,” Dylan says, low. “I love you, so much. I'm so...”

Tyler squeezing his eyes shut, and it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, he can't stop it.

Shaking, he's shuddering, and Dylan just holds him.

Just holds him together.

“It felt like,” Tyler says. “Felt like... I don't even know. Like everything, the whole time...”

He still can't say it. Can't put the words to it, can't believe.

“Like none of it was my choice,” Tyler says. “Ever. It wasn't, it wasn't my decision. I would have made a different decision.”


It's really the only sane reaction.

“I know what I wanted to be,” Tyler says. “It wasn't this.”

And normally he'd check, normally he'd know how that sounds, how that might sound, if you hear it a certain way, but he doesn't clarify. And Dylan nods, he understands. It's not about him. It's everything else.

“You fucking love baseball,” Dylan says. “You're so good at it.”

“You too,” Tyler says, automatically.

“Yeah, but,” Dylan says. “It wasn't what I wanted to do. Not the main thing. The like, driving force.”

“You made videos,” Tyler says, and Dylan nods. “Yeah.”

“You could've played baseball,” Tyler says. “If someone wanted you to. You'd be really good. And you'd enjoy it.”

It's a lot. It's a lot, just to grapple with. Just to settle into, just to breathe through.

Tyler holds onto Dylan, breathes with him.
It's not, Tyler doesn't want to make it seem—like his mom's some bad mom, like all this means she doesn't matter to him anymore.

It wouldn't be so hard if they weren't so close. If family didn't mean so much to him, wasn't such a huge part of his life. You can't, you can't give that up, who would do that? Tyler would never do that. Not willingly.

Dylan understands that. He's upset, upset for him, but he knows. Knows the last thing Tyler wants is Dylan saying anything bad about her.

It still, he still can't wrap his mind around it. Around not knowing his own mind, for so long. When it's so obvious.

But she's not a bad person. She's not, he loves her. They're family. You don't turn your back on family.

She wanted him to do well. To have a career, to be successful in his career. Baseball doesn't last forever. You need a back-up plan. And he got good offers, as a kid, crazy good offers, that she let him turn down, to have time for the game.

Nothing's so black and white. Everything's nuanced. Nobody's perfect, that doesn't make them bad people. And he was a kid. Parents decide things for their kids, it's not some unprecedented abuse story. He wanted a lot of things that wouldn't have been good for him in the long run. That's your job, as a parent, to get in the way. To be that barrier, and that reality check.

It's good to know your own mind, that doesn't mean you have to blame somebody. Tyler's got a good life. Any other way, there's no telling how it would've turned out.

“That's a very healthy perspective,” Jessica says, and Tyler smirks.

“So you're not gonna tell me to cut her off?” he says. “To, to just suddenly turn on her. After everything.”

“It's not my job to tell you to do anything,” Jessica says. “It's your life.”

Tyler nods, laughs. “I see what you're doing.”

“I'm not surprised,” Jessica says. “You're a smart guy.”

“Alright, alright,” Tyler says, blushing. “Calm down.”

It's not like they used to spend a lot of time talking about her. Tyler's mom, she's Tyler's mom. Dylan knows her, he's friendly. That's as far as it goes. And he's perceptive, he's never needed Tyler to explain things to him. Why they can't be a couple around her, why that's just too much for her to take. She likes Dylan, she can be okay with him if she thinks of him as a friend. As a really close friend, and a roommate.

He's bi, too, which isn't as bad. Not bad, not bad. It's just—easier for her. If Dylan's had a girlfriend, if she doesn't have to think about him a certain way.
They can come for Christmas if they're not showy about it. If Dylan mentions Britt, or something, if Tyler nods along to another story of how sweet Brittany is. And she is, she is. She's one of his best friends. He's got nothing bad to say about her.

He's just not dating her. He's just engaged, to someone else.

He just never did date her, but whatever, whatever. If it helps, if it makes it easier... Fine.

The wedding's coming up, and she's not coming. Of course not.

If he really loved her, he wouldn't be doing it. If he really cared about her. If he cared about himself, his own well-being.

It's not a healthy lifestyle. You can read about it, it's on the internet. You can just look at your friend. Colton, you think he's happy? He's miserable.

Because he has to hide it, Tyler thinks, and doesn't say. Doesn't say.

It's not worth it.

It's not like Tyler can't hear it now. It's not like it isn't obvious, now, as soon as he thinks about it. How messed up that is, having to play down his own serious relationship. When he's never been so serious, so sure about anything.

It's just complicated. It's, there's a lot of factors. He's not the only one.

It won't help anyone, just starting a conflict. Not if he knows how it'll end already. With the whole family dragged in, with everyone taking sides about it, or carefully not saying anything in any direction. With it becoming some huge, blown out argument, that never dies down. Mom looking at Dylan like he's some interloper, like it's his fault, for bringing this out in him. And Dylan, he'll defend Tyler in a heartbeat, if that's what it turns into, but he'd never defend himself. He'd worry about it. That she's right, that Tyler's some kid who doesn't know what he wants, who just latched on to the closest thing. And she can be convincing. Tyler knows how convincing.

It's not worth it.

There's better things to focus on. Their movie, they found a distributor. It's a real movie, it's gonna be in theaters, where anyone can see it. That's more than enough distraction.

The trailer's gonna come out soon, everybody's gonna have an opinion. But that barely matters.

Tyler's just really proud of them.

There's this nightmare he has sometimes, where he just freezes. He just can't move. Can't speak, can't do anything.

“Sleep paralysis,” Dylan says, but that's not it. He's not awake yet. He's not in bed, he's just—and he can't do anything.

“Sounds like you've already got a meaning figured out,” Jessica says.

Tyler shrugs. “Seems pretty apparent now.”
“Scary,” Dylan says, hugging him. “It's happened recently?”

Pulling back, looking worried about it. That he missed it, that he's been missing things.

“No,” Tyler says. “Not recently. Mostly—that year.”

Dylan's eyes widening, he's putting things together. “You said you had a nightmare about it.”

“One,” Tyler says. “Before that... Before that, not for a while.”


Looking so serious, sounding so serious. Watching him, waiting for a response.

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “Yeah, okay.”

“Thanks,” Dylan says, and leans in closer. “I love you.”

It shouldn't warm Tyler up so much, just hearing that. Like he doesn't know that already.

It shouldn't still be the best thing in the world.

“You don't know,” Dylan says, he's just holding him. “You don't know what you mean to me.”

Dylan over him, kissing his spine. Wrapping his arms around him, just staying.

Tyler breathes, and breathes.

“Seriously,” Dylan says, after. “I never would've thought I'd meet someone like you. Have someone like you.”

“Someone like,” Tyler says.

“Sensitive,” Dylan says. “And strong, and sweet, and... a lot of other words that don't start with S. Supportive. No,” he says, Tyler's laughing lightly. “That too, but... there's other letters in the language. Trustworthy,” he says. “And like, sincere. Oh my god.”

“Sexy,” Tyler says. Blushing a little, but keeping a straight face.

“Oh, you bet,” Dylan says. “Are you kidding? Like it even has to be said. Loyal,” he adds.

“That's a good one,” Tyler says. “You too.”

“Love...ly,” Dylan says. And cracks up. “Uh, maybe not so much. I mean, you are,” he adds, and Tyler blushes. “But it doesn't sound... There's better ways to say it.”

“S and L,” Tyler says. “And T. Are we spelling something?”

“Not that there's anything wrong with that,” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “No, of course not. Oh my god. Imaginative, that's one. That's, clearly.”

“Stiles,” Tyler says.

“I mean, I wasn't thinking that far ahead,” Dylan says. “But sure. E, uh... Extremely attractive.”

“Doesn't count,” Tyler says. “Two words.”

“Didn't know there was a rule book,” Dylan says. “E, E.” He thinks. “...Enjoyable to be around. Enjoyable,” he corrects. “By itself, it's one word.”

Tyler nods slowly.

“So what happens now?” Dylan says. “You gonna do Derek for me? Because that's one less letter. Even with duplicates.”

“I'll make it up to you,” Tyler says. Looking at him, really meaningfully.

Dylan gapes again.

Christmas at the Hoechlin house. It's probably not a good idea. With Tyler, with how Tyler is lately. So aware, so close to the surface. Feeling everything, and responding to it.

They go anyway, him and Dylan. It's Christmas, it's Christmas. That's about family. And Dylan's his family, and so's his mom.

And Dylan's careful, like always, but suddenly, Tyler doesn't want him to be. Suddenly, he can't think of anything worse than pretending. Spending the whole time pretending.

He takes Dylan's hand, and Dylan looks at him, like, Are you sure?

Tyler nods.

And Dylan squeezes his hand, moves a little closer to him. And it's so, so much better.

Tanner in the doorway, just staring at them, at their hands. Looking up, and right back down again.

“Don't worry about it,” Tyler says. “You don't have to get involved.”

“Hey, man,” Dylan says, like everything's normal. Like nothing's different. “Haven't seen you in a while, what have you been up to?”

And Tanner unsticks from the doorway, comes alive again. Just starts answering the question.


No one mentions it, no one mentions it. There's a lot of looks, and looks away. That's as far as it goes.

It's not like Mom ever said anything to Colton's face. No, she'd wait 'til he was out of earshot.

He can't believe it took him this long to do this.
And then Tyler's in the kitchen, helping wash up, and Mom says, “I can't believe you did this.”

And Tyler nods, okay.

Okay, here goes.

“What you do,” Mom says, “in your life, at least I don't have to hear about it. But in my house—”

“It's my house,” Tyler says. “I bought it.”

Mom stares at him, Tyler would stare at himself. He can't believe he just said that.

“I didn't mean,” Tyler says, but he did. He did.

“Well,” Mom says. “Good to see the kind of influence he's having on you.”

“It's not his influence,” Tyler says.

“Really,” Mom says. “Never heard you talk like that before.”

“Maybe you weren't listening,” Tyler says.

He can't, he can't believe himself. Every word coming out of his mouth, he'd never—he never would've, in a million years, before. Never would've said anything close.

But it's the truth.

“I'm sorry,” he says. “I'm sorry if it bothers you. I'm not trying to rub it in your face.”

“Could've fooled me,” Mom says. “The hand holding? All the—touching. Is that really necessary?”

“Yes,” Tyler says. “Yes. It is.”

“In this house, on Christmas,” Mom says. “If you say so...”

And Tyler almost falters. Almost... It's true, it's true. It's the worst possible day for it. The worst possible place. And it's not fair, to ambush people. If you know they're gonna be uncomfortable, it's not fair to...

But no. No.

“I'm getting married,” Tyler says. “I'm getting married. To Dylan, he's the one. He's the one I want.”

Mom just looks at him.

“You don't have to come to the wedding,” Tyler says. “You don't have to—you don't have to do anything. But I'm not gonna lie anymore.”

“You think I taught you to lie,” Mom says, and Tyler says, “I don't know what you taught me.”

“You okay?” Dylan says, catching him just outside. Hesitating for a second before he touches him, and Tyler hates that.
He hates every part of this.

“No,” Tyler says. “I'm not. But I think... I think that's progress.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says. Looping his arm around Tyler's neck, and Tyler leans close. Soaks in it, the warmth of him. “Yeah, I think so too.”

“I love you,” Tyler says. “I don't—I don't care. What she has to say about it.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says. Kind of sniffing, rubbing at his eye. “I'm, I love you too.”


“Oh,” Dylan says, soft-eyed, and nods, nods. “Yeah, let's do it.”

They get a tree. It's the nicest one, it's theirs. And ornaments, there's some in the apartment, they get a few more. Get eggnog, and Dylan gets a Santa hat, which he puts on immediately.

“Now I just need the beard,” he says. “Think I can grow it in time?”

Tyler looks at him. “Maybe for next year.”


“Seasonal,” Tyler says, nodding.

“Ugh, you're too smart for me,” Dylan says. “Too quick with the, the retorts.”

Tyler laughs. “I'm sure you can keep up.”

“Barely,” Dylan says. “I'm like, winded.” He hyperventilates pointedly for a few seconds. Tyler lays a hand on his back. “Aww, thanks, boo.” He yelps; Tyler has the hat by the, the bottom part, and puts it on, smirking.

“I already have the beard for it,” he says. “You can be... an elf, or something.”


“Sorry,” Tyler says, laughing.

“Your beard's too black anyway,” Dylan says. “Blackbeard. You can be, you can be the pirate.”

“It's a little gray,” Tyler says. Dylan looks.

“A little,” he concedes. “Not enough. Sorry.”

“Getting there,” Tyler says.

“Maybe next year,” Dylan says, and Tyler hits him. “Oh, that's out of line?”

“Not really,” Tyler says. He looks at Dylan. “You'd have a beard if you didn't shave it.”

“No kidding,” Dylan says. “Is that, is that how hair works? Oh my god.”

Tyler's tickling him, which means all bets are off. There's evil in Dylan's eyes, he's not getting away with this.
“I will tackle you in this Walgreens,” Dylan says. “Don't think I won't. I will.”

“Do it!” Tyler says, laughing, and takes off running.
i'll stop the world and melt with you

“You've always had water on you,” Dylan says. He's constantly double-checking now, making sure Tyler always has what he needs. And he does—meds, water, sunglasses—but Dylan adds a million things Tyler's always made do without. “And like, a really strict sleep pattern. I thought it was a gym thing.”

“Nope,” Tyler says. Watches Dylan pat down his pockets, pull out earplugs, Icy Hot, Tiger Balm... “Really? I need all of this.”

“If it happens and you don't want it, I'll take it out,” Dylan says. And stops, points at Tyler. “Sleep! The, the night before. I woke you up, I was editing.”

“It's not that,” Tyler says.

“It's partly that,” Dylan says. He's still going. There shouldn't be enough room in his pockets at this point. It's a little ridiculous. “Why, what else would it be? If not that.”

Stopping, looking down at where Tyler's sitting on the bed, eyes widening.

Tyler just knows what's going through his head.

“It's nothing serious,” he says.

“You know that, do you.” Dylan says. “Because you've been to all these doctors about it.”

“I have a script, don't I?” Tyler says. “How do you think that happened? I've seen a doctor.”

“Oh, one,” Dylan says, but he puts up a hand, apologetic. “Not micromanaging, not micromanaging. You know what you're doing.”

“Thank you,” Tyler says. “It's only been fifteen years, so.”

“Such a smart-ass,” Dylan says, but he's fond about it.

Tyler grins.

It's good, the rest of Christmas. Tyler got Dylan season tickets, it was too easy. Dylan's arms around his neck, bowling him over backwards like that took some kind of Herculean effort, like Dylan can't believe his luck. Dylan, who rented a private island, who says, “I was thinking, if we like it, we could go back, you know. For the honeymoon.”

Tyler doesn't even know what to say.

“It's not the biggest place ever,” Dylan says. “But it's private, and there's animals. And like, scuba diving.”


He can't speak. He's just too overwhelmed, suddenly.

“I know,” Dylan says. Finds the edges of him, moves in slow. “I'm really sorry.”
Tyler rocking closer to him, he can't wait. “Not your fault.”

“It's not fair,” Dylan says. “It's not... You didn't do anything wrong.”

“Unconditional love, you know,” Tyler says. Closing his eyes as they start to burn, finding Dylan by touch alone. “Not always so unconditional.”

“Mine is,” Dylan says.

Jessica's impressed by it. Tyler mouthing off to his mom, and just running away, he gets a gold star.

“It doesn't feel right,” he says. “It feels... There's gotta be a different way to handle it. A better one.”

It feels messy. Everything he does now feels wrong, and raw, and messy. Not how it's supposed to be.

“I think you're doing just fine,” Jessica says.

Out of control. That's what it is; Tyler feels out of control. Even if the control he used to have wasn't really his in the first place.

He just, it's too much. Too much of everything. And the good parts make it worth it, but they also make it worse. He's not used to, to feeling so wild all the time.

“It takes practice,” Jessica says, and it makes sense. It makes sense, it just... This isn't what his life's like. It's never been so, so...

“Real?” Jessica says, and Tyler just stares at her, for a few seconds.

“I,” he says finally. “I—Maybe.”

The trailer drops a little after New Year's. It's a nice way to start 2017. Dylan in the glasses, like the biggest nerd he always pretends he isn't when he's busy calling Tyler one, a beer in his hand and Tyler's hand in the other. Half his hair's sticking up from earlier. Tyler laughs, smooths it down.

“You did that on purpose,” Dylan says. “Just to mess with it now, don't lie.”

Tyler hums, tips his head, considering. “It's possible.”

“Yeah, I'm on to you,” Dylan says. Laughs. “Do it more. It's nice.”

Their inboxes get a little exhaustive, for a while, all kinds of congratulations rolling in. Good trailer, good buzz. It's not over, but it's a good start. Promising.

“For our first time,” Dylan says. “Writing anything.”
“And you wrote and directed,” Tyler says. “And starred in it.”

“Co-starred,” Dylan says. “Oh my god, we're just amazing people. In every way.” Doing this joking kind of voice about it, but not in a negative way. Just, self-aware.

“You are,” Tyler says mildly.

“Oh my god,” Dylan says, making an incredulous face, but putting on a serious one over it. “Yeah, I'm like, savin' the world right now. Single-handedly.”

“It's important,” Tyler says. “Mental illness. Helping people understand it.”

“Yeah, okay,” Dylan says, but he nods. “Yeah, you're right. Good point. Good... outlook.”

“It has an impact on people,” Tyler says. “Not everything's... superheroes.”


“I got one,” Tyler says. “I think I got one, in the end.”


“He's been on break,” Tyler says. “This whole time. He's in Hawaii.”

“Werewolf surfing,” Dylan says.


“It's an interesting visual,” Tyler agrees. “Won't see that twice.”

“Some blazed dude on a boat, like, What? Like, Dude dude dude dude dude! Surf wolf!” Dylan says. “And everyone just thinks he's like, really...”

“And Derek just shifts back,” Tyler says. “Super-hearing.”


“And Stiles is there,” Tyler says. “Obviously.”

“Being a pain in his ass, as usual,” Dylan says. “Thought you said he was on vacation.”

“Nah, he loves Stiles,” Tyler says. “He grew on him.”

“Aww,” Dylan says.

“They'll get married,” Tyler says. “Eventually.”


“If you say so,” Tyler says. “I don't see a better option.”

“So romantic,” Dylan says.
“I don't know if they do romance,” Tyler says. “More like, trying not to die. Constantly.”


“Hate his guts,” Tyler says. “Can't stand him.”


“Works for them,” Tyler says.

“And then Stiles is like, 'You know, we should get married.' For a case or something.”

“Not doing anything else today,” Tyler says.

“Yeah, might as well,” Dylan says. “And then they just never undo it.”

“That's true love,” Tyler says.

“It's something,” Dylan says. “Scott like, finds out by accident. Years later. Or his dad.”

“They don't get to see?” Tyler says. “Yeah, I guess.”

“It's not like this big, serious ceremony,” Dylan says. “They go to Vegas or something.”

“Still,” Tyler says.

“Aww, you want it more romantic,” Dylan says, leaning into him. “Fine. Like a five person ceremony. Scott reads vows off the internet.”

“Not like Derek's bringing a whole lot of family,” Tyler offers.

“Oh my god,” Dylan says. “So sad. No, I'm seriously sad now.”

“His sister comes,” Tyler says. “Cora comes. Wherever she is.”

“South America,” Dylan says. “Isn't it always South America? Like, the whole continent. Not like, Belize, or something.”

“Not in South America,” Tyler says.


“One way to fix that,” Tyler says.

The island's amazing. Not that Tyler had any doubts. It's a private island; in Tyler's view, that's pretty hard to mess up.

“So, good call?” Dylan says. “I did some research, a few days. All the like, available... And this one was like, perfect.”

“Definitely,” Tyler says. Two days here, he feels like a different person. They're not answering calls, they're not doing anything. Two days to themselves, two days to be real people. Forget about everything else.
“I mean, I know 2017’s a trash fire,” Dylan says, “Like on a global scale, in every conceivable... But this is a personal high point.”

“Well put,” Tyler says.

“So privileged,” Dylan says. “Ugh. Pull me away from the guilt spiral.”

“It won't help,” Tyler says. “Feeling bad about being happy. It won't help anyone.”

“See?” Dylan says, and leans his head on Tyler's shoulder. “Voice of reason, right here.”

“I try,” Tyler says humbly.

The view's incredible, in every direction. It's a little hypnotizing.

They go snorkeling, come up and just stare for a while.

“Remind me again why I'm not a bad person,” Dylan says.

“You're just not,” Tyler says. “You're just not. Not even close.”

“Like, it's a lot of money,” Dylan says. “It's insanely nice, but... I don't know, there's starving kids. And like, hate crimes.”

“Make a donation,” Tyler says. “Whatever you want.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says. “I just, it just feels...”

“Overwhelming?” Tyler says.


“It wasn't perfect,” Tyler says. “Before.”

“Yeah, but now it's like...” Dylan says. “Everything's so blatantly, blatantly batshit. All the time.”

“Yeah,” Tyler agrees.

“And I just feel like, I should do something,” Dylan says. “In my position, you know? But I'm just like, using it to torture myself. Instead of helping anyone, ever.”

“What do you wanna do?” Tyler says.

It's a Jessica thing, but it's more than that. It's a good question.

You don't want my advice, you want a sounding board. You wanna figure it out, out loud.

“I don't know,” Dylan says. “I'm like... Should I start a foundation? Every tenth celebrity has a foundation.”

Tyler waits.

“So what issue would it even be?” Dylan says. “There's like a million. There's like a million things happening to people. And different groups.”
“Mental illness,” Tyler offers. “Or LGBT youth. Or both.”


“You know my mom would love it,” Tyler says. “Me, as the face of some LGBT campaign.”

“You did NOH8,” Dylan says.

“I didn't,” Tyler says. “Specifically because of that. Felt great.”

“Just say no, to bullying and homophobia,” Dylan says. “So controversial.”

“To some people,” Tyler says.

“Shit,” Dylan says. “And then, but you had to live like that.”

“Had to,” Tyler says, smiling stiffly. “Because it's all in the past now.”

“I know it's not,” Dylan says, rubbing his arm. “I know it's not. I'm sorry.”

“I don't know why I still feel bad about it,” Tyler says. “Disappointing her.”

“Because it's been your entire life?” Dylan suggests. “Trying to be... Just maybe.”

“Maybe,” Tyler says. His eyes are starting to burn.

“LGBT youth,” Dylan says. Palm warm on his shoulder, rubbing at his side. “Yeah, that one. Definitely.”

“And mental illness,” Tyler says. “I think... It's part of it. It becomes part of it.”

“With the reactions,” Dylan says. “Yeah.”

“And just thinking about it,” Tyler says. His voice is weird, faraway. “Being, like... wrong. I don't know.”


Tyler nods.

“So, love all, judge none,” Dylan says. “That's kind of a new one, for you.”

Tyler doesn't say anything.

The view blurs, a little bit, for a while.

Dylan just stays, watches it with him.

He's half-asleep when he realizes, *the trailer*. Tyler didn't even think about it, he never has. Not when it's a job.

Tyler's in a gay love story, and the trailer just went out.

And he didn't even warn his mom about it.
“I see what it is now,” Mom says. Two weeks not even speaking, and it's the first thing she says to him. “You got caught up in a role.”

“It's not a role,” Tyler says. “Dylan and I dated for three years.”

He tried, he tried to apologize. For running out on Christmas, for what he said.

It just got stuck in his throat, and then she was already talking.


“I'm not damaged,” Tyler says.

“Well, something's different,” Mom says. “And you don't seem very happy.”


That's so, that's way out of line.


It sounds so... Tyler can't defend himself.

Can't say, No I don't. No, I deserve to mouth off to you, to really tell you what I think. I never do. I never get to fucking say anything, he can't say that. He feels wrong even thinking it.

But then Mom says, “You know this isn't who you are.”

“It is,” Tyler says. “It is.”

“I really hope not,” Mom says, and hangs up on him.

And he just gets. So. Angry.

So angry, and he can't even speak. There's nothing he can say to that.

Nothing she'd ever actually listen to.

Because I'm a good kid, Tyler says flatly, throwing down his phone. Except of course I'm not a kid. I never got a chance to be.

Of course he doesn't say that. He wouldn't even think that. He doesn't think like that.

But it came from somewhere.

The anger peters out quick, and then he's just sick about it. Missing his mom, how things used to be, feeling like the worst son in the world.

If he just, if he didn't start. If he didn't ask for so much.

He knows her, he knows her. Knows how she feels about it. How she's always gonna feel.
So why's it so important to challenge her on it?

And just start a fight, and never end it. Just live in this conflict for the rest of his life.

Never having a mom again.

Never being a good kid again, not for a second. Never, ever getting to feel...

He used to think it was working. That he was... whatever, that he could shake it off.

It didn't have to matter.

Sex, it's not that important. And love's love. It doesn't depend on that.

So some girl, it should be easy with some girl. Any nice girl, it should be easy.

Brittany, he loves Brittany.

Just not like that.

It's just that it's not. It's not fair, to her.

And it's not this. What this is, even without the sex. It's totally, totally different.

It's just impossible to explain how important it is.

Especially to her.

And she'd never listen, anyway.

He used to think he could be happy alone.

If he had to be.

He used to think like that, he didn't question it. Didn't question what he was sentencing himself to. If that's what, if that's what God wanted, if that's what everyone wanted...

What Mom wanted, but she didn't even know about it. He just knew already.

It wasn't exactly a secret, what she thought about it. Not like she just goes on about it, out of nowhere, but it comes up. In little ways, sometimes.

So casually, and he'd freeze up. He'd go hot, and feel like a criminal.

And go, maybe, maybe that's not what I am, anyway.

Maybe I'm just wrong about it.

Just freaking out for nothing, just getting in my own head. And really I'm just normal. And I'm gonna have like fifteen kids, and grandkids, and just laugh about it. With my blurry future wife, it's hilarious.

It just never really felt like that.
It just got harder and harder to shake.

It just, Dylan.

Dylan made it so obvious.

It really didn't feel like a choice, after that.

“I'm sorry,” Dylan says, and Tyler didn't realize he was even still thinking about it. Just sitting with him, quiet, just barely touching him. Just staying close, leaning close. “I didn't... I don't know, I never really thought about it. How huge that was for you. And still is.”

“Being a bad person?” Tyler says. “Hard to believe, isn't it? Me caring about that.”

“Yeah, but it's not,” Dylan says. “It's never had anything to do with that, for me. Like, there's no association.”

“Must be nice,” Tyler says.

“Yeah, I really think it was,” Dylan says. “And is. Like, I worried about it, but not because... Not about that.”

“School,” Tyler says.

“Everyone, you know,” Dylan says. “People get weird about it. Or think you're weird, whatever. Or, it just changes things. How they see you. School, yeah.” He nods. “I mean, obviously, that's the first like, really social space. To get all this feedback.”

“People were bad about it,” Tyler says. Kind of—he doesn't know. Furious.

When it's Dylan, when it's Dylan, it's different. It's just—it couldn't be more obvious.

There's nothing wrong with him.

“I mean, I don't know if it was about it,” Dylan says. “Or just like a general... unlikability, I don't know. Lots of options.”


Dylan laughs. “Yeah, you wouldn't think so. Nicest dude on the planet.”

“I'm really not,” Tyler says.

“That I've met,” Dylan says. “Maybe there's some really strong competitor out there, who knows. You're up there.”

“Not lately,” Tyler says.

“You didn't do anything wrong,” Dylan says. “Talking to her like that. She's been treating you like that your whole life.”
Tyler balks. “We're not equals.” They're not... That's not how it works. Parents can hit their kids, kids can't hit back. There's a distinction. They're not supposed to be friends.

“She hit you?” Dylan says, outraged, and Tyler shakes his head, can't speak fast enough.

“I didn't say that,” he says. “I didn't say that. No.”

“But it'd be okay,” Dylan says. “If she did. You'd be fine with that.”

“I... Not fine,” Tyler says.

But maybe he would be. If he deserved it, if he thought he deserved it. If it taught a lesson.

“That's so fucked up,” Dylan says. “We're not hitting our kids. Tyler.”

“Of course not,” Tyler says, and only realizes what they're saying after they've said it. “…You wanna have kids?”

“Oh,” Dylan says, he's blushing. “Did I say that?”

“Think you did,” Tyler says.

“I mean, not now,” Dylan says. “I'm like, barely getting a grip on my life as it is. But someday, yeah.”

“With me,” Tyler says.

“No, with my second husband,” Dylan says. “Yes, with you. Oh my god.”

“Good to know,” Tyler says.

“Good to know,” Dylan says. “Playin' it so cool, all the time.” He looks a little worried. “You do want them, right? Like, eventually.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says. It comes out a little hoarse.

“Oh, you do,” Dylan says, and hugs him. “Scared me, for a second.”

“Do I seem like someone who doesn't care about family?” Tyler says. God, he really needs to sort things out.


“Nothing to talk about,” Tyler says. “Family's everything to me. It's not really something I'm shy about.”

“Still,” Dylan says. “Nice to know.”

“Yeah,” Tyler agrees.

“And like, it's not like we have to get into the whole, surrogates vs adoption thing,” Dylan says. “But, I like both. Different reasons.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says.
“There's a lot of kids in the world already,” Dylan says. “Who don't have families, or good ones. Feels a little shitty just making whole new ones anyway. Or, only.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says.

“Sorry, that's a lot,” Dylan says. “That's a lot of detail, for a hypothetical.”


“I mean, biological kids are a big deal to people,” Dylan says. “I get that. Your mom, probably.”

“Probably,” Tyler agrees. “It's me or Tanner, so.”

“But it's a little too over-emphasized,” Dylan says. “I think. Like adopted kids are just backups. When you can't produce the real thing. Sorry,” he says again. “Sorry, I have a lot of opinions. Obviously.”

“Never would've guessed,” Tyler says. “Have we met? I'm Tyler.”


“But it's a good point,” Tyler says. “It's a good point. Yeah.”

“It's not like it really means anything,” Dylan says. “Passing on your genetics. I mean, you have great genetics,” he adds. Tyler blushes. “Like, great, don't get me wrong. But it shouldn't be about that.”

“Not what makes a family,” Tyler says.

“Exactly,” Dylan says. “Or a legacy. It's nothing to do with it.” He shrugs. “I mean, none of us are gonna be around a couple generations from now anyway. In any distinguishable, biological way.” He shrugs. “It's just like, the impact, you know? Are things better or worse. Because of you.”

“Better,” Tyler says. “Things are better.”

“Glad to hear it,” Dylan says.

He's blushing again.
“Too hokey?” Dylan says, playing Tyler another one. It's good, catchy. Tyler's never heard it before. “With the, the werewolf imagery, I don’t know.”

“I like it,” Tyler says. “Uh, my mom might not.”

“Okay,” Dylan says, nodding. “What about... Ooh.” He winces, listening. “Direct reference to your body, that’s...”

“It’s not,” Tyler says. This one's familiar, but different than the version he's used to. The same singer from before, Dylan obviously likes him a lot. “Like, it’s more than that. That’s the point.” More than just your body.

“What if we just did, all Blink-182 songs,” Dylan suggests. “We know one guy would love it.”

“I don’t know about that,” Tyler says. He’s not sure what that would even look like. “Hozier, maybe.”

“All his songs are sad, dude,” Dylan says. “Or like... No, yeah. Just, all this abuse and drug addiction. And homophobia.”

“He’s not supporting the homophobia,” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “No, but I mean. It’s our wedding. You really want, like... torches, and all that medieval imagery? And like, persecution.”

“We wouldn’t play the video,” Tyler says, but he shakes his head. “I’m not saying him, I’m just saying... Something, something along those lines. Like, soulful.”


“So suicide isn’t sad, you’re saying,” Tyler says. “Or...”

“That one where he’s just blatantly screaming about Louis having a baby? Yeah,” Dylan says. “Yeah, I wasn’t like, thinking of a specific... Just the—general vibe, you know.”

“I give up,” Tyler says. Dylan'll pick something, he'll figure it out.


“Yeah,” Tyler says.

“So, it’s the same dude,” Dylan says. “Troye Sivan, he’s like... He used to be a YouTuber.”

“He’s good,” Tyler says. He is. He has an interesting sound, kind of a mixture of his and Dylan's. Soulful pop music. “Is he, like...”

“Hire-able?” Dylan says. “I mean, maybe.”


“Oh,” Dylan says. “Oh, oh my god. Tyler, you’re a genius.”

“Really,” Tyler says, and Dylan plays him something.
“That’s,” Tyler says, a long while after. Kind of drying his eye on the edge of his palm, nodding.
“That’s, yeah.”

“Yeah?” Dylan says.

“Definitely,” Tyler says.

Cake tasting, it's really not that complicated. Dylan decides that they can't fully assess each flavor as it'll taste on the day unless it's smashed into their faces, then quickly ducks his head and laughs it off at Tyler's look. Which: fine. He should just be prepared for what he signed up for.

“So vicious,” Dylan says, after, brushing crumbs and cream off his cheek. “I'm, I feel so attacked right now.”

“And you just came here to have a good time,” Tyler says.

“Nope, it's even better,” Dylan says, and picks icing out of Tyler's hair. “It's came out to have a good time. So fitting.” He groans. “Such an old meme, though. We're so old.”

“Twenty-five,” Tyler says. “Yeah, you're already going gray a little.”

“Don't you dare,” Dylan says. “Are you serious?” Feeling all around his face, like he could detect it by touch somehow. “No, tell me.”

“You're twenty-five,” Tyler says again. “You barely started growing facial hair. You're fine.”

“So many knives to the back,” Dylan says, his hand to his chest. “So many. I want a divorce.”

“We're not married yet,” Tyler says calmly. “You can just walk away.”

“Oh my god,” Dylan says, hitting him. “Don't even joke like that, holy crap. Tryna give me a heart attack.”

It should've been a funny joke, but: Tyler did do that. Actually.

“Oh my god, no you didn't,” Dylan says. “My brain was trying to murder me, dude, you were the biggest bodyguard. The like, best kind of backup.”

“I wasn't,” Tyler says. He really, really... He can't even count how many times he messed up, then. It was a waking nightmare.


“Tyler,” Tyler says. “Posey. He was...”

“Best friend, yeah,” Dylan says. “Knows me pretty well, I know him. Didn't stop me being a paranoid freak about him just running for the door.”

“Really?” Tyler says. He didn't know that. Tyler Posey was always the one Dylan counted on, it felt like. When Tyler was just useless, and scared, and showing up in paparazzi photos holding hands with people. Just sitting there, thinking that had to be helping, when most of the time, it just made things worse. He didn't even think to mention Dylan being sick all the time to his doctor. He just assumed he would somehow have known already.
Posey brought Dylan his laptop, and music. Made him feel better. Didn't lose his fucking phone under the bed, and make him think—

Tyler breathes out sharp. Dylan's arm comes up around him, his voice goes soft.

“It wasn't like that,” he says. “Not even—Dude, not even close.”

“Wasn't it,” Tyler says.

“No,” Dylan says. “You were the best thing. Like, too self-sacrificing. It was unbelievable.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says.

And that, that didn't help either.

“Oh my god, Tyler,” Dylan says. “Can you—can you talk to Jessica about this? Because there's no way in hell she's gonna agree with you.”

“Invasive,” Tyler says, nodding, almost impressed, and Dylan covers his face.

“Ugh, sorry,” he says. “Such, such an intrusion. And like, a violation, of... But you can't seriously think it was on you, you can't be a martyr about this. I'm not gonna let you.”

“Tyler left his job,” Tyler says. “I could've done that.”

“You did, 'til you got sued,” Dylan says. “He went back so much quicker. And even when you did go back, you came back every night. Like—with migraines, with how much sleep and stress can affect you, and you still—and you cried like, once,” he adds. “Not that that's even a weakness. I'm glad it happened. I felt really alone, not knowing how you were feeling. Or if, you know. Anymore.”


“Well, I can't win,” Dylan says. “No, you weren't, like, everything I could've possibly needed the second I needed it, even if I never verbalized anything about it, god. It'd be weirder if you were. You did your fucking best, man. You tried. And stayed. That's more than most people would've done. But you wanna beat yourself up about it, I guess I can't stop you. Have fun with that.”

“You had,” Tyler says, and can't exactly breathe right. “A heart attack, because of me.” And Dylan's gonna say something, contradict it, and that's not even the worst part. “You would've died, if Tyler didn't come find you.”

“That's not fair,” Dylan says.

“It's what happened,” Tyler says. “I could've made a choice sooner, both times, but I didn't, and that's what happened.”

“Leaving out a lot of detail there,” Dylan says. “Like how none of it had anything to do with you.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “It's just a coincidence, that I always could've done something.”

“Nope,” Dylan says. “Pretty sure that's called a savior complex, actually.”

“It's not a savior complex,” Tyler says. “I'm not—it's called not avoiding responsibility.”
“I doubt you've ever done that,” Jessica says. “Avoiding responsibility? Doesn't sound like your style.”

“Yeah, and suddenly that's a bad thing?” Tyler says. “I'm—There's choices I could've made. You know how I am with choices,” he tells her, and waits for a nod. It doesn't come. “So I just never—I just let things happen. I just let things happen to him.”

“That's really what you think,” Jessica says.

“Obviously you think differently,” Tyler says. “Is that how this works? You and Dylan, just defending me all the time. Even when there's no basis for it.”

“You can't think of a basis?” Jessica says.

“Excuses?” Tyler says. “Sure. Does it really matter?”

“Devil's advocate,” Jessica says. “Tell me why it's not your fault. You don't have to believe it.”

“Oh, I don't have to,” Tyler says. “Well, that'll help.”

“Number one,” Jessica says.

“Uh,” Tyler says. “Uh... I don't know.” It's a lot harder than he expected, actually. “Uh, he's not my responsibility. He's just the love of my life, I don't have to care about him.”

“No sarcasm,” Jessica says. “Try again.”

“I don't have to worry about him,” Tyler says. “He can take care of himself. Yeah, he can,” he counters immediately, “when his head's not trying to kill him—”

“Keep going,” Jessica says. “Number two.”

“He has other friends,” Tyler says. “That's what Camille said. Rodriguez,” he adds. “She's my... We were friendly on set. And she drove to me to the hospital, when.” He doesn't want to think about it. That day, that blur. His whole body tense and scared and angry and terrified and so, fucking sorry. And that could've been the end of it. If Posey wasn't there, that would've been the end of it. Someone finding him, or Tyler finding him, too late, and it would just be over. Everything, everything.

That's what happens, that's what happens. He's played it, he thought he knew it then. He didn't.

“He has other friends,” he says again. Too sharp, and his chest is too tight, and— “I'm not his friend! Not just his friend.”

It's not, it's not.

It's not even close.

“Number three,” Jessica says, and Tyler says, “No.”

He's not doing this.

“No,” he says again. “I'm responsible. I'm... forget it. I don't care what you think about it.”

“It's not healthy,” Jessica says, and Tyler bursts out, “I don't give a fuck if it's healthy or not! He would've fucking died, do you not get that? I would've fucking killed him!”
He can't do this. He can't do this.

He stands up.

“He doesn’t have to agree with me,” he says. “And you don’t, you can think whatever the fuck you want.”

“It’s still gonna be your fault,” Jessica says.

And Tyler looks at her, and sits down.

“Yes,” he says.

“For not knowing,” Jessica says. “Not knowing something was wrong with him.”

“I knew,” Tyler says. “I knew he was sick. And anxious, and doubting himself. And avoiding me.”

Blinking, blinking, but he can't stop the burn behind his eyes.

“Not knowing it was that bad,” Jessica says. “Near-death bad.”

“It shouldn't have had to be,” Tyler says. “He's the love of my life. It shouldn't fucking matter how bad it was. I knew it wasn't good.”

“Did you think you could fix it?” Jessica says, and Tyler frowns at her. “Going to find him. Did you think it would've helped him? But you didn't feel like it.”

“Of course not,” Tyler says. “Of course not. I wouldn't—if I thought he needed me?”

“Or needed help,” Jessica says. “From anyone.”

“Of course not,” Tyler says. “Of course not. I wasn't there. I was just ignoring—just going back to work. Leaving him to die.

Tyler feels punched.

“If I knew?” he says. “I would've—I don't care, I don't care, fuck my fucking job. Fuck my entire—I would've been there. I would've been there.”

“So why weren't you?” Jessica says, and Tyler says, “I didn't know!”

“But that's not an excuse,” he adds. It doesn't matter. It doesn't...

“I don't think it is,” Jessica says. “I don't think you ever would've chosen your career over him.”

“Of course not,” Tyler says.

“You would've been there,” Jessica says. “If you thought there was anything you could do.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says heavily. “But I wasn't.”

“Okay,” Jessica says. “So what that is, is blaming yourself for not knowing what you know now. Which you couldn't have.”

“No,” Tyler says. “I don't know.”

It makes sense, which just makes it more frustrating.
“It doesn't matter,” he tries. “If I didn't know. I should have.”

“You didn't tell Dylan about your migraines,” Jessica says, and Tyler blinks at her. “Should he have known?”

“That has nothing to do with it,” Tyler says. “What does that have to... They're annoying. Nothing's gonna happen to me.”

“Dylan didn't know that,” Jessica says. “Did he? On the plane.”

“No,” Tyler admits. “It scared him.” He swallows, swallows. “He thought—I don't know, all the worst things. Because I couldn't breathe normally.”

Tyler should've told him.

He just didn't want to. But he should've, he should've.

It wasn't right, scaring him like that.

“Don't worry about that now,” Jessica says. Tyler gives her a flat look. “You were in pain. It wasn't the first time. So he should've known.”

“That doesn't make sense,” Tyler says. “He's never seen—it's not something you'd just guess.”

“But refeeding syndrome,” Jessica says. “Or a heart attack. You just should've known about them. Even before Dylan did, or his doctors.”

Tyler doesn't know.

“You should've been there,” Jessica says. “I think you mean, you wish you would've been. You wish you would have stopped it.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “Yeah.”

“And Dylan wishes he could've helped you with your migraines,” Jessica says. “It doesn't have to be logical, Tyler. All it means is that you care.”

“No,” Tyler says, shaking his head. “You don't get it. I had a choice.”

“I think you're misrepresenting it,” Jessica says. “I don't think that choice was ever between your career and Dylan's health. I don't think you would've had any trouble picking the right answer, if it was.”

“No,” Tyler agrees.

“So it was a different choice,” Jessica says. “A harder one. With no clear best direction.”

“It was his movie,” Tyler says. “It was his movie. It wasn't about me.”

“I think it was,” Jessica says. “And you knew that it was. That's what made it your choice to make.”

“It shouldn't have been,” Tyler says.

“Why?” Jessica says, and then, “Because you don't make the decisions.”
Like that means something, in this context, some so much deeper message.

Everyone keeps trying to find some major insight in everything.

“You know how you are with decisions,” Jessica says. “You reminded me. So you waited for someone else to make it for you. And later, you used your inaction to create a fantasy where you could've stopped a really bad thing from happening.”

“No,” Tyler says.

But it makes too much sense to shake.

“And the heart attack,” he says. “It was me in the pictures.”

“Did you know about the pictures?” Jessica says. “Did you mean to forget your phone?”

Tyler purses his lips, exhales sharp. "No."

"Would you have even gone to work that day?" Jessica says. "If there was any chance of that happening to him."

"No," Tyler says. Breathing, he's breathing. There's a buzzing in his jaw, he's clenching it.

“No one likes feeling powerless,” Jessica says. "Thinking bad things can happen randomly, with no warning."

"It's not random," Tyler says. "It can't be random. There's a reason."

Jessica just looks at him.

Tyler doesn't know if he's religious anymore. What he believes now, really.

It makes sense around his mom. And around Dylan, about Dylan, it just seems...

It's not like it has to be a choice. It's not like it can't be—Jesus is real, but his mom's wrong about what that means, or he isn't, but nothing's random either. It could be anything. Tyler doesn't know.

It's not something he really likes to think about.

But he can't... Dylan lying there, and Tyler finding him, too late. There has to be a better answer than that. There has to be a reason, and a way around it, there has to be.

“There is,” Jessica says. “You're in it.”

But that's not good enough.

That's not good enough, that leaves it up to Tyler Posey. Leaves Dylan living up to a friend he didn't talk to for a month, and him just randomly missing him, and that's not good enough. Maybe it happened that way, it's still not reliable.

It can't be such a close call. It can't be.

Tyler can't be okay with that.
“I love him,” Tyler says. “I can't lose him. I can't.”

It can't have ended that fucking easily.

And it shouldn't be that simple, what it is, but of course it is. It's always so obvious, once Jessica unwinds it. The whole thread, start to finish.

“You don't understand,” Tyler says. “It's not... I need him.”

He's family, he's family. And he's everything else.

He's the best part of everything else.

Tyler doesn't want to think about... if he had to find someone like him again, he couldn't. It's just never gonna happen.

There's just one of him, and Tyler really, really needs him not to just randomly fucking stop.

He gets out of the session gripped by more panic than he knows how to handle, and there's really only one way he knows to deal with that.

He gets very, very drunk.

He thinks it's maybe helping; he's not sure. There's a thought about Dylan, or a million, but all the drinks drown it. Dylan on the, don't worry about it. Sit warm and keep swallowing and don't try to think.

Fine, it's fine.

Don't try to drink.

No.

The opposite of that.

Dylan finds him, Dylan finds him. Dylan's hands on his shoulders, Dylan's face on his... face. Thing. Neck.

No.

Dylan's face, hands all handsy, with the gestures. Saying something, Tyler looks at him.

It's a good face. And good hands, too, good good hands. And face, and—in between thing. Voice. Maybe.

“Tyler,” he says with his facehands. “C'mon, I got you.”

Yeah. Yeah, that's good.

It's a little bit like spinning. But nicer, and worse, and Dylan catches him. Puts Tyler's hands on his shoulders, mmm. Shoulders. Holding on to Dylan’s shoulders, he’s so supportive. He’s literally, so...
“You’re drunk,” Dylan says, he’s very intelligent. Always knows, always has... Tyler loves him.


No, but. Tyler loves him. Like, he could explode.


And Tyler, Tyler floats off the floor. Dylan hugging him, leaning into him. supporting again, he’s so...

The word before, that. The good one.

“I... like you,” Tyler tells him, confidentially. “So much. You’re, like...” He doesn’t even know. Is there even a word? There isn’t.

“Good thing we’re getting married, then,” Dylan says, and Tyler stares at him, nodding. Yeah. Good thing, it’s a really good thing. Stiles.

“Nope,” Dylan says. “Just his face, sorry.”

“Love your face,” Tyler says. reaching out, touching it, and it breaks into a smile, Tyler’s fireworks. He’s fireworks, he’s... “Stiles,” Tyler says again.

“Dylan,” Dylan reminds him. Tyler’s whole mouth opens up, eyes widening, of course.

“Even better,” he says, warm, and Dylan grins, hugs his neck, and Tyler almost falls over from all the fireworks inside him.
“You texted me,” Dylan says, in the car. In some stranger's car, Dylan's arms around him. “Yeah. A few times.”

Dylan's mouth at his ear, his breath, he's breathing. He's breathing, he's fine.

Tyler just lost his mind over nothing.

He's... he's unraveling. Getting messier and messier, less and less in control.

It doesn't help. It doesn't help anyone.

But he can't stop it.

Dylan kissing his collar, covering his face, Tyler knows what he's doing. Glancing over at the driver, moving his shoulders up. Leaning over Tyler, blocking him off.


And Tyler gives in, he gives in.

Takes a too-shaky breath, lets Dylan take over.

Two weeks to the date, Tyler's mom agrees to come to the wedding if they can get an evangelical pastor to do it. A real one, not the handwavy, hire one get one free abortion kind, and who knew Tyler's mom was such a joker?

Tyler, apparently. His face doesn't even move, there's no expression. There's a total lack of expression, of vocalization, of anything. He nods, a little bit, but she's on the phone, so that's not makin' a huge dent in the conversation.

“We'll do it,” Dylan says, and Tyler stares at him, like, What are you doing? Which, that's fair. Not his mom, not his business. Well, kind of his business, seeing as it is his wedding they're talkin' about, but... still, not really requiring his involvement. In this moment.

He just hates seeing Tyler, like, cowed like this. Shut down, too quiet, so beyond agreeable. It's like, the worst thing in the world.

“We'll do it,” he says again. A little louder, in case it didn't really go through. There's not a lot of audible response happening, at this point. “We'll, yeah. You got it.”

“A real one,” she says again, after a long, long pause, where Tyler just looks at Dylan like, Oh fuck, oh fuck. “Not one of your—actor friends.”

That, at least, gets Tyler defensive. “I wouldn't do that.”

But: “I don't know what you'd do anymore,” she says.

And just like that, he's crushed again.
“She can't talk to you like that,” Dylan says, and instantly regrets it at the look on Tyler's face. “I'm just... You can't talk to people like that.”

“I did to her,” Tyler says. “On Christmas.” Like one conversation totally turns the tables on everything. Or like it being a holiday makes this drastic difference, makes it, like, criminal. If it wasn't already.

“What'd you say already?” Dylan says. “I know you. It can't be that bad.”

“It wasn't me,” Tyler says. “Wasn't... what I normally sound like.”

“Just, a million f-bombs,” Dylan guesses. “Wait, no. Wasn't what you normally sound like.”

“Ha ha,” Tyler says flatly, and shapes his mouth into a smile. “It wasn't good, trust me.”

“So you vented,” Dylan says. “For once, for one five minute conversation. That's not... Dude. Everyone does that.”

“I'm not everyone,” Tyler says, and it's such a specific thing to say. Makes Dylan think of like, the anti-peer pressure stuff teachers used to drill you with, all the best responses. It's seriously adorable, in like a confident little kid way. Who has never gotten his ass kicked, or had people laugh in his face about it. “What? I'm not.”

“Got me there,” Dylan says. “You're so much better, dude, I'm in awe.”

Tyler rolls his eyes. “That's not what I'm saying.”

“No, you have to be,” Dylan says. “You have to be better, all the time. You... better be.” Realizing, gaping a little. “Hey!”

Tyler grins, for a second. Realer, more real than the other one, but still so disconcerting. Dylan swallows.

“Sorry,” he says. “I'm, I'm being a tool. It's none of my... It's so not my call.”

“It's fine,” Tyler says, and Dylan knows that one too well.

Soft, he says, “Doesn't have to be.”

So, two weeks. Two weeks to get a pastor, an evangelical pastor to do a gay wedding for two actors most people have probably never heard of. Dylan's not sure if that helps or hurts the cause. Like, maybe career suicide turns into career martyrdom, if you've got enough of a fan base to support it. Or maybe the excessive fame would just make it worse, make it like, inescapable. Everyone knows your deal, all your preachings are just completely rejected, wherever you go. For, for being a sell out.

But, too bad. It's happening, if he has to like, make a cake shop case out of it. Or maybe not that far, but this is so, so huge to Tyler. His mom being there, and like—maybe not approving, exactly, but... tolerating it. Being somewhat okay with it, and not just this huge acerbic sarcastic bitch. So it's just gonna happen. It's gonna happen, it's gonna be great.

So, how do you even do that? Where to start... Lists. Dylan, Dylan's a pro at lists. Looking stuff up,
and like, compiling... So, that way.

He does a little Googling, makes a list of every evangelical church in California. Every pastor with a hint of online presence, ranked by likeliness to risk their career for them, mostly through searching their websites and social media for a few pertinent buzzwords. LGBT, that's a good start. Homosexual, not so much. Sexual perversion, forget about it. You can just turn away now.

If all that goes nowhere, he'll just look outside of California. Then outside the US, then anywhere people know English. Tyler always loves to travel anyway.

“We could get a translator,” Dylan offers. It's a surprisingly long list, it's so nice. Gets a lot shorter when you filter out the ones who are liberal in every way. “Or she could. So she trusts it.”

“Let's not go that far,” Tyler says.

“You want her there,” Dylan says. It's like... he's never seen Tyler so defeatist. About anything. Always, he's always the most go-getting guy. “It's gonna happen. I swear.”

“Okay,” Tyler says, like, sure, it's nice to have dreams, Dylan. Then, “Don't be too hard on yourself.”


“It was a peace offering,” Tyler says. Which—that was peace, really? “It wasn't a real promise.”

“We'll see,” Dylan says.

They find a guy out of Modesto, this really nice preacher with a partner and two kids. He's just not specifically evangelical. Well, obviously not, but he is in the Spread the love of Jesus way, which should count for something, no?

It weirds Tyler out, a little bit, reading some of his stuff. Like, he's into it, it's just really not what he's used to. Kind of—if you had vanilla ice cream, all your life, and then you had sweet cream. And sweet cream is so clearly superior, there's no contest. But there's still this thing like, wait, what is this? Vanilla doesn't taste like this.

Look at Dylan, killin' it on the metaphors. The one metaphor, singular. Still.

“It won't be,” Tyler says, looking up from the screen. “She's not gonna like it. Him.”

“I like him,” Dylan says, but it's not like that's the vote that matters, at this point. “But yeah. Maybe you're right. Not enough... fire and brimstone.”

“She doesn't like gay people,” Tyler says, and wow. Wow, there's a punch to the gut.

“You're gay,” Dylan says.

“Am I?” Tyler says. “Hadn't noticed.”

“I'm,” Dylan says, and Tyler says, “You're bi. It's different.”

“Whoa,” Dylan says. Second punch, it's getting a little hard to inhale. “What, because I'm not like, all the way...” Tyler nods. “I'm still getting gay married. It's the same thing.”
“Not to her,” Tyler says.

“Wait, wait,” Dylan says. Not that this is really the most pressing realization, but... “I thought you were bi. Like, with Brittany.”

“Tried to be,” Tyler says. “At least outwardly. Didn't really take off.”


“Eventually,” Tyler says.

“Well, shit,” Dylan says. “I really spent a year of my life being insecure for nothing, wow.” That's not completely humiliating at all. Stalking their Instagrams, hating himself for caring. For obsessively Googling all their names, and envisioning all these detailed romances. “Like, he maybe wasn't even trying to fuck with me.”

“He was,” Tyler says. “He did. He meant to be.”

“Unless he was just, like, posturing,” Dylan says. “You know, helping your reputation as a straight guy. And he never really thought I'd think... Like, I know you.”

The Ian version never made sense, the just sleeping together? Just this endless eager lineup of people who wouldn't even look in Dylan's direction, and Tyler just going to town on them.

It shouldn't have been the slightest bit believable.

Meaningless sex, yeah, that really sounds like him. Really sounds like what he'd go for. Absolutely. You got me, dude, I'm gonna go away and cry now. And like, get so anxious I stop eating, you bet. What you're saying, it's totally possible. And probably the reason we broke up, you know. My own physical, and social, and sophisticational inadequacies.

There's so fucking many of them.

“I don't care what he thought he was doing,” Tyler says. This tense look on his face, the one he gets whenever they talk about Ian, however briefly. “I don't care. I hated it.” Voice softening, eyes softening. “I love you.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says, he knows. “Love you too. So much. But like, we were broken up. Even if he was really trying to, like... Make me miserable, or whatever. Being shitty to me is part of it. As your best friend.”

“It's not,” Tyler says. “I don't want... I never want that.”

He's still so, so upset about it.

Dylan has to hug him again.

“Tyler's been shitty to you,” he says, pulling back. He heard them, in the hospital. “When... About the pictures. I didn't want it, but...”

“I don't wanna talk about him,” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “Tyler?”

“Ian,” Tyler says, and he never even used to call him that. He had all these fond nicknames. Ian, that's like, so cold, compared to that. “I don't—He doesn't matter.”
“You used to love him,” is what Dylan would've said, but... He's asking. He's asking for something, let's not just steamroll it immediately.

“Okay,” Dylan says, and rubs at his shoulder.

There's a pro-gay pastor in West Covina who might be just hateful enough. Except he's a Trump supporter, and no way. No way Dylan's whole marriage is gonna be kicked off by someone who thinks anything that guy says is okay. Much less laudable.

“She's a Trump supporter,” Tyler says, and yeah, that just figures. That just makes so much sense. “Not like... I'm sure she doesn't agree with everything.”


“I don't like him either,” Tyler says. “I wasn't gonna fight for him.”

“I know,” Dylan says, but it's still good to hear. “Okay. There's one in Orange County...”

There's a few days like that, going back and forth. Less intolerant, way too liberal. Full of holy rage, hates black people. Or Jews, or like, bisexuals. Choose, you greedy fuckers! Can't be born both ways!

It's starting to seem a little bit hopeless.

It's, no abortion. That's the perfect amount of judgy, that's what they're aiming for. Something they can point to like, see, there's a line, without having the whole rest of their lives sanctified by someone who just thinks women shouldn't get to vote.

“That's not real,” Tyler says. “There's not... That's not based on anything.”

“I'll Google it,” Dylan offers, and Tyler shakes his head.

“It's not normal,” he says. “There's gonna be outliers.”

“You're an outlier,” Dylan says. “Gay Christian, how often does that happen? Like, out of everybody.”

“A lot,” Tyler says. “Clearly. If there's this many churches open to it.”

Which, fair point. Point, Tyler.

“And I'm not,” Tyler says, and stops. “I don't know if I'm...”

He just struggles for a while.

“Full gay,” Dylan jokes. “Maybe you're just, like, Dylan-sexual.”

“No,” Tyler says. “I mean, maybe,” he adds, and it's weirdly flattering, as ridiculous as it is. “But I'm not...”

And then he just gives up.
“Oh no,” Dylan says, and feels at his forehead. “This church search stuff is frying your brain.” He kisses him, pulls away. Stands up, stretches a little. “Okay. Break time.”

“Like, I believe in it,” Tyler says. “Mostly. Besides all the ways they're twisting it.”

“Oh, of course,” Dylan says, cutting out the stretching. Serious, he's serious. He's a serious adult. “I'm not saying they're all like that. Or like, just widely religion-bashing.” Except, he kinda has been. He kind of has been this really intolerant, asshole atheist dick.

“Sorry,” he says. “Sorry, I'm just, like...” Excuses, Tyler doesn't need excuses. “I'm sorry,” he says. “I'm, that's not cool. Not cool, Dyl. You shouldn't have to tell me.”

“That's not what I'm saying,” Tyler says.

But isn't it, isn't it? No, eat your words, Tyler. Get all defensive, lemme make you so defensive about yourself. Hey, doesn't that look familiar?

Really, Dylan and Tyler's mom have so much in common.


“You don't have to say that,” Tyler says.

“Yeah I do,” Dylan says. “It's not, you know, it's fine. People really benefit from it. In a lot of ways.” Oh god. “And like, maybe it's even true. I don't know. It's all subjective.”


How have they never dealt with this before this? Oh, well maybe Dylan's been smart enough to step around this landmine, until now. And Tyler's never been like, Hey, do you have a minute to talk about Jesus?

But here they are, here they are. Bound to happen eventually.

“I'm not trying to debate,” Tyler says. “We don't need to do that.”

Oh, thank fuck.

“I can just, yeah, stop being so overly critical about it,” Dylan says. “I'm really sorry, dude. I seriously didn't notice.”

“You're not overly anything,” Tyler says. “You're allowed to talk.”


“Just however you want,” Tyler says. “I don't have a problem with it.”

Right, he never does. Never has a problem with anything.

And wow, is Dylan just trying to pick a fight with him? Where is he hoping to go with this? Seriously.

“I like the first guy,” Dylan says. “The Modesto guy. He's like, if I was really picking for us.”

“So pick for us,” Tyler says. “It's not... She's not going to like it either way.”

“It's good,” Tyler says. “It's enough. It doesn't matter.”

It's like he doesn't even care.

“No, wait, Tyler,” Dylan says. He should really have...

He can't believe he didn't ask this.

“What do you want?” Dylan says. “Like, for yourself. Outside of your mom, or anyone.”

Tyler looks at him. He didn't think of the question either.

God, god.

“I don't know,” he says.

It's still a little bit of a mindfuck. How long Dylan knew him, without knowing anything. Any of this.

Just assuming, just assuming he's the healthiest guy in the world. The most together guy, the most confident.

Like, who wouldn't be? Looking like him, performing like him. Being so, like, constantly on the ball.

Dylan never realized he just had to be.

Had to be, and he couldn't turn it off if he wanted to. Couldn't slow down, couldn't take a break.

Couldn't, ever, ask for anything.

Couldn't even think about it.

It's massive, what Tyler's doing in therapy. How much of a difference it's making, already. He's asking for things, he's having negative emotions he doesn't instantly just try to shut off. He does, he does still do that, but he's different about it. It's just, it's wild to take in.

Dylan, for Dylan therapy was just talking. He doesn't really think he got that much out of it. Like, yeah, some things make more sense now, maybe, but it's not like anything really drastically changed, in his head. No flipped switch, no like, eureka moment. Where it all just slotted into place.

Not like he really expected it to, ever. So unrealistic, what do you think? You know, it's only as good as what you give 'em to work with. And Dylan already knows his head too well for anyone new to uncover something that earth-shattering.

Baseball, Tyler's baseball reveal? That was crazy. Or that stuff with Posey, he never would've said anything about it before. Not in a million years.

Talking back to his mom, even, whatever he thinks about it. That's such a major fucking step for
him.

Or the biggest thing, what he needs more than anything. That Dylan's been doing this whole time, apparently, without even consciously realizing it, but it's never been heightened enough. Really overt, really... undeniable.

Can you care about me? Just, can you give a fuck about my wellbeing, visibly. Can I matter, please.

He never would've said any of that. Or close, or hinted at it. Forget it.

And finally seeing all this, finally hearing it, it's not exactly the biggest mystery why.

He's got a session after the cake tasting, the one Dylan actually made it to. Didn't leave him waiting, didn't make it up with crying apologies and hugs and Tyler just being fine with it. Dylan doesn't know what that means, in his vocabulary. Not fine at all, for starters. Really horribly let down, and betrayed, and insulted, and hurt, but he's not allowed to be any of that. So he'll just swallow it down, just find some kind of explanation that excuses it, and then it's not your fault for hurting him, it's just his fault for not being over it yet. For actually giving a shit about it, for ten seconds.

It's so, like. Dylan just wants to hug him all the time.

Not that he'd mind it. Not that Tyler'd ever, ever refuse. Or not be like, the most grateful receiver. Receiver? Recipient. Recipient of them.

Whatever. It'd be a good arrangement. It's not, there's no downsides.

Tyler's got a session, and Dylan's got a pastor to bribe. To hire with two week's notice, even a little less than that. Be like, oh, by the way, we don't want it in the church. It's a beach wedding, we're gonna have a tent. You know, like a film festival. Independent Spirit Awards. Did I mention we're actors? We know a lot of people. They're mostly not religious at all.

Yeah, Dylan might need to polish that pitch a little.

He gets it down to two minutes, leads with the heart. Tyler, Tyler's mom. Dylan loves him so much, and Tyler loves his mom, and she doesn't really... You know. Agree with the homosexual agenda.

But religion, you know...

And Tyler's religious. Tyler's religious, he just, it's hard. Because of all the stuff about him being an abomination, and everything. Getting stoned to death, it's not the warmest, fuzziest feeling.

In hindsight, that pool scene they did on the show has a whole, deeper meaning. That Dylan never even previously contemplated. Tyler's eyes getting all wide, he didn't look like Derek at all. In that second.

Ugh, Dylan has to go home and hug him again.

love you, he texts Tyler, and then he turns his phone off.

Head straight, spine relaxed, he's going in.
He comes out feeling good about it. He's a really good guy, this pastor. A little Jesusy, you know, obviously. But just a really decent, mellow dude.

He really gets it, with Tyler. Tyler and his mom. That whole situation.

Not that Dylan got that deep into it, but just the religious stuff. The conflict there.

Matthew really got it.

And he's not, it's not a lock. Two weeks, that's not a lot of time. But he's gonna try, he's gonna move stuff around. If however possible.

Dylan's not the most optimistic dude in the world, but this seems pretty set. For once, everything's like, really starting to come together. All the pieces.

And then he turns on his phone.

And there's a message, from Tyler. Not a text, or a voice thing on Whatsapp, or whatever. An honest to god message, like on the phone part of his phone. Tyler's the last person who actually uses it.

There's a message, and Tyler's crying.

It's a little bit of a blur, after that. Getting a car, texting Tyler a few times. Waiting for a response. Listening to the message again, really disassembling it.

_Dylan_. And this _shudder_, like it's the worst thing. Like the worst thing just happened.

_You're not... You're okay._

_You're_, like something's happened to _Dylan_ lately. Like it's one of those celebrity death hoaxes setting him off. All of Twitter writing little memorials, never bothering to check. Pick up a posthumous lifetime achievement award, you're done. Just a million Facebook statuses about how you impacted their childhoods.

_And I'm okay_, Tyler says, and that's the most terrifying part, why wouldn't he be? And clearly he's not, actually, that's really not that hard to figure out. The audible crying is kind of a dead giveaway.

Oh god, let someone not be dead. Or near-dead, or like, threatened. With a near-death experience.

_I'm okay, you're okay._

This again. This over and over again, constantly. Dylan really doesn't know what to think about that.

Like, who's he trying to convince?

_And I love you_, Tyler says. _I love you, I love..._ Sounding horrified he didn't say it sooner, shuddering. _You're okay._

Swear to god, Dylan's gonna fucking lose his mind, the next time he hears how okay he is.
Text, there's a text back, finally. *Sorry

Didn't mean to scare

Yeah, no shit. He'd fall off the side of a cliff before he'd scare Dylan by telling him about it.

where r u, Dylan sends. what's wrong

no forget it just tellme where u are

Bar, Tyler sends back. Well, that narrows it down. Gonna go look..

Michigan Bar

*Gonna

don't need the asterisks, Dylan tells him, and looks it up. It's a pun, apparently. Or, whatever. Double meanings. Michigan Bar, it's a mining camp in Sacramento. Or was, anyway.

It's really not important right now.

okay, Dylan sends, once he has the address. Of the bar bar, not the—other one. I'm omw to you. what happened?

And, nothing.

Absolute nothing.

Just great.

He's very, very drunk when Dylan gets to him. Staggeringly drunk, all fondly dazed and confused. The sweetest, most unvarnished form of flattery, really. Just falling all over him gushing.

It's just once they get outside, into the hot night air, something changes. Tyler's long long looks getting so serious, he's barely blinking. He's not saying anything.

In the quiet, in the Uber home, he just starts shaking.

Dylan soothing at his side, it's barely helping. And then Tyler's crying, he's terrified.

"Whoa," Dylan says, soft. Quiet, the driver's not gonna hear. Hiding Ty's face with his arms, leaning in close. "Tyler, what's going on?"

And he can't say it. He can't say it. Just shakes his head, like, No, please.

And he doesn't have to. It's okay, Dylan's not gonna make him. Not, no way.

If Dylan stays close, Tyler just looks drunk and touch-hungry. Dylan kissing his brow, nuzzling in, they're just a gross, obliviously in love couple. Just, this constant array of PDA violations. And no one has to know Tyler's crying, no one gets a souvenir video of his panicking face. That's not part of it, that's not how it's gonna be. Dylan may not know what's going on with him, or how to fix it, but he can do that much, at the very fucking least.
Dark settling in, and some really mellow reggae playing, this whole easy listening mix, but Tyler's too quiet, and shuddering, barely settling down. Dylan doesn't know what that session did to him, or if it even was that, but he's ready to hit someone over it, knock 'em out. Throw hands, there's an expression. Yeah, and fists, and why stop there? If someone hurt him, past or present, Dylan's not holding back about it. They can just fucking see if it was worth it.

Getting out of the car again is the biggest challenge; Tyler's visibly not okay. And Dylan can't hide his face like he'd like while he's supporting him, but it's dark, and that's gonna have to be good enough. Uber guy just starting to look around, too helpful, but Dylan's like, I got it. You have a good night, okay? Okay. Take care, man. His arm under Tyler, and around, and he can already see the headlines, Tyler wasted, Dylan dragging him home. They'll act like he had an attitude about it, like they're gonna fight over this, like they're on the outs. *Hobrien On The Rocks?* Whatever the fuck. Some stupid pun like that. Like it's anything even close to that.

They get inside, and Dylan gets Tyler to bed. Makes him drink a bunch of water. It's a pain, but it's nothing next to what he gets with hangovers. Dylan *assumes*. Whatever, it's not like water can make it worse, suddenly. With the introduction of a fuckton of alcohol.

There's still so much about migraine that Dylan doesn't get, and Tyler's ones specifically. He's like—he doesn't like being unprepared for things, he doesn't like not *knowing*. They're both like that, but with medical stuff—Dylan just likes knowing what's what. And has to, kind of has to for the benefit of his ongoing sanity. However compromised it may already be.

But Tyler's working on it. He's working on it. Getting stuff out, and being allowed to have opinions that actually impact his life, what a scandal. It's not like it's fucking easy, turning around and starting with that stuff at twenty-nine. There's so much to unpack there, it's like, mind-boggling.

But he doesn't, Tyler wouldn't want him to. Not past a certain point, it doesn't help. Just makes him feel bad about it, and what the fuck's the point of that? So Dylan's gonna shut up about it. He's got opinions, Tyler knows he's got opinions. They don't have to talk about it.

Dylan's not sure, if he got started, that he'd know how to stop.

Tyler's nervous in bed, fidgety, looking like he's gonna have a panic attack. Like he is having one, the kind without the hyperventilation, where your brain just keeps going and going and you're just along for the ride. Doing these things he used to do sometimes to calm down, or hype up, little harsh outward breaths, trying to regulate it. Dylan used to think it was motivational. Maybe it was, then. Glaring off at middle distance, really intimidating the open air in front of him. That'll show 'em who's boss.

“Tyler,” Dylan says. He really doesn't... Wasn't he drunk, half a minute ago? What the fuck happened to that?

Tyler looking at him, it takes him a second to focus. And then he's too focused, like it's a job. Like he's being scored at this.


And he does, a lot, and his eyes water. Great, great advice. Dylan clearly knows what he's doing here, absolutely.

“Do you need, like,” Dylan says, and he shouldn't have to ask. He should just know if Tyler needs it, but this is something different. Dylan doesn't know how to tend to it yet. “Would it help?”
Tyler hesitating, and nodding, okay. Okay, that's something. Step one.

But he doesn't know if touch is okay. It was in the car, but that was the car. He's more than sober now, and Dylan doesn't know what he's been going through.

He hesitates, and Tyler gives him a worried look, this jerky, wide-eyed—And, okay. No holding back, holding back is concerning. Concerning really isn't what Dylan's going for.

Sure and steady, reliable. That's more like it. Dylan doesn't know what he's doing, doesn't mean Tyler has to know that.

And it's so dumb, because it's just touch, and Tyler. There's nothing Dylan knows better. He's just overthinking it, putting all this weight on every choice he could make. Like there's a wrong way to do this.

Tyler's eyebrows a little high, Dylan knows what that means. Taking it like rejection, taking it like, Oh, I see. And that's all I'm ever gonna say about it, or express, and then I'll just retroactively find a reason I'm fine with it. Like: You don't owe me anything. Love, affection? Basic levels of respect? Don't, it's not necessary. I'm just here to serve.

“Tyler,” Dylan says. And moves in close, almost predatory, Nogitsune-sure and still.

Tyler sitting up, and finally. Finally. His eyes are dark, he swallows. Dylan grins.

Not his grin, not some goofy, nervous... He's got intent.

“Oh,” Tyler says, breathing a little heavily, and Dylan kisses him.

Pushes him down, and stops, says, “Okay?”

“Yeah,” Tyler says, rough. “Don't—don't ask me.”


But he doesn't, he's still overthinking it. Ends up taking it back, just holding him. He's too drunk, they're both too worked up. Dylan's too anxious about it, hurting him somehow, going too far.

“There isn't a too far,” Tyler says. Eight hours and half a thing of Pedialyte later, he's doing better than Dylan ever would be. “Not with you. Trust me.”

Dylan nods, nods. That's, wow.

“Noted,” he says, calm as anything.

He makes Tyler pick a safeword anyway. Safeword, that's a thing, right? And safegesture, for when you're a little... otherwise engaged.

“Oh,” Tyler says, looking very interested in that, but no. They're figuring out this shit first.

“Seahorse,” he says, shrugging, and... that's a little mystifying.
“Seahorse,” Dylan says.

“It's not gonna come up,” Tyler says. “It's not gonna come up. That's the point.”

“Okay,” Dylan says. “Sure. And gesture, what's... Do seahorses do anything distinctive?”

“I'm not playing a seahorse,” Tyler says, rolling his eyes. “I'll tap out.”

“And you have to,” Dylan says. “You have to, if it feels like... Or we're not doing this.”

“Oh, don't worry,” Tyler says. “I really don't think I'll find anything to complain about.”
“You can tell me,” Dylan says, when Tyler looks a little more willing to address it. Not as, you know, completely terrified by the possibility. “Like, you don't have to. But it looked really... I don't know, really intense.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says, and that's such a huge, huge difference already. He shakes his head. “I overreacted. I don't know. I'm just really...” He laughs. “I think I'm just taking therapy too far.”

“Oh,” Dylan says wisely. He's not really that sure what to say about that. It's not his call, it's really not his right to push Ty in any directions. That's kind of exactly the point of all of it.

“I mean, I'll still go,” Tyler says. “If something really starts bothering me. But otherwise, it feels like... I don't know. Like I got what I'm gonna get out of it.”

Dylan nods, nods. Makes sense. Makes sense, and it's not like Dylan's the most regular visitor, himself. He checks in, you know, fills the forty-five minute hour. Every once in a while.

“I know you wanted me to,” Tyler says.

“No, dude,” Dylan says instantly. This, he knows what he wants to say to this. “That's, you did it. It's just totally up to you.”

“I feel like I'm... worse,” Tyler admits. “Like, I'm not... I don't know.”

In control all the time, maybe. Or selfless, or shut down.

“I don't like scaring you,” he says, eventually. “Or starting a whole, like, thing, and it's not even—” He's blushing. “This is so embarrassing.”

“I had a heart attack about literally nothing,” Dylan says. “I think I got you beat on embarrassing meltdowns.”

“Yeah, but it wasn't nothing,” Tyler says. “It was a heart attack. It wasn't just panic.”


“What? No,” Tyler says. “I just—It was just a lot.”


“It's not,” Tyler says. “I didn't hyperventilate, I could breathe fine.”

“That's not always part of it,” Dylan says. “That's like, it could be. It varies.”

“I don't have them,” Tyler says. “I've never... I'm not like that.”

Like you'd've noticed if you were, Dylan definitely doesn't say. Too far, that would be so over the line.

“You had one recently?” Tyler says, sounding all worried, but for a second he kind of just looks relieved.

Dylan burns his hand making dinner, because he's an adult but also a walking catastrophe. It takes about an hour to stop noticeably stinging, and after that he pretty much forgets about it.

Tyler loses his actual mind.

Not vocally, not anything like that, he just stares at Dylan's bandaged wrist like it's a robot arm or something. He's stock still, and then he's moving impossibly casually towards him.

“What,” he says, and then he just stares for a few more seconds. “What happened?”

“Oh,” Dylan says, when he puts the look and his wrist and the burn together. It takes a minute, because of how he genuinely forgot about it. “That, right. Burned my hand, a little. But, hey,” he adds. “I made lo mein! Spicy.” Tyler loves hot food, it's ridiculous. He'd put pure capsaicin on everything he ate, if he didn't also want to kiss Dylan occasionally. Dylan, he can do hot, you know, a little's nice. He doesn't think food should be painful.

They compromise. Tyler holds back a little; Dylan's slowly upping his game. You know, that's what love's all about.

“Oh,” Tyler says. “So... It's not.”

His voice is weird, calm and shaky at the same time. There's tears in his eyes.

The realization sinks in slow.

“Whoa,” Dylan says. His brain's on some kind of delay. “You didn't think, like... Tyler.”

“I don't know,” Tyler says. “I couldn't... I wasn't really thinking.”

“Well it's not,” Dylan says, and hugs him. Tyler moves in against him, drops his head against Dylan's throat. “Like, not even... Even in the hospital, I never actually...” Even in his life. “It's not gonna happen. Especially now.”

And he never would've done it like that.

“It's stressful,” Tyler says. “Everything happening with me.”

“No,” Dylan says, horrified. “No way, are you kidding? You're doing amazing.” Has he really not been saying that out loud?

“I'm not,” Tyler says, and his head drops a little further. Dylan moves his shoulder up, braces him a little. “I'm... I used to be reliable.”

“Still are,” Dylan says. “Like, beyond. It's unreal.” He laughs, just barely. “So, you know. It's okay if you wanna be real sometimes.”

“I don't like being,” Tyler says, after a while. Dylan just holding him, his pounding pulse just starting to slow down. “A weight, on anyone.”

“Nobody does, dude,” Dylan says. He turns in a little, kisses just under Tyler's jaw. “I like being
there for you, though.”

Dinner gets cold. They heat it up again later.

It's good.

Dylan's done editing at night. He's, forget it. If he'd've known what was gonna happen, he never
would've even considered it. Sleep, it's a big deal to Tyler. To him not just suffering for a day.
Dylan's not playing around with that for anything.

It's just a little harder to hide what you're doing when your partner is completely awake.

Tyler shows up over his shoulder, Dylan slamming the laptop shut as subtly as possible. “Still? But
the movie's done.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says. Can't argue with that. “Yeah, no, it's just uh, a kind of...”

“Director's cut,” Tyler guesses, and yeah, that would've worked, but Dylan's already saying, “Gag
reel. I guess,” wishing he'd just kept his mouth shut for an extra two seconds.

It's, yeah, it is a gag reel. You know, it hits all those beats. But it's not for the DVD. Not for the
web, it's for the wedding. All these little moments, of like, affection. And easiness, and banter.

Mostly it's Dylan behind the camera, trying to get Tyler to break. Or both of them on set, cracking
up over nothing. Over the littlest anything.

Or just goofing off, or dancing together. Or forgetting lines and trying to save the scene anyway, or
just giving up, laughing. Or that fight scene they had, Tyler's big crying scene, that he really
wanted to do without tear sticks, or anything. And he got there, but he stayed kind of worked up for
a while after, Dylan slowly realizing it wasn't a joke, or a method acting thing. And stepping in
front of him, blocking his face, touching his arm, speaking soft.

Or both of them so tired everything was funny. Or where everything turned into innuendo. Or Tyler
coming up behind Dylan in this like Fabio wig, this ludicrous hipster mustache, and sunglasses.
And just playing it cool, just silently amused, waiting for Dylan to notice. Or Dylan accidentally
biting Tyler's lip, and covering his face, apologizing. Saying, “We're gonna need, we need a stunt
guy in this one. You know, it's hazardous.” And Tyler cracking up, backing them up against the
wall. Leaning in, and Dylan joking, “We should call the medic in, just in—” And Tyler kissing
him.

Or the two of them, doing live Foley sounds along with traffic. Doing thirty million fake Vines,
singing terribly to the radio. Or freezing to death shivering, huddling close in the same jacket,
because Dylan forgot to bring one. Or leaning up against each other in giant puffy coats, and just
passing out.

Dylan just thought it would be nice. As a wedding thing, you know? Just, a culmination. Of
everything.

He didn't realize how much Tyler actually needed it.

He gets in touch with his DP, with some of the cast, asks their favorite moments. And gets bolder,
going back. Back to MTV, asks for any footage they have of them. Any anything. It doesn't have to
look like anything.
Bloopers, behind the scenes, anything, anything. Promo footage, whatever.

Dylan'll know it when he sees it.

The sex stuff... It's not like, this really kinky, really dominational thing, for them. Dominatrixal? That's not it. It's, it's not like there's a dungeon. Or all these props, or any. Four books and three movies and fifty shades, no way. It's not even really about liking being hurt, for Tyler. It's... he's hurt, and someone's taking care of him.

It hurts, and he doesn't just have to swallow it. He can let it out, Dylan's gonna be there.

It matters.

Dylan can get used to that, taking control, being all bossy about it, uncaring. And then snapping out of it, switching back. Tyler loves that. Coming down from it, and Dylan's... not sorry, but, like, sympathetic. Comforting.

Yeah, I got you. I love you. It's okay.

It's actually not that much of a stretch. Not that far from how it ever is, it's just tweaked a little. And Tyler actually does say seahorse once, and Dylan gets off him in a second, would be halfway across the room if Tyler didn't stop him. Didn't say, No, I like it. I just wanted to see.

“Yeah, well,” Dylan says, a little shakily. “Happy to demonstrate.”

And he comes back, tries to get back into it, and Tyler says, “Are you okay?”

Pulling back, all worried.

“What? Yeah,” Dylan says. He scratches at his cheek a little. “No, yeah. Why wouldn't I be?”

“You don't owe me anything,” Tyler says. “All of this, it's... It's a lot. And if you don't like it—”


And Tyler doesn't look sure.

“You need a safeword,” he says. “Also. If it's too much or if you just wanna stop or... Any reason.”

He talks so fast, sometimes. Stuffs all his words into one sentence, doesn't pause. There's like this lisp he gets, almost. Just running through it.

“I'm serious,” Tyler says. “It's not just my call.”

“Yeah, I know,” Dylan says, too late. Too distracted by Tyler's, like, vocal rhythms, to actually hear what he's saying, or respond. He hears something, it just takes a few seconds to process the actual words of it. “I'm... I would tell you.”

And Tyler just looks at him, like, Really?

“I'm not the only one who's fine all the time,” he says, and Dylan ducks his head. “You don't have to be. Even if I really like it.”

Safeword, safeword. Word that is safe. And snappy, and not at all sexual.

He thinks for a minute, then says, “Dad.”

Tyler chokes a little.

“Yeah,” Dylan says. “If I'm thinking about my dad at all, I'm definitely not interested.”

Tyler shakes his head. “Dad it is.”

“Ew,” Dylan says. “I'm getting soft just hearing you, like, mention it.”

“Really,” Tyler says, very seriously. A little too amused with himself to pull it off. With whatever he's gonna say, it keeps creeping into his face. Dylan's close to laughing just looking at him.

“A little bit,” he says, and Tyler hums. Comes back from it, goes all serious again. Looking at Dylan, really holding his gaze.

“Lemme see what I can do about that.”

Dylan's dad comes in before the wedding, Dylan loves his dad. His mom's coming in after, but she's gonna give them some time alone.

Great, that's just what they needed. Time to catch up, time to really...

Really get into it.

Tyler's never really actually met him. Like they've been, they've shared a room before. Occupied the same general space. They've had conversations, they've exchanged words. Briefly.

It's just never been a one-on-one situation. Or two-on-one, even.

Dylan's kind of been majorly avoiding it.

“Dad,” he says, at the door, and hugs him, helps him with his bags. “Hey, uh, this is... Dad, Tyler. Tyler, Dad.” Making a face, laughing a little at their expressions. “Which, you know that. Obviously.”

“Tyler,” Dad says. “I've seen you in Road To Perdition.”

“Spitting image, right?” Dylan jokes. “Hasn't changed a bit.”

Tyler laughs.

“Seriously, he's only saying that 'cause he hates Teen Wolf,” Dylan says. “It's like, what was it? An insult to remakes?”

Wow, he never meant to mention that gem. It's been forever, he shouldn't even remember it.

“I came around,” Dad says. “Least until they made the mistake of letting you go.”

“Aww,” Dylan says, a little stiffly. Glancing at Tyler, looking away.
“It's good,” Tyler says. “Change is good. Gives you new opportunities.”

Tyler. He can find the silver lining in anything. Dylan nods, pats at his shoulder. “Yeah. Especially working with this guy.”

“He makes it easy,” Tyler says.

And it's like, it feels like an interview. Like they're back doing interviews, helping each other out.

“So sweet to me,” Dylan says. His hand on Tyler's shoulder, he slings his arm closer around him. Tyler looks at him.

“Anytime,” he says, nodding slowly, and Dylan has seriously never been more in love with him.

It's, it's okay. It's not the total nightmare trainwreck Dylan was expecting it to be. He doesn't trip over himself just trying to get a word out, he doesn't confess to a whole host of symptoms, past and present. Doesn't just start crying, randomly. That was a thing, for a while. Definitely would've made an impression.

They talk about, like, the weather. And traffic. And the movie, a little bit, Dad hasn't seen the trailer. Tyler pulls it up, so helpful.

It's good. It's fine. Dad's very cool about it. All glowingly complimentary, all proud about it. It's not weird at all.

Tyler looking at him like he can't make sense of something, edging a little closer to Dylan's side. Hands on him, always a welcome addition. And: Chill, Dylan. Don't, like, invent a whole thing out of nothing. Out of absolute thin air. Just, looking for things to be anxious about.

Everything's going so great.

Dad, Dylan loves his dad. So much.

He just keeps forgetting how to be around him.

Tyler, he's in the bathroom or something. Taking a shit, leaves them alone for a minute.

And Dylan's whole mind starts spinning out.

“You look really happy together,” Dad says.

“Yeah,” Dylan says, and swallows, and swallows. “Yeah, yeah, I am.”

“He's a lucky man,” Dad says, and Dylan doesn’t really know how to respond. I'm lucky to have him, you don't even know. What a basket case I turned into.

He's definitely not gonna say that.

“We always wanna hear from you,” Dad says, while Dylan's scrambling. “Whatever's happening, with your mom and me, I don’t want you to think...”

“No, I know,” Dylan says, this black hole opening up inside of him. “I'm not, it's not... Work just
gets crazy, sometimes.”

“Your movie,” Dad says. And Dylan doesn't, he doesn't... “Mr. big time director. How’s it feel?”

“Uh,” Dylan says. His stomach's like, writhing. “Kind of, you know, terrifying.”

Dad laughs. “Yeah. Yeah, I bet it is. Dylan.”

Stopping, watching him so seriously.

“I’m really proud of you,” he says. “I know it wasn’t always so easy, and I just... I’m just really glad you found something that means so much to you. That’s worth the effort, you know?”

“Yeah,” Dylan says hoarsely.

“It never really gets easy,” Dad says. “But meaningful, if you can make it meaningful... I mean, that's the dream, right?” Laughing, that kind of self-effacing laugh that's too easy to mimic. “Your old man’s pretty deep, huh.”

“As a ravine,” Dylan jokes, and what, what does that even imply? He doesn’t even know what he was trying to convey, with that. “It’s, yeah,” he says. “Yeah, it is.”

“Call your mom, okay?” Dad says. “She doesn’t like to, to badger you—”

“It’s not badgering,” Dylan says, and then he really can’t see, for a few seconds. His chest’s inflating, deflating, he doesn’t really know how. “It’s not badgering, it’s not... Dad, I’m really sorry.”

“Not to me,” Dad says, and Dylan nods, nods, Yeah, of course. “And, listen. Don’t tell her I told you to do that.”

“I wouldn’t,” Dylan says. He's pretty sure he's gonna pass out, for a second. “I... I’ve really, I’ve really been a tool, lately. But I’m not, I’m gonna fix it. I swear.”

It's, he almost lurches, a little. Takes a step back, and back again, just to play it down. Hand on his heart, he's just bein' a cheeseball. Overacting.

And everything, everything's fine. Everything's fine, what's his problem? You'd think he was, like, under interrogation. Or cross-examination, how he's stumbling away. Fighting, like, fighting to give one clear answer.

Scratching at his cheek, and his eye, it's gotta be so obvious.

Dad's just being nice, not mentioning it.

“We just wanna hear from you,” he says. “It doesn’t have to be about your glamorous life, you know.” Getting all sing-song, making a joke out of it.

Dylan kind of grins, tries to laugh for a second. The muscles go, he just can't hold it. He ducks his head, tries to cover.

He's seriously so broken.

“You’re still our kid, Dyl,” Dad says, and Dylan looks up again. Sees his dad all soft-eyed, sincere. He always is.
He always is, he never means it like...

He's just trying to break the tension.

“We love you,” Dad says. “It doesn’t have to be about anything.”

He's really sad about it.

And Dylan has to hug him, and he hugs him. Says, “Yeah, no, I know.” Nodding so hard his head drops. And just staying like that, for a few seconds. It's a little too weirdly heavy to lift.

“Love you too,” he tells his dad. And laughs a little, makes a face, what? Like it has to be said. “I mean, you know that.”

“Still good to hear,” Dad says, and pats him on the shoulder. “Never gets old, I promise.”

“You okay?” Tyler says when he's gone. When he's like, a minute out the door, and Dylan's just staring out after him, barely catching his breath.

“Super,” Dylan says, a second too late. “I'm, yeah. Doing so great.”

He doesn't know why he gets like this.

Why he freaks out, so consistently, over nothing. Over literal nothing, over the nicest words. And sentiments.

Tyler just looks at him, keeps looking. Comes just a little closer, lays a hand on his back.


It's, he's remarking on it. It's worth remarking on.

Tyler makes everything feel easy.

Or easier, anyway. Less, like... horrifyingly stressful. Even if it really shouldn't be, in the first place. Even if no one else would ever even have had a problem with it.

Oh, your dad came? Your dad came to visit? And he was so nice, and supportive. Just like always. Yeah, that's a real hardship, you got it. That's a real ordeal to go through.

Dylan's such a piece of shit, seriously.

He doesn't know how anyone fucking stands him.

Dylan's not the steadiest therapy goer. He's not, like... Not this shining example, for Tyler, or anyone else.

He goes when he can fit it in. When he really has something to say, or a question, when there's a point to it. Otherwise it's just ruminating. And he doesn't need any encouragement with that. Obsess a little more, maybe. No, really think back. How did you feel about it? And what did that mean, and this. And why does everyone hate you? Because you know they do, right. It's so
apparent.

They're just trying so hard to be nice to you, but they hate your fucking existence. Every, like, look, every word that comes out of your mouth. It's the wrong one, always.

Just think a little more about that.

And Tyler's all concerned, he's always concerned. Nervous about Dylan's fragile mental state. It's so sweet. Such a nice ongoing perk of their relationship, since Dylan tried to not exist so hard it almost happened. Almost resulted in that, that conclusion. Without him ever actually actively doing anything.

And hey, wouldn't that have been something? His dad hearing about that, Dylan doesn't know how he'd be about it. Maybe he'd treat it like a tragedy. Like, who could've seen this coming? So heartbreaking. So young.

Maybe he'd just be relieved.

And that's, it's such an insane thing to think. When there's no, when there's never... When there's never been a real indication.

It's just like, this gnawing suspicion. That keeps coming back.

No one wants you here.

Except Tyler, except both Tylers. It's, they're the best.

Dylan doesn't even know what to make of it.

Tyler says, “I think you should go back to therapy. Talk about it.”

In the most nonjudgmental way possible, his voice is all warm. His hand on Dylan's back, it's like, steadying. Grounding, in a way.

“You hate therapy,” Dylan says, even though he knows that's not true. “You told me you wanna stop.”

“For a while,” Tyler says. “Just to take a while to process everything, and figure out what to do about it.”

Looking at Dylan, too intently.

He says, “I think your dad brings something out in you, and I really think you should talk to someone about it.”

Matter of fact, a little too steadily. Just kind of presenting the idea of it. It's not like it's a demand.

Eyes all heterochromatic, voice all nice and level and sure. There's not really a way out of it.

Til he says, “Or else just tell me what I can do to help.”

It's... He doesn't know. It's not like... Dad was never bad to him.

Not for, not for a second. Never, like, shut him down, about anything, or didn't care completely. He's like, the most considerate dad ever. Too considerate, even.

And Dylan just stressed him out, okay? Being all... him, you know. Spastic and anxious and weird. It's like, get it together, Dylan. And the more he tries to, like, he can't. He's just like, more and more completely helpless about it. Like, thinking about him just amplifies it.

“I know that's terrible,” he says, kind of laughing. “I know—I just, it's how it is.”

“And your mom,” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “No, no.”

He loves his mom.

“Not that—not that that's contrary,” he says, and covers his face. “I love both of them. God, I'm the worst.”

“You're not,” Tyler says. He has to say that. Has to like, find the good in everything. “It seems—not easy. The stakes of it.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says, but he feels like shit even admitting it. Feels like, he doesn't know. A betrayal. “I'm, I don't know. I know this must be really shocking,” he says, and tries to laugh. “Me being oversensitive to things. So out of character.”

“You get it from him,” Tyler offers. “Maybe.”

“You been talking to my therapist?” Dylan jokes. “So... How dare you. The invasion.”

“She said something about it?” Tyler says.

“Our last session,” Dylan says. “And it wasn't, like... It's so typical. You know? It's always, blame the parents. That's the easiest answer.”

It doesn't immediately occur to him.

"Not that...” he says, realizing a beat too late. How Tyler doesn't need him being all dismissive about that, how it's just a little too real for him. Dylan's like, the most insensitive piece of shit. “Sometimes that is what it is. Completely. It's just—Not always.”

“You're just born this way,” Tyler says. Kind of jokingly, in a deadpan way. Dylan doesn't know how to take it.

“I'm not, like,” he says. Dad, it was never about him. He was helping Dylan with it.

He tried everything.

“And my mom, too,” Dylan adds. “They're barely different. They just really care, you know? A lot. And that's, like, you know... It's a weird situation.”

Really heavy, really intense.

But it's not from them. It's, whatever. School, maybe. Or yeah, born this way, you know. Anxiety doesn't need a reason.
It's not exactly the most rational... Like, the most completely causational thing.

It doesn't have to be.

His dad was always a lot more easily stressed out, between them, but it's not like he took it out on Dylan, or anything. No, he just fought with Dylan's mom. And took off, and cheated on her. And you don't have to be a genius to make a connection.

His mom had nothing but patience about him, and worry, but that was maybe worse. Because Dylan was the reason everything was so miserable, and everyone, and she still treated him like... She was just so selfless about it. And Dylan just felt so bad, all the time.

It's not like the fights were ever so dramatic. It wasn't, his family's not like that. No one yells at anyone, no one gets in anyone's face. No one's sarcastic, or even passive aggressive. Everyone's just, like... Tired. And sad. And at a loss. And just trying to joke their way out of it. Like, if you can laugh about it, it can't be that bad, you know? Not in that one second.

The cheating, it wasn't even... You know, it's not some cliché. The babysitter or whatever. It was just really hard, being, like... inundated all the time. With all this constant negativity.

He just needed to really get away from it, for a minute. And stupid jokes only fix it so far.

He didn't even like it, it didn't even feel like anything. He said... You know. It's not like he ever met someone so amazing. It wasn't ever—emotional cheating, to him. Just, like, escapism.

Like that's so comforting, to his wife, like that's better. It's not. But it's not... Dylan can't entirely blame him.

Not when he's the real catalyst for everything.

He doesn't go to therapy. He doesn't go, because... He just doesn't have time, okay? There's like a million things to do before the wedding, he's scrambling as it is.

And the movie, yeah, it's done, but it's still happening. Just because he's not cutting it together himself, that doesn't mean... You know, there's a lot left to do about it. Still a million things to like, consider, and double-check about. Yeah, we feel good about that mix? No, I thought so. Just, better safe than sorry.

There's the wedding, there's the movie, there's, like... Tyler, what, are they supposed to be done with that? Right back to fixating on Dylan's stuff, never even wondering where Tyler's at. Fine, right? You look fine, you must be.

His mom's coming to the wedding, how about that. Not the whole thing, only for the ceremony. The actual... Whatever, it doesn't matter. That's the main thing.

Dylan swore his mom was gonna come, and she's coming. If Dylan has to pick her up and drive her himself.

“See?” he says, hanging up from the confirmational conversation, in which he was the most incredibly calm and mild-mannered dude he's ever been. Oh, is that convenient for you? Oh, thanks for letting us know.
Hanging up, and flipping out, turning to Tyler immediately. “See? What did I tell you.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says, looking a little shell-shocked about it. He's, like barely responsive. “That's... Okay.”

Nodding, nodding.

“Even with the partner pastor,” Dylan says. “Pastor with a partner, whatever. You thought she'd never go for that.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says.

He's crying.

Soundlessly, and then he's squeezing his eyes shut, breathing sharp, trying not to. Tensing his jaw, it's just shuddering.

“Whoa, Tyler,” Dylan says, and reaches out, and Tyler just moves toward him.

It's maybe the most intense hug, out of all of it.
Time speeds up, they're all tuxed up. Suited up, they're very well suited.

They're waiting for the car, Dylan's just checking his phone.

“Water,” he says, and Tyler points at it. “And your, make sure you have your...”

“I do,” Tyler says, and Dylan grins.

“Little early for that, don't you think?”

Tyler snorting, Dylan saying, “Save it, save it for the...”

“Just making sure it sounds natural,” Tyler says innocently.

“I hate you,” Dylan says. Pushing him a little, leaning into it.

“Really,” Tyler says, and then he's too pleased with himself. “Little early for that, don't you think?”

Dylan gapes, throws his head back laughing.

They're just finishing up with the photographs when Brittany shows up out of nowhere to hug Tyler so hard his suit creases, and the first thing she says is, “Your mom’s here! I wasn’t sure...”

“For the ceremony,” Tyler says. “Not—after.”

“Oh,” Brittany says, deflating, but she makes a visible effort not to. “That’s a really nice suit, by the way. Really flatters you.”

“Thanks,” Tyler says, dry. “Dylan picked it.”

“He’s got good taste,” she says. “In a lot of things.”

Tyler nods, nods.

“Take a walk with me,” Brittany says, and holds out her hand.

Tyler’s mom leaves near the end of the vows. Just gets up, just—goes.

Tyler stops, stares after her for a few seconds. turns back. He's shell-shocked, a deer in headlights. He doesn’t know what to do.

And Dylan touches his arm, moves closer. Closes his fingers over Tyler’s shoulder, and gives up on subtlety when he shudders, just a little.

“She did come, so,” Dylan murmurs. “That’s something.”
“Yeah,” Tyler says, and Dylan hugs him, soothes at his side.


Tyler doesn’t say anything.

Dylan just holds him, for a while.

“Just give us a minute,” Dylan tells the minister. The pastor they specifically searched out, just to satisfy... “Just give us a minute. Please.”

Holding Tyler, telling him, “We don’t have to... We can take five, you know, or longer. It’s okay. If you’re not in the, if this isn’t exactly...”

“No,” Tyler says. and straightens, straightens. “I want this. I want you.”

“You already have me,” Dylan says, and they’re both already crying, it’s too fitting. People kind of murmuring in the back, Dylan’s only starting to hear them.

“I don’t wanna wait,” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “Yeah, okay.”

Kind of nods at the pastor, starts it all up again.

Slow-dancing after, they're just kind of swaying. Just kind of holding close, sharing space. Tyler's hand on Dylan's back, their beards kind of co-mingling, it's nice. Tyler's quiet, but not in a horribly sad way, even if Dylan's still kind of angry about it. It's not like, it's one five minute thing. Just, don't crush him for five minutes, is that really...

And he barely even talks about it, he doesn't want to. He'd rather be punched in the face than hear a single bad thing about her. The Trump-supporting, homophobic...

She's his mom.

That's all that matters, to him.

So love all judge none, so swallow, swallow, swallow everything, all the time. And just be fine with that, be happy. Having a mom that loves you, that's more important.

Like that's even a choice, like that's anything. Anything you can ever control. If, if they're just gonna... If it's that fucking precipitous, if they can just, like, stop caring.

Dylan can't even imagine.

His hand on Tyler's shoulder, and it doesn't feel like enough, but Tyler's coming back, with every second of it. Looking at Dylan, it's just sinking in.

Dylan's angry, but he can't be. It's literally not possible, with Tyler looking at him like that.

Like he's, like he's everything.

“It's a good song,” Tyler says. “A good choice.”
“Yeah?” Dylan says.

“Yeah,” Tyler says, his voice keeps getting warmer. Watching Dylan, just swaying close. “Yeah, it's...”

And he kisses him, so seriously, and Dylan's mind just empties out. Of anything, anything else. Dylan's wrists hooking behind his head, the rest of the room's a distant blur.

“,,” Dylan says, and swallows, and Tyler grins at him.

“Speechless,” he says. “I'm gonna do this more often.”


“What can I say about these two that hasn't already been said?” Linden says. “Honestly, not much. I'm sure whatever I've got planned, the internet's beaten me to it.”

There's a ripple of laughs, some cheering; Dylan hides his face a little.

“So I'll skip the part about how incredibly attractive they are,” and now Tyler's blushing, “and how there's never been a greater love story in the history of time. Besides my own, of course.” Looking out at Susan, she's just looking back, they're both kind of laughing. Dylan's so completely heartwarmed. It's so nice, you know? Seeing people just—continue to care about each other. Like, forever.

“But enough about how charming I am,” Linden says. “And enough lines from the Hobrien hashtag on Twitter.” More laughs, some whooping this time. Dylan's pretty sure Colton and Posey are half the reason that hashtag even exists.

“I'm sure everyone here's got a story like this about them,” Linden says, “but this one's special.” He pauses, adds, “Because this one happened in front of me.”

There's a rolling wave of laughs. Linden's such a pro at this.

“And lemme tell you,” he says. “It's a good one.”

Dylan didn't even remember that day. Both of them, like, so badly sleep deprived. Shooting at the weirdest hours, losing their minds. Hitting the part of the night where you stop hearing what anyone's even saying, it's just white noise. Gotta go back, take it again.

So it's this setup, this one scene they're really just not getting. Tyler started out so good, but like, Jeff just gave him nothing. No notes, no feedback. Good or bad. Just focused totally on Dylan, on how Stiles is doing. That's so great, what if we just bring it up a little? Oh my god. I love that.

Linden glosses over that part, a little.

Tyler getting all, that way he gets, or used to. Right, right. This is fine. Just do the job, it's not about you. Doesn't matter, if you're even doing a good job or not. No one's gonna be looking in your direction.

Linden glosses over that part, a little.

Dylan like, close to falling down he's so zonked out, swaying a little. But he still picked up something. Tyler behind him, being all silent and Dereky behind him. It was just a feeling.
Like, like someone just getting crushed down to powder. To just not even expecting better anymore.

And Dylan just got really angry about it.

“No, wait,” he said. Waking up a little, scrubbing at his face. “Derek should be out front, with me.”

Jeff looking at him, like, what? That's not the shot, that's not the episode. Derek's just a loner, a lurker, the biggest loser in the world. You know, it's only been three seasons, or four, if 3B is a different one. They haven't made any strides, or anything. Those guys? What, they hate each other. Or not hate, not even... Like, there's no interaction. They just, neither one of them gives that much of a crap either way.

They're just forced together, sometimes, by total circumstance. You know, it's not like it means anything.

It was such bullshit.

“Yeah yeah yeah,” Dylan said. “I'm, Derek's been through the ropes with this guy. And he's been looking for him,” Tyler's nodding, nodding. “You know, he's been really concerned. So like, shouldn't there be a payout to that? Why even set it up if you don't wanna knock it down eventually?”

The way Linden says it, the story goes: Dylan's blowing everyone away, as the nogitsune. Like, it's unbelievable. But he wasn't content with that, he wanted Tyler there with him. Pitching this whole Sterek scene, on the fly. At like two in the morning. The guts on that kid.

And Tyler just started joining him. Just added on to it, and built off it, and they started playing it out. And it was like, magical. Like, something really special, riffed out of thin air.

He doesn't mention the part where the scene got cut. Where Tyler deflated, and deflated, from really excited about it to just... Whatever, sure. Of course it doesn't fit with the sides. All the different character arcs, you bet. It's such a really serious show, with the slow motion, and the spontaneous sideburns. No room for a little playing around.

Fuck, Dylan's still mad about it. Tyler getting shut down like that. It wouldn't even have been like, humoring the actors. Linden was there, he saw it. That was a good scene.

People just trample Tyler all the time, for the fun of it. Or not fun, even. They just don't care.

Just, don't, like, see him.

Dylan's so completely mind-boggled, by the concept.

Posey has a different anecdote: it's some season one shoot, and Tyler's the most hungover Posey's ever seen him. He's like, dying. And it's so early in, they're all so nervous about making a bad impression. So Posey and Dylan resolve to help him hide it. He's in sunglasses, he barely has an actual line, it should be easy, right? To just, like, Weekend At Bernie's him through it.

Again, Dylan completely forgot about it. That whole few months was such a blur. Just, this constant adrenaline rush, and mess of anxiety. And somehow making a show around it. That was actually watchable, who knew. That first season, watching Jersey Shore and Teen Mom, all the MTV offerings, Dylan didn't expect anything. Didn't think it would turn into anything. Just a first
job, just a launching pad. An IMDB credit. He wasn't about to get all invested in it.

Tyler, he was like, every day is game day. Everything is so important, this is gonna be huge.

He was the first one who ever predicted it.

And he just got shafted by it, just got let down and let down. It's so, like, infuriating.

Dylan's so infuriated by it.

And just like, saddened, and disappointed. It could've been so good, you know? All their scenes, all of it. Every little suggestion, just playing up their dynamic. Building it into something.

It's, yeah. So beyond over, such old news. But, like... Those were his and Tyler's first ideas, and scenes. It would've been so cool, seeing how they turned out. Like, going back, years later. Remember that? Oh man, that day. And now it's like, memorialized. Not just counting on one of them to remember it.

Their movie, now, they're gonna have that forever.

They're never gonna lose track of any of it.

The story, though, it's hilarious. And such a fun recalled memory, that day? That was like, everything felt so... Dylan doesn't know. He just felt so close to both of them. In like the funnest, most light-hearted way. It felt like summer camp, or something. Like how you'd expect summer camp to be, based on movies. Just—getting into hi-jinks, and having all this adrenaline, from that like, shadow of danger. The three of them all banding together, scheming a way out of it. It was just, one of the nicest moments. Out of anything.

Until he turns to Tyler, laughing remembering it, and Tyler says, “Yeah. That was a good day.”

“Shit,” Dylan says, realizing. “That's—the other migraine.” Brow creasing, wait, that doesn't add up. “You said there were only three of them.” The plane, and the aphasia one, and then... KitsuneCon, didn't Tyler say...

“I don't keep such close track,” Tyler says, which is so insane, Dylan doesn't even know where to start. “It's—about three. It ranges.”

“Depending on what?” Dylan says, and Tyler sighs a little. There's another wave of laughter; Colton's toast includes photo evidence.

“Severity,” Tyler says. “It's not... It's not always so serious.”

“Which one wasn't?” Dylan says. They all looked awful.

“The convention,” Tyler says. “I dealt with it, it worked right away.”

“You slept for like six hours,” Dylan says. “If it was even really sleeping.” He looked really uncomfortable, in hindsight. Once Dylan was thinking about it. He assumed it was just the weight of everything, of their whole breakup, finally hitting him now that it was over, and maybe that even contributed. Stress, right? That's such a huge trigger of it.

But Tyler was like, staggering.
Dylan really doesn't get how it wasn't a million times more obvious to him.

There's more laughter; Colton has found the absolute most ridiculous picture of Dylan on the planet. Holding it up with the Tyler ones, explaining, of course these two were meant for each other.

“Yeah we are,” Dylan says. Dips his head against Tyler's shoulder, there's a a chorus of awws. Dylan hiding his face a little more in reaction, Tyler's arm coming up around. Patting at his side, and just staying. They really are. It's like, the most inarguable thing.

It's so hard to believe he ever wasn't sure about it.

There's a couple of surprises. Brittany, giving Dylan this whole glowing review. Him and Tyler, all these compatibilities between them. Dylan didn't even know she liked him that much.

Shelley has a story, seems like everyone has a story. The two of them always working on separate sets, and finding the shallowest reasons to go see each other. Or... not shallowest, but like... Where it was really apparent, how it was only... Flimsiest! Flimsiest, that's the word. Shallowest, what? That's a totally different expression. Yeah, no. Coming up with the dumbest excuses, or contrivances. Like, as if they need a reason.

She leaves out the part about them being broken up at the time. It's the one, it's a bittersweet element. That whole year, like, chasing each others' tails. When it could've been resolved so easily. Tyler's arm coming around Dylan a little closer, and it's like... Every little thing he does is so thoughtful. But not just thoughtful, it's not like it's this selfless act. He feels it too.

Dylan pats at his back, keeps his hand there. Tyler leans a little against it. Oh god. Dylan's going to cry again.

Back on the dance floor, everyone's gettin' into it. It’s a little less, like... incredibly serious, at this point. A little more top 40, Dylan’s whole body just loosening up, Tyler’s following after. Both of them just bursting out laughing at each other, Tyler's crying.

It's perfect.

Dig Down by Muse playing, Dylan’s doing like a, like this interpretive dance to it, all melodramatic. Tyler cracking up just looking at him, and no, no. This is not a sideline sport, come on. He grabs Tyler’s hand, pulls him into it.

i by Kendrick Lamar, Dylan and Posey start like, jumping in the air headbanging. The next song’s so sweet, and, like, the most nostalgic feeling ever. Dylan just wants to hug everybody.

“I really love you,” Dylan says. “So, so much. Like, dude—”

“You too!!” Posey says. “This is the sickest wedding I’ve ever been at. Like, just talking to you, I’m getting all emotional. Just, like... I don’t even know!! Just from talking.”

“Well you’re the best best man,” Dylan says, he’s gonna cry again. “So, so like...”
“Can I have this one?” Colton says, appearing out of nowhere, and Dylan says, “Uh, yeah, sure.” It's a little more romantic of a song than he'd've picked for that, but...


“Yeah, sorry,” Posey says, on a little bit of a delay.

He's blushing.

Dylan kind of gapes after them for a few seconds.

Finds Tyler dancing with Brittany, turns him around to see.

“Really,” Tyler says.

“Blushing,” Dylan says. “He's blushing. And, like...” He can barely speak through the huge smile overtaking his face. “Colton, he's got like, the smoothest moves I've ever seen. Outside of you, obviously.”


“Aww,” Dylan says, and squeezes his arm, just a little. “Hey, agree to disagree.”

“That's such a Tyler thing to say,” Brittany says, eyes widening, kind of—crying, almost. While still looking more beautiful than basically everyone on the planet besides the guy standing between them.

Dylan shrugs, squeezes his shoulder. Tyler kind of hums, leans into him. “Guess I like him,” he offers. “Or I'm trying to assume his identity. Who knows.”

Tyler laughing, laughing against him, Dylan's whole warmed heart keeps expanding. Like, across both of them. There's no, there's no distinction.

“Alright, you two,” Brittany says. She leans a little, hugs Tyler's side. “I'm really happy for you.”

“We're really happy,” Dylan says. Tyler nods, nods. “Like, for ourselves.”

“I noticed!” Brittany says. “Oh my gosh. I'm like, bawling.”

“Aren't we all,” Dylan says. “Like, I've cried more tonight than I've ever cried on camera. Including the bad takes.”


“I'm not sure how to take that,” Tyler quips.

“Genius,” Dylan says, after a second. “I didn't even hear it like that, that's...” Leaning up, kissing his jaw.

“I think that's my cue,” Brittany says. “Have a really good night, you guys.”

“No pressure,” Dylan says, barely straight-faced, and then his face heats up so much he can't look at anything. “Oh my god,” he says, laughing.

Tyler laughing low in his ear, it's this, this grounding feeling. He says things, it's fine. Tyler likes it. No big deal.
“I haven't eaten, like, anything,” Dylan says. “You hungry?”

“I could eat,” Tyler says.

They duck past the dancing, the milling guests, past the music. Head out onto the beach, the sun's going down. There’s a couple taco trucks, the view's amazing. Dylan kind of wishes he had a camera.

“I think this is the best part,” Tyler says. “Just this.”

Walking close, their arms kind of brushing, watching the sky go dark.

“You think so?” Dylan says. “We'll see.”

And he doesn't even mean it like that, Tyler's eyes popping, like it's the filthiest thing in the world.


“I'm trying,” Tyler says. “You keep...”

Shaking his head, just looking at him.

Dylan laughs.

They're just watching the water, all diamonds in the dark, shimmering. Tyler's kind of getting emotional again, just on that alone.

Or maybe not just that.

“I really thought,” he says. “You know, if it was a little more legitimate.”

Blinking hard, and Dylan touches his arm.

“Can't win over everyone,” he says, and it's, it just hangs there. It's no kind of answer, but there isn't one, sometimes.

“It's my mom,” Tyler says, and Dylan's heart just, breaks for him. “Everyone, I can deal with everyone. But she's my mom.”

“I know,” Dylan says. The water's shining, he can barely see. “I'm really, really sorry, Ty.”

“You'd think you'd get used to it,” Tyler says, finally. “Over—over time.”

“It's your mom,” Dylan says. “It's...”

“Yeah,” Tyler says, and sniffs, and Dylan lays his head on Tyler's shoulder.

“I really love you,” he says. “So much.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says, and they just watch the waves for a while.
“She's still,” Tyler says, his voice is quiet. “You know, she's not a bad mom.”

The silence hangs a little heavy, there.

Dylan can't exactly fill it with anything.

“She cares, a lot,” Tyler says. “It's just this one thing. That she really, really believes...”


“She's just worried about me,” Tyler says.


“So it's not,” Tyler says. “It's not so cut and dry, you know. She's protective.”

“And she came anyway,” Dylan says. “Even though she thinks...”

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “It's just, with the pastor, and everything. And going through the vows, when it's so obviously... When it's just really different,” he corrects. “From anything she's used to. But really similar, at the same time.”

“Like, uncanny valley,” Dylan says, and Tyler nods.

“I don't wanna feel like,” he says. “Like I'm choosing sides. Between you.”

“You're not,” Dylan says. “You're not, you don't have to. She's your mom.”

“And you're my husband,” Tyler says, and he's never said it before. It sounds very, very new. A little awkward, even.

But sweet.


Tyler's head against his chest, Dylan's arm around him. Just watching the water, rushing up to the edge of them, calming down. It's kind of, like, meditative. Dylan's in a whole other headspace. Just this like, tranquil, serene...

Which, that doesn't happen. Not in Dylan's head, there's always something. He can't like, not watch himself, not get stuck in this over-analyzing loop. But now, it's like... It comes up, it starts going, building up steam. And then it just... breaks, into this foamy nothing. Tyler so close, and everything just feels... y'know, settled. Simple, in a sweet way. Conquerable.

And maybe it's a cheesy metaphor, but it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter.

He's finally starting to get it.

Tyler shifting a little, Dylan opening his body up around him, lifting his arm a little away.

“No,” Tyler says. “It's good.”

There's just this extra little edge to him, this energy just sitting in his spine. He doesn't look sad
anymore, just... cooped up.

“C’mon,” Dylan says, and takes Tyler's hand. “We're goin' back in.”

“Whoa,” Tyler says, only just keeping up. Dylan's cutting through the stragglers, eyes darting everywhere. “Dylan. What's going on?”

“Just, um,” Dylan says. “I gotta pee actually, can you just... gimme a second?”

“I'll try,” Tyler says, and Dylan pushes at his chest. Aah, it's such a nice chest.

“Dylan?” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “Right, yeah.”

Darts off, sorts out a few things.

He finds Tyler talking to Camille, says, “You made it! Didn't you have that, the Harvest premiere?” He's pretty sure Tyler picked this date just to avoid it. The whole filming was such a nightmare to him.

“It's not really a premiere,” Camille says. “I mean, it kind of is. But then I was thinking, it's your wedding. Like, you guys've been through so much.”

Well, that's not where Dylan was hoping she'd go with it.

“And then your mom, you know,” she tells Tyler. “That was so messed up.”

“Uh,” Tyler says, and just stands there for a few seconds, trying to figure out what the hell to actually say to that. He settles on, “Thanks for coming.”

“Yeah, thanks,” Dylan adds. “Means so much, you know. To the family.”

He kind of wants to forcibly exit the conversation, wants to just grab Tyler's hand and go. But Tyler's already, like, resigned himself to the situation. To just standing here, as inoffensively as possible, and swallowing it. Just, not making a scene.

It's so, so fucking uncomfortable. Tyler's like, sweating under studio lights hot over it, and just feels obligated to participate anyway. Like, yeah, no, let's really open this up for discussion, let's...

“It's religion, right?” Camille says, oblivious. “People get so, like... close minded. Even their own kids, it's just like, abomination.”

“Uh,” Dylan says. Looking at Tyler, Tyler's looking at him. Eyes widening, he's like, pleading. And forcing his face back neutral, and it's so funny, suddenly.

“Yeah,” Dylan says, and Tyler looks at him. “Yeah, Tyler was just saying that. About religion. He's like, the biggest heretic now, so. Well, he'd have to be, you know, I'm—”


“Gay, I mean,” Dylan says. Looking at Tyler, and Tyler does that face, that really serious trying not to laugh face. Derek face. “Well, bi, but considering where we are...”

“Good to know,” Tyler says genially, and Dylan looks at him, and his eyebrows go up, just barely. And Tyler almost loses it, just like that. Just chokes, just corpses out.
“Yeah, that's,” Dylan says. Tyler's wide-eyed, pressing his lips together like he can hold back the hilarity of it by the sheer force of muscle tension. Like he isn't visibly struggling just to keep from breaking, and breaking anyway, in every other possible way. Dylan pats him on the shoulder supportively, and it's shaking. There's tears in his eyes, just trying to keep it together. “Sorry, sorry to spring it on you like that.”

“See, I never got this,” Camille tells Tyler. “The constant jokes, that aren't even that funny. So what's so great about him?”

Tyler's just straight up staring at her now. Eyebrows higher than they should be able to go, he's like, Are you serious?

“But after your mom,” Camille says. “How he was like, so... Like, mothering, I don't know. I was like, oh. They're actually really sweet together.”

“Thanks,” Tyler says, so pissily, and Dylan almost loses it on that alone.

“Yeah, good insight,” Dylan says, and Tyler chokes, leans into him. Like, crying on his shoulder. Dylan pats his back. “Sorry, he just gets a little emotional.”

“Wow, yeah,” Camille says. Tyler's, like, wheezing. Tears streaming, he's burying his face.

“I think he just really needs, like a nap or something,” Dylan says. “You know, it's been a long day. He's not usually up this late.”

“Oh!” Camille says. “Yeah, of course.”

She barely makes it out of earshot before they both just burst out laughing.

They head back out again, Tyler's arm around Dylan's back. He's still crying laughing, wiping tears from his eyes, when the boat pulls up, lights the water bright blue behind it.

Dylan just waits, just gives him a second. It barely takes that long.

Tyler's eyes going huge, mouth dropping open, he’s mindblown. Tacos, the beach, he thought it was just gonna be this quiet night. And it was, but that was before Dylan called in for reinforcements.

“Dylan,” Tyler says.


“What?” Dylan says, so innocently. But he cant help grinning, dipping his face against Tyler’s shoulder. “You like it?”

“Do I like it,” Tyler says. He’s like, tearing up, all over again. “Dylan, I don’t... I don’t really even know what to say right now.”

“Don’t have to,” Dylan says. And the music comes on, and Tyler’s head whips around, and then he’s just staring again.

“Soulful, right?” Dylan says. “Bluesy. You got like, one song choice, it’s only fair.”

“I didn’t know anything about any of this,” Tyler says.

Dual wakeboarding, it's like, the most exhilarating thing. At night, with all this epic music playing. Just the boat and the water out in front, just the whole open ocean behind them.

Tyler's just nonstop beaming.

They get back to the beach breathless, and there’s a wide white projector screen, a blanket across the sand. The lights go off under the water, just stars and moonlight, and Dylan sits down, tugs Tyler down after him.

“What is this?” Tyler says.

Wide-eyed, already disbelieving.


This little punk kid on the screen, Dylan's already ducking, a little. Already going pink, watching Tyler through his fingers.

“Hey, I’m Dylan. O’Brien. Reading for the part of uh, Stiles Stilinski.”

And this guy, this weirdly familiar young guy, after him.

“Hi, I’m Tyler Hoechlin, and I’ll be reading for the part of Derek Hale.”

Chapter End Notes

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i wanna sleep next to you
and that's all i wanna do right now
and i wanna come home to you
but home is just a room full of my safest sounds
so come over now
and talk me down

talk me down - troye sivan```


They go back to the island for the honeymoon. It’s a little hard to breathe. Tyler’s constantly overwhelmed by everything.

It’s a little hard to believe there won’t be a downside to this.

Nothing’s this easy. Everything has a price. If things are this good, you’re gonna have to pay it back sometime.

“So jaded,” Dylan says. “So untrusting. With the Derek face, and everything.”

“Derek face,” Tyler says, and feels himself making it. “What am I—Oh.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says, and ruffles Tyler’s hair. Tyler’s face scrunches up. “Ooh. Electric shock?”

“Chills,” Tyler says, but they’re already gone. “No, I like it.”

“Behind your head, maybe,” Dylan says, trying that. Kind of scratching just above his neck, and Tyler shivers again. “Your face is giving me very mixed messages.”

“More… the first one than the second one,” Tyler says, and twists his neck a little. Dylan’s hand slips up into his hair. “Wait. Nevermind.”

“So, an inch above, maybe,” Dylan says. “Is what I’m getting from this. That’s the sweet spot.”

“You’re the sweet spot,” Tyler says, which is a stupid thing to say. It should be.

Dylan blushes, ducks his head against Tyler’s cheek.

“So, career brainstorming,” Dylan says. “And I know we have a premiere coming up, but if I think about one more frame of our movie one more time I’m gonna shoot myself in the head, so. Not literally.”

“Figurative,” Tyler says mildly. “You’re gonna, figuratively…” But his face heats up too fast, his throat tensing. “Actually, can you not…” He stops, shakes his head. “Forget it.”

“No, what?” Dylan says. Too serious, everything’s too serious, too quickly. “Talk to me.”

“You know,” Tyler says uncomfortably. “I don’t like when you… Unless you’re really telling me.”


“I don’t mean you can’t make jokes,” Tyler says. He feels kind of sick, even hearing that apology. “It’s not… I just hate it. Thinking that, you.”

And now his breath’s catching in his throat, so he holds it. Clenches his jaw, a little, looks away,

“I know,” Dylan says. His voice is too soft. Too sorry. “I really scared you, didn’t I.”

“Not,” Tyler says, and glares at nothing in particular, “not now.”
“Before, though,” Dylan says, and Tyler doesn’t shudder, but it’s a close thing. “The… After your appointment. That was about me?”

Tyler holds his breath again.

“I’m sorry,” Dylan says, and Tyler hates his apologies. Hates being the reason, when it’s not Dylan’s responsibility. “I really love you, Tyler. And I’m so sorry.”

Hugging him, and Tyler says, “You couldn’t have stopped it.”


“I’m gonna go back to therapy,” Dylan tells him later.

“You don’t have to do that,” Tyler says. “Unless… you think…”


“Oh,” Tyler says. It’s a little too much of an exhale. It shakes.

“You can always talk to me,” Dylan says, and rubs Tyler’s shoulder. “About anything. I swear it’ll matter to me.”


He doesn’t want it to matter. All these stupid little things. Jokes, or comments, or stifling silence from people who you used to think loved you more than anyone else ever could. He keeps checking his email, keeps drafting passive-aggressive thank you notes.  

_Thanks for coming to the wedding. It really meant so much that you could be there._

He’s not suicidal, and he’s not stupid. And there isn’t a point to it.

Maybe Dylan cares how he feels about things, maybe he’s sorry. Maybe, in that, Tyler isn’t the bad guy.

He doesn’t want it to matter, but his mind really doesn’t care what he wants.

Post-honeymoon, everything’s the press tour. Which should be good, fun, easy, he’s with Dylan, they’re pitching the thing they wrote together. That they acted in, and Dylan directed, and studied every frame for months after, until he physically couldn’t stand it anymore.

“Self-funding a movie is—ambitious,” someone says. “What do you say to people calling it a vanity project? Like, even down to the production company. Black Pearl Productions. That’s just you, right?”

“Whoa,” Dylan says.

“It’s not under,” Tyler says, “uh, it’s not under Black Pearl Productions. That—was just me. Yeah.”
“I’m sorry, has this fluff piece gone negative?” Dylan says. “What the hell?!?”

“It’s a Pirates reference, right?” the guy says. “What do you think of the allegations against Johnny Depp?”

“That they’re not allegations?” Dylan says. “Also, have you considered using your powers for good instead of evil, and like, targeting a politician or something?”

He’s gotten a lot bolder, lately. Maybe everyone has, to an extent, but Tyler has no idea what his face is doing in reaction to it. He’s used to smiling, and nodding, and being as inoffensive as possible, and maybe raising his eyebrows, if someone’s really out of line. And lately he’s been saying things, and feeling things, but he hasn’t had an outburst in public, and the best time to start seems like never. Never’s probably a good choice.

“We’re self-funded, yeah,” Dylan says. “DIY, you know? That’s how I started out, and if you can do it… Like, go for it. If you have the idea, and the right people, and everything… I mean, that’s the dream.” Slinging his arm around Tyler at the right people, and Tyler warms a little, goes a little less wooden.

“And it’s a gay love story,” and Dylan nods. “Your gay love story. Don’t you think that’s a little… vapid?”

“It’s not us,” Tyler says. He’s very, very tense. And maybe normally he wouldn’t notice that as much, but lately it’s been inescapable. “It’s not about us. Our story.”


Looking at him very pointedly, and Tyler laughs.

“But like, feel free to not watch the movie,” Dylan says. “If you’re offended by it. By, like, indie content creators.”

Another thing Tyler never would’ve said, but it’s not like he disagrees with it. And he wants to contribute.

“And representation,” he says. “And… yeah. It’s not a bad thing.”

“I’m sure the fifty millionth Marvel movie will outgross us,” Dylan says. “If you’re worried. The studios are safe.”

“Next question,” Tyler says.

“Right,” Dylan says, after. Tyler inhaling a coffee, which probably isn’t a good idea, but it’s that or something a lot harder. “Well, that could’ve gone worse. Probably.”

“I could’ve spontaneously combusted,” Tyler suggests.

“Is it still spontaneous, when it’s incited by an asshole?” Dylan says. “What was that? You were so cool, by the way.”

“You’re kidding,” Tyler says.

“Like, so under control,” Dylan says. “Yeah, that is my company. Fuck you very much. Is what I
would’ve said.”

“I was sixteen,” Tyler says. “It wasn’t, like, a serious… I mean, I wasn’t joking. But I didn’t have a plan.”

“Who needs a plan?” Dylan says. “You find a project, you produce it. You don’t find a project and then start a company, you were thinking ahead.”

“I probably should’ve changed the name,” Tyler says, “I would’ve, if I was actually using it for that.”

“It’s not the movie’s fault, what he turned into,” Dylan says. “Or always was, maybe. With Winona Ryder.”

“Maybe,” Tyler says. He’d rather not think about it. “It’s just really embarrassing.”

“Yeah, fuck you for having ambitions,” Dylan says. “And liking a movie that like, everyone likes. It’s too good an ending.”

“It’s a drama,” Tyler says. “I should’ve said that. It’s not just a love story. It’s a drama, with heart…”

“Comedy,” Dylan says, and Tyler nods. “Yeah. Well. I’ll excuse us for not remembering our talking points.”

Us, Tyler notices, and is warmed by it, even though Dylan was doing everything else. Pitching the movie was the least Tyler could do.

“No, no,” Dylan says. “You kept it cool. Kept a cool head about it.”

Which isn’t even close to true, but Tyler takes it anyway. Takes Dylan’s hand, and Dylan half-spins, rests his chin against Tyler’s shoulder.

“I really love you, you know.”

It still feels like a rush, just hearing him say it. And the weight of Dylan against him, and the pressure. And he doesn’t talk like that to anyone else. But Tyler, somehow.

But it’s too much, isn’t it? Tyler’s asking too much of him. Putting too much on him.

He’s not self-sufficient anymore.

“You’re really into, like, weight on you,” Dylan notices. “It’s like, a very common theme. With what you like.”

“Oh?” Tyler says. Dylan seems like he’s going somewhere with it, but Tyler doesn’t have a clue.

“I should get you, like, a weighted blanket,” Dylan says. And looks at him appraisingly, and ducks his head. “Yeah? Or maybe not.”

“You’re my weighted blanket,” Tyler says, and that has to be the dumbest thing he’s ever said. He actually floats a little bit out of his body about it.

“Aww,” Dylan says, kind of laughing. Fuck Tyler’s entire existence.
But he’s blushing again.

“Tell us a little bit about the inspiration behind this,” Jimmy Kimmel says. “Why boxing? Is that something you’re both into?”


“Yeah,” Dylan says. “Like, you know, cornerman… having someone, like, in your corner. Maybe it even comes from that.”

“Taping up your face,” Kimmel says, and Dylan laughs. “That’s a common relationship experience. Right?”

“And icing it,” Tyler says. “And icing it. With the bar...” Enswell, but he can’t think of the name.

“And the like, Vaseline,” Dylan says.

“Well that’s important,” Kimmel says, and Dylan drops his head into Tyler’s shoulder, dies for a while. Tyler pats his back.

“On the face,” Tyler says, and Kimmel says, “Hey, this is a family show!” and Dylan gapes, loses his mind laughing.

“Funny,” Tyler says. It would be... Yeah, now would be a very bad time to get really, really self-conscious. Dylan’s mastered laughing about it. Making everyone just love him even more. Tyler… doesn’t really have a tactic.

Except Count on Dylan to save me. That, Tyler’s an expert in. Sit there, and barely raise your eyebrows, and wait. Let Dylan find an out.

Or facepalm, but it’s too late for that now. Tyler took too long freezing up. And it’s just a dumb joke by a late night host, trying to be funny. It’s not a big deal.

He just doesn’t know what to do with himself anymore.

“Oh, god,” Dylan says, and hangs off Tyler’s side a little while longer. “Wrong... wrong time slot.”

“It is late night,” Kimmel offers. “Just not that late.”

“No, um,” Dylan says. Rubs under an eye a little bit. “Oh my god. What were we saying? …the relationship. The relationship, I think, between these characters, it’s actually really warm and like, slow-burning and beautiful. Like, it’s a really sweet story. Not... really about the setting as much. Or the exact implements.”

“The Vaseline,” Kimmel says, and Dylan says, “Not the Vaseline! Oh my god. Let that be the one thing everyone here remembers from this interview. And then everyone at home.”

And he looks at Tyler, for a second, kind of rubs his shoulder a little bit, and Kimmel looks at both of them.

And Tyler should definitely be saying something by now.
“ENSWELL opens in select theaters February 18th!” Kimmel shouts, and Tyler exhales, gets ready to stand. Stand up, shake hands, figure out an exit strategy. Go back to the green room, back to never thinking about this appearance again, if he can manage it.

“So that went well,” Dylan says. Sipping on Tyler’s water, handing it back. “I mean, also incredibly embarrassingly, but…”

“You think?” Tyler says.

“But we were memorable!” Dylan says. “You can’t say we weren’t memorable.”

“I guess not,” Tyler says.

“How was the clip, do you think?” Dylan says, and Tyler’s mind switches modes with massive relief. “Like, I wasn’t sure if it should be the fight scene, or…”

“The iPhone drone footage,” Tyler supplies, and Dylan says, “Exactly. Or if that would be like, blowing our loads way too early. See, I saved one innuendo. It can be done.”

“Apparently,” Tyler says, and Dylan scrubs at his face, buries his head.

“…Oh my god. What is wrong with me.”


“You... are very blind,” Dylan says. “Even with glasses on. No, like maybe it’s like, showing off. Like, I’m a director, look how directory I am. Woo, angles for no reason. What a creative mind.”

“It’s not no reason,” Tyler says. “You needed an overhead. And that was the best way.”

“With our budget of like, forty dollars,” Dylan says. “Yeah.”

“It didn’t look cheap,” Tyler says. “It looks like a movie.”

“There’s a pull quote for the poster,” Dylan says. “It looks like a movie! Tyler Hoechlin.”

“Shut up,” Tyler says, shaking his head, kind of laughing anyway. Dylan just has that effect on him. “Not just a movie. It looks good. I would see it.”

“Even if you weren’t in it?” Dylan says. “Yeah. Of course you would.” His gaze softening, his voice. “You’re always supporting me.”

“Even if you didn’t direct it,” Tyler says, and Dylan hits him. “No! I mean, if it was exactly the same. It has a good trailer, it’s a good—and it looks awesome. And like, touching, and tense.”

“Oh,” Dylan says quietly.

“And you know, I wrote it,” Tyler says. “So I’d probably be invested in that.”

“Just a little bit, yeah,” Dylan says. “You’re so good in it, too.”

Not as good as he is, but there’s no point in saying that. Dylan would just brush it off. Or take offense to it, spend an hour defending him from himself. Break reality trying to make it true.

But Tyler’s proud of writing it. Even where his style melds with Dylan’s so cleanly you can’t even tell whose line is whose. Or maybe especially that, and how easy getting on the same wavelength
turned out to be. How it wasn’t actually really that surprising.

And it looks, and sounds like both of them. And neither, and something different, and new. And Dylan worked out his sparse ambient indie movie soundtrack, and Tyler got in an About Today moment. Actually, a few of them. Those scenes where the right song cuts in at just the right second, and amplifies the whole feeling of it. Where it just swells all through you.

It just figures that the name of their movie would be wordplay. Really, they’re too predictable.

But it’s deeper than that.

The clip blows up, and the moment. Tyler always expected it to. He’s confident there are hundreds of GIFs of his frozen face, if he looks for them. He really isn’t planning on it.

But buzz is buzz, and attention is attention. And his manager’s happy about it, and that’s far from predictable. He’s not sure he’s ever heard so much excitement in her voice. But apparently you’re way more valuable, as a couple. If someone else can stand having you around.


“Give it time,” Tyler jokes, but he isn’t really joking. Which even he wasn’t expecting.


“Like you aren’t getting sick of this,” Tyler says, and instantly wants to take it back. Instantly, he doesn’t even know what he means. “Just fucking... reassuring me all the time.”

“Yeah, that’s so one-sided,” Dylan says. “You’ve never pulled me out a panic attack at all. Took a fucking flight for it, no way. Or drove there to find me.”

It makes sense when he says it like that. Makes sense, Tyler being like this around him.

It still feels fucking vitriolic.

“I fucking love you, you know?” Dylan says. “All of you. You don’t have to hide from me.”

In another take, that’s much more dramatic. Or if Tyler said it, it would be cheesier. From Dylan, it just sounds true.

But that doesn’t really make it any easier on him.

And Tyler’s tired of this. Tired of everything being on Dylan all the time. Dylan’s mental health, and dealing with Tyler’s issues, and every good or spontaneous moment in their relationship. It’s all him.

It can’t be.

And the proposal’s the perfect example of it. Tyler just being there, and Dylan making something incredible out of it.
Tyler’s a romantic, but Dylan’s the only one actually being that way.

Because he knows what it means to him.

And Tyler’s bringing nothing, nothing. Not health, not family. Not even really someone that he can count on. Just headaches and abruptness and weird secrets and a new mom to hate Dylan no matter what he does.

And Dylan’s mom hugged him. The last dregs of the wedding, long past the party dying down. She hugged him, said, Welcome to the family.

And he couldn’t swallow for a few seconds. Couldn’t really feel anything, or see.

Couldn’t stand her being so okay with it.

But don’t you know, some part of his head still says, deep down. Don’t you know this is just selfishness? This is just me doing what I want. And damn the consequences.

And no one really knows what’s going to happen. If there’s something at the end of everything.

No one really knows where I’m gonna go.

It’s almost easier to believe in it. It’s almost easier to throw it away.

Almost easier to go back and forth, or pick and choose. Build-a-Jesus, use whatever parts you want. What’s the worst thing that could happen?

And all he really knows is that right here, now, Dylan makes too much sense to him. And Dylan not being his family doesn’t make any sense at all.

So it can’t be, it can’t all be some test he’s just failing.

But that’s the thing, right?

You can’t know.

And he used to have a community. And it’s not, it wasn’t flawless. Far from it. But it was something he had. And for a big part of his life, it made sense to him. At least most of the time. And maybe he wasn’t really thinking about it, but he still isn’t thinking about it. Thinking was never the point.

And Dylan says there are places that are really welcoming, you know, they don’t judge. That’s the catchphrase, right? Or mantra, whatever. Love all…

And Tyler knows, he’s seen some of it. Dylan was searching for pastors for the wedding, he found plenty of them. Who wouldn’t even think twice about it.

It’s just all a little hard to swallow.
Mom doesn’t call, or text, or write, or send a fucking telegram that just says STOP, but it’s fine. It’s fine, it’s whatever. Moms, it’s not a guaranteed thing. Some people just don’t have them.

Dylan has one, and she’s so nice it’s sickening. So careful, like she saw what happened up there in front of everyone, and she doesn’t think he deserved it. And he can’t be so sure of that.

And Tyler calls her a few times, but she doesn’t pick up, or call back. And he can’t leave a message. There’s too much nothing stuck in his throat.

And he drafts texts, and emails, but he can’t actually send anything.

And maybe, maybe that’s how it is on the other end. Mom typing away, *Tyler. I’m so disappointed in you.*

But no, no, he’s married already. He’ll never see the light now.

And whatever, whatever. Fine, it’s *fucking* fine.

Tyler’s not even gonna think about it.

And Dylan says, “Hey, are you okay?”

And Tyler just kind of laughs at him.

Says, “You wanna talk about it?”

And that’s the last thing Tyler ever wants to do.

“Okay,” he says, “Okay, yeah, don’t worry about it. Um, wait. Should I...”

*Do you need*, he means, and they go through the motions of it, but Tyler can’t feel anything. And Dylan amping it up for his benefit just feels hollow, and fake. Like Tyler’s making a lie out of both of them.

“If you just need time,” Dylan says, but Tyler doesn’t. He doesn’t, he doesn’t wanna be alone.

He’s not like Dylan. He can’t do that.

Not if he ever has a choice.

They end up curled up loose on the couch, watching some mock documentary thing Dylan likes. Tyler’s confident he’s missing most of it, but he likes watching Dylan laughing. Even if he’s also doing something on his phone, only half paying attention.

“I’m getting you a weighted blanket,” Dylan says, catching Tyler’s gaze. “I mean, I might be getting *me* a weighted blanket. If you don’t actually like it. But it looks nice.”

Tyler shrugs. He doesn’t know anything about it.

“Like, it’s not like there are studies, or anything,” Dylan says. “Actually... actually peer reviewed.
And double-blind, although—I guess they couldn’t really ever do that. You’d know if it wasn’t heavy.”

“By degrees,” Tyler says, and Dylan hums, considering. “Or using really gullible subjects.”

“Feel like that would count as bias,” Dylan says, and Tyler shrugs.

“They could all be gullible.”

“Science Tyler,” Dylan says, and nods seriously. “I’m kinda into it.”

“Guess I’ll go back to college,” Tyler says.

“Get a lab coat,” Dylan says. “And goggles. Or just, like, bigger glasses.”

“Stereotypes,” Tyler says, shaking his head mock-reproachfully.

“Ugh, you’re right, I’m so bad.”

“I can fix it,” Tyler says. “The… the trials look promising.”

“Better be FDA approved,” Dylan says, and Tyler hesitates. Says, “Yeah, it’s a—uh. Uh, a little bit of a choking hazard.”

“Tyler Hoechlin,” Dylan says, eyes wide. “Are you trying to seduce me?”

“Trying,” Tyler says, hand to his heart. “Ouch.”

“I mean, I’m pretty sure that product’s off the market,” Dylan says. Then, “There are some weird moral implications to this bit. I feel weird about it. It’s an open market if you want it to be.”

“Definitely not,” Tyler says. “There’s a whole, like... eligibility thing. Very selective.”

“Really just the one candidate,” Dylan says.

“Yeah,” Tyler says.

“Well, this is the nerdiest flirting I’ve ever done in my life,” Dylan says, after a long, heated silence. “But you’re pulling it off. Helps that you’re like, Clark Kenting it, you know.”

“Am I,” Tyler says.

“Yeah,” Dylan says. “Like, even with the glasses, I can’t really buy it.”

“Oh?” Tyler says. Not really sure how to take that. Other than being sure Dylan didn’t mean it how he’s hearing it. Yeah, you’re not really pulling this role off. This stupid joke role we just came up with, that doesn’t mean anything.

“Yeah,” Dylan says, and grins. “This… God, this is gonna sound so fucking cheesy.”

“Go for it,” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “I warned you. Okay, I actually might be building it up too much now.”

“I can’t pull off nerdy,” Tyler reminds him. “Because…?”

Dylan shrugs. “You’re still Superman.”
“I know I know I know,” Dylan says, almost immediately afterward. “I’m sorry.”

“I’ve heard worse compliments,” Tyler says.

“There’s a fascinating phrase,” Dylan says. “But, oh! That’s what I was gonna tell you earlier. Like, way earlier, you know, the career thing? Before the press tour, even.”

They’re casting a Superman thing.

And it’s not, you know, it’s Superman adjacent. It’s not like he’s the focus of it. And it’s TV, it’s not the big bucks. Or this glamorous movie star thing. More like, shitty hours and a tiny trailer in Alberta. But it’s a character he’s always wanted to do. And it’s kind of the perfect cultural climate in which to do it.

“You’ve really thought about this,” Tyler says.


“Especially now,” Tyler says.

“Yep, yup, yeah,” Dylan says. “And DC’s just destroying it, making it gloomy. We agree on this.”

“He’s not Batman,” Tyler says. “He’s not supposed to be Batman.”

“I think you should be a really big deal,” Dylan says. “I mean, you already are, to me.”

It isn’t fair that he’s able to say that kind of stuff so sincerely. That he can say any line, and it sounds right, because he’s the one saying it. And it doesn’t just sound like a bad joke.

That slow shy grin, looking down like he’s embarrassed by it, but not really that sorry. And the flush in his cheeks, the soft downward curve of his eyelashes. Tyler’s gonna fly into the sun. He’s gonna file a formal protest somewhere.

“I’m gonna kiss you now,” he says.

“Yeah,” Dylan says, nodding, nodding, and Tyler closes the gap between them.

“You’re gonna be a big deal anyway, with your work in the movie,” Dylan says, later. “But even beyond that. Like, it’s Superman.”

“Gay Superman,” Tyler says. “It’s a stretch.”

And Dylan knows, he knows that. He planned his career around that, and his whole life, for a long time. And even now, even with earthquakes in everything... Some things never change.

“Maybe,” Dylan says. “They’re fuckers, if that’s the reason. You’d be great at it.”

“Worth a shot,” Tyler says, and Dylan fist-pumps, hugs him.

“Ayyyyyyyyyyyy,” he says.
It’s impossible not to notice the impact politics has now. All those people on the internet Dylan keeps raging about, who apparently think art shouldn’t be political, Tyler gets it. He’s never really liked conflict, or division, or any bad feeling that he could possibly avoid. And maybe movies are supposed to be escapism. Maybe everything else is supposed to be the hard part, and then you just want something larger than life to sit in front of and turn your brain off. Someone else’s life, or love, but even just telling those stories has politics in it. If it’s really based in something. Otherwise it’s just… fireworks.

And it’s not like he’s ready to speak on anything personally. Not like he thinks he’s ever gonna be confident, or knowledgeable enough about any one topic to open his mouth. But you can still stand for something.

And this absolutely, absolutely didn’t start as his pitch for the role, why we need hope and optimism and that whole aw, shucks mentality, even if it doesn’t always feel real anymore. How he is this larger than life character who can do all this stuff, inspire and lead and be moral and fight for justice, without anyone ever feeling like they’re being talked down to, or preached at. And why that’s maybe never been more important, at least relatively recently. And the two sides to him, and it’s even more than that. Because Superman doesn’t always know what he’s doing, and maybe even Clark Kent runs out of faith sometimes. But you get back up from it.

It didn’t start as a pitch, anyway.

It might’ve turned into one.

But this version of him, it can’t be like the movies. Where he’s this vengeful god or whatever. Not or whatever, that sounds flippant. Like Tyler barely gives a shit about it. Where he’s this vengeful god, where… And he’s not! He’s not. If anything, he’s lonely.

Derek Hale-like, oddly enough, but taken to an even further extreme. His whole family’s gone. His whole planet. And he’s got these powers no one else can know about, and not a single person on the planet who can understand it. And he never even knew his family. Raised by humans, that’s all he’s really experienced. That’s the only role models he has.

And that is his family, and he loves them, he’d do anything. Anything to protect them, and keep them safe. But there’s gotta be this struggle about it in him. Who he looks up to, and everything he knows, and his real identity.

But he loves people. He wants the best for them. And he feels human, a lot of the time. From the way he was raised, he forgets he isn’t sometimes. That there aren’t people like him somewhere, or people who could handle it. Knowing him, the full him.

Maybe he’s just sick of hiding.

And Clark Kent isn’t a fake persona, and Superman’s more of a fantasy. Actually being that side of himself, and being held up as a hero for it. As opposed to what would probably actually happen if someone in his real life found out.

You always think people are gonna be more okay with it than they probably actually are. That if they know you well enough, all the other sides of you, maybe they could just see past it.

Maybe he already tried that once.

Maybe he’s learned not to count on it.
“Lex,” Dylan says instantly, and Tyler goes, “Obviously,” but it wouldn’t be. If he was anyone else.

“So, so he’s like, scarred for life about it. His best friend, he thought he knew everything.”

“You’re scaring me right now, with how on track you are.”

“Same brain,” Dylan says. “Same, like, wavelength.”

“I know!” Tyler says, and that’s never what he means to say, and it never ends up mattering. Dylan knows he means Right??! Means, I literally was just thinking that. Just a little while ago.

“So that’s why he turns evil,” Dylan says. “Or who knows, it can be more ambiguous. Like, is he redeemable? Tune in to find out.”

“9/8 central,” Tyler says.

“And Clark, he’s like, forever guarded,” Dylan says. “After that. After testing people like that.”

“It wasn’t a test,” Tyler says. “Well, maybe.”

“Imagine if Smallville was about that,” Dylan says. “Like, a character you could actually care about. And not this, like, robotic stalker.”

Tyler shrugs. “Never seen it.”


“That is specific,” Tyler says.


“Isn’t everything?” Tyler says. “After a while.”


“You know just saying my name after things doesn’t...” Tyler starts, but he gives in. “What’s the wardrobe for that?”


“Not sure glasses were available, in quill times.”

“Anachronism Tyler!” Dylan says immediately. “Or like, time traveler. The glasses are a requirement.”

“I’m starting to think you just really wanna put me in glasses.”

“Wanna take you out of,” Dylan starts, and blushes. “Oh, man! I didn’t even mean it that time.”

“Well luckily, I’m functionally blind,” Tyler says. “Or something like it.”

“Clark Kent has glasses,” Dylan says. “It’s all, like, fitting together.”
“I might not get the role,” Tyler says. “I’m sure I’m not gonna be the only one in consideration.”

“Gonna be the best one,” Dylan says, but, “We can still do it, regardless. Like, the story. Clark and Lex. The dark, loaded history.”

“Just change the names a bit,” Tyler says. “The surroundings.”

“Oh, I didn’t even mean like a movie,” Dylan says. “But, yeah. That, even better.”

“The phone booth is a closet,” Tyler says, and makes a face. “No. Definitely not that.”

“The closet is a phone booth,” Dylan offers, which makes no sense, but it makes Tyler laugh anyway. “Like, the last one. In pristine condition.”

“Collect calls only,” Tyler says.

“Yeah, the coin thing doesn’t work,” Dylan says. “But it’s like, interdimensional.”

“And that’s the Fortress of Solitude,” Tyler says.


Tyler laughs again.

“Ugh, you’re the best,” Dylan says. “That wasn’t even a good joke.”

“It’s in the delivery,” Tyler says.
Dylan means it, he means it. He’s gonna go back to therapy. Just not this second, just not while…
everything’s so over-scheduled around them.

And he can’t be opening up about his deepest darkest fears, and like, anxieties. Not when Tyler’s so
obviously going through something. One he starts navel-gazing, like, who knows where he’ll go
with it. With permission to be so self-absorbed again.

He spent years barely registering Tyler’s feelings. Literally, years. Because he was too caught up
in his own head to even imagine it.

And it’s not like he said right now. Oh yeah, I’m going back to therapy tomorrow. He didn’t
specify so… specifically. And Tyler knows he’s overworked as it is.

He hasn’t really been sleeping, lately. Hard to pin down the reason why exactly.

Maybe he’ll steal Tyler’s weighted blanket, when it comes, and that’ll be all it takes.

His stupid joke, the closet is a phone booth. It sounds like the title of something. Like Dylan could
use it to pull a Bo Burnham, put out a book of, like, weird but sweetly sentimental poetry. All the
words in lowercase. No, no.

the closet is a phone booth

where you can quickly change

into someone more tolerable

or less awkward and strange

you can be a superhero

you can fly till time’s reversed

but if you really wanna be okay

you’re gonna have to come out first

Yeah, that’s not getting seen by anyone.

“Here,” Tyler says, and sets a brown paper bag down by him as Dylan snaps the laptop shut. “Uh,
coffee, and chicken nuggets.”

“Can I marry you again?” Dylan says, grabbing at it. “I kinda wanna marry you again. You are the
best, seriously.”


“Such a celebrity thing,” Dylan says, digging for the sauces. “Oh, you got extra. I love you.”

“And coffee,” Tyler says, like that’s even remotely relevant in this moment. Dylan has half a
nugget in his mouth, everything else is pointless.

Wait.

“Like, for a reason coffee?” Tyler doesn’t look stressed. Well, not more stressed.

“What?” Tyler says. “Oh. No, just—not everything’s about that.”

“Just checking,” Dylan says. “Forget it. I love you. Hey, did you get recognized at the counter? Because I think there’s a number in here, hold on.”

“So they’d have to have recognized me to do that,” Tyler says. “I think I’m offended?”

“Bold, if they saw the ring,” Dylan says.

“But not if I was recognized.”


“It’s not that blinding,” Tyler says. He’s blushing. Dylan regrets nothing.

“No way, dude,” he says. “Number one cause of lens flare. I’m a director, I know these things.”

“You’re right,” Tyler says. “You’re the expert.”

Dylan goes for another nug; makes it two. Cold nuggets are sad nuggets. And who knows, maybe they’re lonely. Get a friend in there. Sweet Chili it up.

Sleep deprivation Dylan: he’s a real fun dude. So creative! So completely scatterbrained.

“I love you a lot,” he says, chewing laboriously. “But uh, this might be a you day, interviews-wise. In terms of taking the lead.”

“Oh,” Tyler says, incredibly mildly.

“You’re doing that thing where you’re very calm, and screaming internally,” Dylan says.

“Maybe,” Tyler says. Dylan pats his wrist, the closest thing he can reach without moving.

“I believe in you.”

“I’ll try to remember that.”

It’s weird; Tyler can a hundred percent hold his own in a one-on-one, but in anything they do together, he spends the whole time looking at Dylan. And like, waiting for his response, and only barely not following it, and riffing off of him.

It’s, yeah, extremely flattering, but it’s also, like, massive pressure. And Dylan is too barely-awake to more than kind of follow along right now. Maybe get a few jokes in there even he wasn’t expecting.

What was the question? Something… Tyler’s saying something about TJ, how he’s dedicated, how he doesn’t back down. So like… what do you most admire about your character? What will
audiences most connect to about your character? What personality trait is most likely to get your character killed.

No, probably not that one.

And then Tyler’s done, and it’s all eyes on Dylan, great! He just takes a blind stab at it.

“Uh, Seth has a lot of… admirable qualities…”

Tyler nods, nods. Dylan breathes.

“Yeah. Um, his loyalty, you know, it’s kind of divided but he’s… uh, he shares it well. For the most part. Because he wants his dad to have a legacy but he also really wants to make sure Tyler’s safe… Sorry, TJ. Wants to keep TJ safe, you know, it’s tricky. But ultimately that’s the job of a cornerman, and he’s just filling in for his dad. Yeah. So.”

Dylan stops, tries to assess a little bit. The interviewer looks a little lost, but Tyler’s nodding. So, inconclusive.

“And um, determination, yeah, that’s a good one,” Dylan says, in a fit of blind hope. “And dedication… That’s basically the same thing. But, yeah. And loyal, did I say that? I did, huh. Yeah…” He scrubs at his face. “Sorry, I am like, on another planet right now. With the directing and the editing and everything… And it’s not even that really, it’s more like micromanaging now. And like, obsessiveness.”

“Dylan,” Tyler says lightly.


Tyler’s blushing. He’s so fucking cute. It isn’t fair that he’s so cute and Dylan can’t do something about it because he needs to be speaking. And like, composing a thesis statement, like his brain isn’t turning to soup.

“He’s gonna be Superman, did he tell you that?” Dylan says. “After this.”

“He’s very tired,” Tyler says, patting his arm. Dylan pats him back.

“And I’ll be Clark, maybe,” Dylan says. Squints. “No, the other one. Lex. He’s the evil guy, right? Like, rich and… bald and stuff.”

“Very tired,” Tyler says, faintly amused. “We wrote a story together. That’s all he’s talking about.”

“Gay Superman,” Dylan says, and frowns at the word. “Superman. Singular.”

“And Lex,” Tyler says. “It’s complicated.”

“Right,” the interviewer says, and Dylan snaps back to her. Tries to focus. Question time, here come the questions. No more screw ups. “So, I saw the movie.”

“You…” Dylan says, and tries to raise an eyebrow. “It isn’t out yet.”

“There was a screening,” the interviewer says. “That you didn’t attend?”

“Oh,” Dylan says, and looks at Tyler. Scrubs sharply at his eyes. “Um, I was sick. Insane food poisoning. You don’t wanna know, trust me. Tyler thought I might die.”
He squeezes Tyler’s shoulder reassuringly.

“I saw the movie,” the interviewer says. Right, that, yeah. “And I guess I was wondering why there weren’t any women in it.”

Oh, shit.

“There is,” Tyler says. “There is. Uh, there’s TJ’s mom…”

“We don’t see her,” the interviewer says.

“There’s like four characters in the whole movie,” Dylan says. “It’s not really an ensemble cast.”

“It’s a male-dominated field,” Tyler says. “I mean, more than that. Boxing.”

“Male boxing,” Dylan says. “Like, men and women don’t compete, together.”

“But you could’ve written about anything,” the interviewer says.

“That’s… true,” Dylan says, foggy-headed again. “I mean, we weren’t really thinking about it. You know? We just made a movie. Like, we’re gay, so…” God, let the rest of the sentence justify saying that. “Write what you know, and all that.” God, it really didn’t.

But Tyler’s nodding, good. Let him fix it.

“There’s a boxer,” Tyler says, “and a cornerman, who’s Seth’s dad. And Seth’s Dylan, and he steps in… And then there’s the guy in the ring with me. None of those could’ve really been…”

Well, this is a trash fire.

“Straight movies do this all the time,” Dylan says. “Where the only girl’s the love interest. Here Tyler’s my love interest. Or I’m his, who knows. We’re both each others.”

See, this is why you bring a publicist. To come with you, and cut all this off ten minutes ago, before you actually go and say something.

But no, Dylan was sure they could handle it.

“Point taken,” he says. “For, for the next one. Definitely.”

“Is it true your mom walked out of your wedding?” the interviewer says.

Tyler stares at her.

And, yeah. Fuck this.

“That is so beyond the pale,” Dylan says. “Really, was that the whole point of this? Just all leading up to that?”

Tyler’s, like, frozen in place.

“You know, I’ve never walked out of an interview before,” Dylan says. “But, this was great. So energizing.” He touches Tyler’s arm, careful about it. “C’mon, Tyler.”

And… yeah, he’s not moving.

“Actually, why don’t you leave,” Dylan says. “Since you’re the asshole here.”
He moves in closer, blocks off Tyler’s face.

“I’m okay,” Tyler says lowly, sounding so truly not, it’s actually enraging. And infuriating, and then both those just compete with each other. “It’s… Don’t worry.”

So fine’s off the table. Dylan’s not sure if he’s proud, or just concerned, about that.

“You wanna get out of here?” Dylan says, trying to stay calm. “Go somewhere… anywhere not here, and just crash for a while.”

“We can’t walk out of an interview,” Tyler says.

“That was not an interview,” Dylan says. “That was an ambush. Like, seemingly valid points, and then—actual indefensible reason for it. We’re in the clear, professionally.”

“I just can’t,” Tyler says. “What did I—Is she gonna publish that? Or post it, or whatever.”

“I will literally pay her not to,” Dylan says. “Or sue her if she does, I swear. I’ll take care of it.”

“No,” Tyler says. Shakes his head. “Forget it. She’ll get less attention this way.”

“There’s this video,” the interviewer says, and Dylan has never more hated a human being. “Tyler and you on a plane, and something’s wrong with him.”

No, nonononono.


“You seemed pretty upset about it.”

The internet is the actual worst invention. That, or iPhone cameras, or the actual human race. People should’ve just stayed amphibians.

They’d probably be happier.

“Yeah, I care about him,” Dylan says. “I fucking love him, you know? Like, a lot! And I don’t know if you know this about me, but I’m not the calmest, most rational-thinking person. Around any, like, possible health concerns.”

“You said he wasn’t breathing.”

“False alarm,” Dylan says. “Very false. Fake n… Nope.” Definitely not that. “Can I interest you in uh, in no longer having this conversation? Who’s gonna read this, by the way? That was months ago.”

“No one cares,” she says. “It’s sweet.”

“Well, that’s fun for you,” Dylan says. “I’m so glad it’s entertaining. I’ll be sure to have a seizure on my way out.”

“Dylan,” Tyler says, and she says, “It didn’t look like a seizure.”

“Yeah, it wasn’t one,” Dylan says. “All the more reason to take it up a notch. Give you some real action, huh? Finally.”
“Tyler Posey made a 911 call,” she says, and Dylan swears. “Also about someone not breathing. Sources say his friend Tyler Hoechlin suddenly missed a lot of work.”


So people do know, then.

And their premiere, which is supposed to be about their actual movie, will be about anything else. Dylan O’Brien, basket case.

“Tyler’s sick, isn’t he,” she says. “He’s been sick for a while.”

Oh.

Well, that’s not the conclusion Dylan was expecting.

“Not that it’s any of your business,” he starts, “and it really isn’t, but—”

But Tyler says, “Yeah.”

“I have headaches sometimes,” Tyler says. Dylan’s just kind of caught on, What?? And why. “They can get—intense.”

“Headaches,” the interviewer says.

“Migraines,” Tyler says. “Sometimes it looks bad.”

“Must be hard,” the interviewer says.

“I’ve had them a long time,” Tyler says. “It doesn’t hold me back. Usually.”

“He’s a lot like TJ, you know,” Dylan says. “Dedicated. He’s been powering through it for a really long time.”

“But it’s getting worse,” the interviewer says.

“I can handle it,” Tyler says.

“And that 911 call...” the interviewer says.

“He was just looking out for me,” Tyler says. “I really wouldn’t worry about it.”

“He’s like the biggest sweetheart,” Dylan says. “He really cares about people, you know?”

“He’s a good guy,” Tyler says.

“One of the best,” Dylan says. “I love him. I’ve had good luck with Tylers, really. Two for two.”

He looks at Tyler. “And he had the multiple Dylans. Weird, huh?”

“Multiple...” Tyler says.

“Sprayberry.”

“Ah,” Tyler says, and shakes his head. “There’s just one of you.”
“Slam on Sprayberry,” Dylan says, and laughs. “No, no. He’s just always complimentary.”

“Not when it’s not warranted,” Tyler says.

The story is too predictable. ENSWELL’s Tyler Hoechlin Opens Up About Migraines (And That 911 Call!): “They Can Get Intense”

“Could be worse,” Tyler says, pulling back from scanning the screen over Dylan’s shoulder. “It doesn’t have any of the big stuff.”

“References the movie,” Dylan says, nodding. Like, Yeah! Any publicity is good publicity! That bullshit. He looks at Tyler. “Seriously, are we okay?”

“What?” Tyler says, looking briefly alarmed. “Of course we are.”

“Because I kind of led you to the wolves, there,” Dylan says. “Pun not intended. If that even is one.”

“Left me to the wolves,” Tyler says. “That’s the expression. No you didn’t, you defended me.”

“And led,” Dylan says. “And like, fed, and whatever else. I scheduled all the interviews. With like, the least possible amount of vetting. Anything to get the word out.”

“I could’ve helped,” Tyler says. “You’re already doing every other job.”

“And then my brain turned off,” Dylan says. “Like, completely… derailed it so much more than it ever could’ve been taken, naturally.”

“You’re exhausted,” Tyler says. “You need some sleep. That’s all.”

“Can’ keep burning the candle at both ends, tall child,” Dylan mumbles. Tyler looks at him. “I didn’t see that with you? Oh, man.”

“When you’ve slept a few hours,” Tyler says, before Dylan can pull up the special on Netflix. “I’ll make something.”

“’m so spoiled by you,” Dylan mumbles. Yawns. “G’me ‘nrealistic expectations.”

“We did a good job with it,” Tyler says. Scrubbing at his shoulder a little bit; Dylan nuzzles into it. “We made a good movie. It’ll be well received.”

He can’t know that, but Dylan isn’t saying it. “Fu’yeah we did.”

Repeat after me: I am not Tommy Wiseau. My vanity project is not delusional. And even if we are vapid, or hack frauds, or unintentionally sexist and canceled, we made a movie, and it’s not the worst one. We will be okay.

Dylan says none of this. He barely thinks this. It’s more of a repetitive recent mantra.

It’d probably help him more if he believed.

“We’ll be okay,” Tyler says, and Dylan squints at him.

“Go to sleep,” Tyler says.
And he will, he will. He's going to. And screw it, he’s watching the first scene again, the first two
topics, just making sure it still hits like it should.

TJ, and the first shot we see of his face, he’s already down. Already bloody, and struggling.

No illusions here. This isn’t about glory.

He’s just trying to survive.

But before that, we follow the lead up to it. Not his POV, but just behind it, Seth, watching him.
Smearing Vaseline on his face, offering him water, checking the wraps on his hands. We’re only
seeing tight close ups of what Seth’s looking at, and mediums and wides framing the two of them,
but never TJ’s face. Even when Seth is looking at him, or touching him, we only see a fragment of
the side of it. Like he’s hiding it, you know, getting all his vulnerabilities out of his system. Putting
up all his defenses. And Seth has no defenses. He’s angled so he’s mostly facing the camera, and
it’s a few feet behind them, behind TJ’s shoulder. And you can see how nervous he is. His, like,
forced calm. Checking, double checking.

And we don’t hear TJ really speak. Seth’s checking on all this stuff, asking him questions, Alright,
you ready? Anything else you need? And he’s quiet, too, That like, low, dry dread quiet that almost
sounds callous. But TJ’s just kind of barely vocalizing. Too focused on what’s coming up ahead,
it’s more head-shakes and nods and distracted answerings while he gets his mindset ready to go
out. To maybe come out fired up enough get in a good first few hits, and keep going, or maybe just
fucking take a beating for a while.

No way to really prepare for it. No way to know until you know.

You just have to go out and see.

And then they’re in the hall, it’s wide shots, moving into mediums, for closeness. And they start
off really close together, like at the middle center of the frame. The camera lagging behind them
down the hall, and it’s like dimly lit, almost creepy. Like, just enough soft filtered light that it’s not
a horror movie. But kind of almost noir, in a way, you know? And TJ’s up ahead, and Seth’s
behind him. The closer they get to the door, the more Seth and the camera are lagging behind. And
the camera is nearer to them as they’re further down the hall, and now Seth’s lagging behind.
And the camera matches Seth, his pace, completely, so we’re Seth’s eyes on him. On TJ’s back,
the rising adrenaline in it. His neck, the back of his head. He’s just barely nodding, nodding,
nodding.

Seth says, You can do this, and we see past him, and the rest of the shot’s this narrow entrance hall.
And like, the only light’s the big EXIT sign waaaay behind them. The camera’s up near TJ, like
right where he’d be looking, if he was looking back. And then it reverse shots to him. And there’s a
kind of grim nod. Like he’s being sent off to die for something. Like all that’s left now is that
sacrificial glory, you know. Keeping your head up no matter what’s going through it.

TJ goes out into the light, to distant cheers. The hall’s dimly lit besides the exit. And it’s like Seth’s
face has it’s own lighting. Him, the shadows next to him. The roaring fervor barely dying down.

The hall was narrower when TJ went out. Claustrophobic, them both taking up the space of it. Now
it’s, like, too wide.
Seth’s still holding the water bottle. No close up on it, it just kind of dangles from his hands.

And his hands are shaking.

And there’s a crack, over a J cut, and Seth’s shadowy frame fades to the source of it. We don’t see him ever react. Crack, we open on Tyler. TJ bleeding, TJ’s shell-shocked face.

And tense resolve again, and now we stay with him. What he’s seeing, the moving target. The constant source of attack. The scattered cheering, the brand-new blur in his vision. There’s blood in his eyes.

His ears are ringing.

And Tyler’s so fucking good at it. Just, you immediately feel for him. You’re immediately in it with him, amped up, panic and pain and adrenaline. And this steady, solid tension in the shape of him, this quiet resolve, and you know. He’s hanging in even if it kills him.

So when he gets back up, barely, there’s no way you’re not rooting for him. There’s no way you’re not instantly invested. And like, cheering, when he gets a good few hits in. When there’s a really close dodge.

And wincing, when he goes back down again. Comes up slower, the same to-the-death resolve, but he’s half out of it.

And his cornerman steps in.

Steps in, and he’s not supposed to. Steps in, but he’s not really there.

And now we place him where he actually is, versus where he sees himself. Rushing in, rushing TJ out of there. All the noise of the crowd amped up indistinguishable, his head’s just roaring.

But no, he’s just standing by the sidelines. Just, with his little kit, with like, cotton swabs, and the enswell on ice, and the little thing of epinephrine. Held incredibly still, but his skin’s itching. And Tyler’s barely standing. Seth’s just staring at him. His fucking water bottle getting mangled, one handed.

And Dylan expects a lot of flak for this. For like, making it homoerotic, boxing, this beloved, hyper-masculine sport. Or pointing out how it could be. Like, the deepness—the depth in that relationship, inherently. If the cutman actually gives a crap about them. Isn’t just, like, sending their fighter into a massacre, good luck. We’ll find out if you’re worth it.

And normally this kind of movie starts with the inciting incident, with the build up to it. Like, introduce Seth’s father, the real cornerman, midfight, and then send him to the hospital. And then Seth steps in.

But that’s so pat, that’s so predictable. So, like… like, you’re not invested in any of it. You’re just watching things happen.

You start it with the main guys, you start it seeing where they’re at, what they’re fighting. Without ever having to really establish it in an expositional way. You get all their motivations from the physical acting alone. From their interactions. And they never don’t care about each other. They just have really different priorities.
Once we’re rooted to these characters, once we give a shit, then we can go back. Fill in a few things. Move from the static and white noise to that on a TV screen, to Seth crumpled in a chair at the hospital. Clearly, like, beaten down, and worn out, and in that spot a long time. And his dad tried something.

One thing, one thing that keeps Seth rooted in place, when he should be rushing in and calling it. One thing that won’t let TJ stop.

He’s Seth’s dad, but he’s TJ’s coach, and mentor. The like, guiding force, in everything.

The only real reason TJ believes he even has a chance anymore.

So there’s that weight, between them, Seth and him, they don’t really know each other. They’ve never really more than interacted before.

But they know what’s going on in their heads.

Know TJ winning is the only thing that’s gonna pull Seth’s dad out of it.

Seth’s dad, the cornerman’s dad, played by Matthew Broderick, by the way. And so well, and so sparingly. But just enough to resolve it.

They didn’t want Seth’s dad to be this hulking bully. More like, down on his luck and desperate, and so are all of them. TJ especially. He’s got a little brother, he’s got a mom who always saw the best in him. Who always expected greatness, along with everybody, but everyone else forgot about him a couple years after high school, and she never did. And he’s just been disappointing her.

No one’s there because they think it’s cool, or glamorous. TJ’s not volunteering to get the shit kicked out of him because he’s a big fan of bleeding, and Matty isn’t in love with orchestrating it in some unregulated small-stakes small town ring in the middle of nowhere. And Seth doesn’t even like the sport anymore. Like, it meant something when he was a kid, when his dad was the hero of everything. Once you’re feeling for the guy getting hit, it’s just terrifying.

But it’s his dad. It’s his dad in the hospital. He’s counting on this. This fight, it’s his star athlete’s one real shot at recognition. At actually moving up in the world, taking Seth’s dad with him. And if you don’t have someone in your corner, you’re basically dead.

And TJ isn’t backing down for anything.

There were other drafts of it. Where there was more stand-up comedy, where Seth had this whole ex-wife thing, and a daughter. Where they were friends from when they were kids, and wrestling buddies, or where Seth was a soldier who came back with PTSD and TJ basically gave him the job because he took pity on him, and it’s not like there were that many better options. Where TJ’s dad was the original cornerman, and Seth was just a cutman who got too involved. Too invested in it. Where TJ’s dad was pushing him way, way too hard, and Seth fucking snapped at him. Put him in the hospital.

The original pitch had physical therapy and a comedy festival. And they actually put on a festival for it, for a lot of different mental health charities, but it didn’t make it in. That all just became, like, a whole other movie. All the different pieces that didn’t fit this story anymore. And instead of just shoving them in where they don’t belong, why not fill in all the blanks there? Two movies. A
really tense drama with some lighter moments, and a comedy with serious ones. Show how multifaceted they are, besides just the acting and writing and directing.

Dylan’s still working on the fill-in shots for that. There’s some scenes he wants to get, with Tyler, he just needs to do some location scouting. Figure out permits again, get their equipment back.

But he kind of likes the idea of a limited focus. Like, instead of three months, you’re seeing one, high intensity situation. Almost a bottle episode. And everything’s so much more loaded, because it’s all these really subtle dynamics packed into this so much smaller frame of time. And there’s no setup to anything. Just, bang, there you are. Right in the middle of it.

Tyler had so many more ideas than Dylan even considered, it turned out. Like, a vision for everything.

But in the best way.

And they can still do the other one. All the other ones. If they just tweak them a little bit. Or don’t, and just make it, like, a weird series. All these barely-alternate universes.

The Seth and TJ cinematic multiverse.

They’re on a low enough budget that there’s basically no way they won’t make it back. Unless it just, like, totally tanks, like makes like three thousand dollars opening weekend. Like, an unprecedented low amount.

That… is definitely a nightmare Dylan’s been having.

But it’s what the people have been asking for, right? Him and Tyler, all Stereky. All intense, all these little loaded interactions, and this closeness growing between them. And little moments of humor. Not like, slapstick, Stiles flailing everywhere, but just enough to keep it afloat. Little looks, little comments. So it’s not this total downer movie taking itself too seriously.

He really thinks they struck a good balance. Him and Tyler, they really worked something out.

Now it’s just down to the rest of the world to not think they’re crazy.

Tyler’s nervous too, but in a different way. He knows the movie’s good. He’s not even questioning that. Not laying awake checking on when the blanket’s shipping, for the millionth time, rather than actually getting that shut-eye he’s supposed to, or instinctively tapping into Twitter, and finding out what else to panic about, where he’s completely powerless and irrelevant. Oh, my movie might not be hugely acclaimed. While people are being kept out of their own country, and a million other things.

Tyler’s very centered. Very straightforward, and like, almost never rattled by a random thread of panic. Dylan could freak out in a million different ways. Lose his mind based on basically anything. But for Tyler, if it’s not in front of him, it doesn’t exist.

It’s a good, like, balance between them. A good recipe. Because Dylan can actually deal with that, with what’s directly in front of them, and workable. It’s just everything else that’s terrifying. So he can be there for Tyler, when him being there’s all he needs to get through it, and Tyler always drags him out of the panic spiral in his head. Being all, like, calm, and reasonable. And like, be outraged, yeah. But channel it into something. Don’t just, like, come apart over it, and pat yourself on the back for just being aware. Not that he says it like that, but Dylan’s mind always makes those assumptions. Turns everything more judgmental than it actually is.
But just spreading despair doesn’t help anyone. You have to be, you have to be proactive. And the first time they were on the island, they were talking about it. Starting a foundation, really doing something real.

So Dylan’s been looking into it. Like, what he’d need to file, and everything he’d need to know. And what his actual goals should be, and how to genuinely accomplish them. So it isn’t just, like, some tax shelter.

Something with LGBT youth, definitely. And mental health. And religion, if Dylan can at all manage it. He really fucking hates how Tyler’s mom is to him. And was, and the effect it had. Him actually thinking that maybe he’s a bad person, just for loving somebody. That he’s gonna, like, burn for it.

And walking out, and now she’s not even talking to him.

Which you’d think would be a good thing, maybe, considering their relationship. But it’s torture for him. Like, he used to think they were close, you know? Like, out of any of his family. That she was always gonna be this massive part of his life. And then she just walked out of it.

During his vows, like the most awful, symbolic gesture. Like, no, guess what? You do this? You’re dead to me.

And it’s not like Dylan’s, like, the closest with his mom, but that’s just about his shit. Not hers.

She’d always be there for him.

And after everything, after that whole night, and then the little home video screening on the beach, they went back in, and it was mostly emptied out. Most people don’t stick around after the hosts take off on them. Just really enjoying the catering.

But Posey was there, and Colton, and Mom. Just sitting there, talking to them, it was the most normal thing in the world.

And Tyler’s mom would’ve made jokes of both of them, for all the worst reasons. Just for all their little looks. For being happy together. Like you shouldn’t grab on to that as hard as you fucking can, anyone who makes you happy, or anyone who can make things just a little bit more okay, or even tries to. Like it really fucking matters if it’s gay or not. Like that’s not the most insane thing to fixate on.

Dylan’s never gonna fucking get it, how someone can think like that. And like, try to make their kid choose. Me, or who you actually are. And not just being alone forever.

And Tyler’s always been so deferential to her. And like, too agreeing. And he just got kicked around for it. Just, turned into this never-ending show pony.

Dylan just doesn’t fucking get how she can sleep at night.

“You didn’t sleep, did you,” Tyler says wisely. Dylan tries not to yawn.

“Maybe a little,” he says. “I’m not slurring anymore, so.”

“Oh, you are,” Tyler says. “I’m taking your phone next time. Turning off the WiFi.”
“You wouldn’t,” Dylan says, but also, please. Please, holy crap, he does not have the self control. “No, ‘m jus’… checking if it’s, um.”

Nope, no. Lost that train of thought.

“Perfect?” Tyler says. “It’s not. It’s very good.”

“I know that’s reassurance, but,” Dylan says blearily. “Um, maybe I can fix it. If it’s not too late.”

“It is,” Tyler says, and Dylan groans, buries his head in his hands. “It’s very good! We can be proud of it.”

“Can’ wait for the CinemaSins,” Dylan says, and carefully doesn’t say anything like, Can’t wait to hang myself.

“I hate CinemaSins,” Tyler says. “They don’t understand movies.”

“I know, I know,” Dylan says. He remembers. “Or YMS, or something. How Did This Get Made.”

“A lot of hard work is how,” Tyler says. “And now you’re done. Go to sleep.”

“Impossible dream,” Dylan says, and then, “Heh. Dream.”

“Very funny,” Tyler says. He holds out a hand. “Give me your phone.”

So I just saw ENSWELL and it was hiiii-laaaaarious! 2/10. Maybe a 1, definitely not a 3…

Sleep, no. Sleep is the enemy. Sleep is determined to destroy him.

Jay, what did you think of ENSWELL.

What a stupid name, probably. And why did they decide to fully capitalize it? Just, really lean into this hypersaturated aesthetic, for the poster, when the colors of the actual movie barely have anything to do with that. It’s not like it’s a trippy, 80’s-style anything, or a neon video game, or Blade Runner. There’s barely any color in the whole movie. Just a lot of playing with like, shadows and empty space. And understatedness. And their relationships spelled out visually, without having to ever explain it. Fucking filmmaking 101, crowding them into the middle of a wide frame, to like, indicate their otherwise aloneness. The eventual us-against-the-world-ness of them.

There is color, obviously. Dylan’s not that pretentious. And he kind of likes that look, that dark-so-you-can-better-see-the-light look. And colored light, so it doesn’t just look like total garbage. But he was going for a kind of realism over fantasy floodlights. Where everything’s randomly lit pink everywhere.

But maybe it just looks drab, and like, barren.

There’s stuff you can do, color grading in post. But Dylan wanted it minimalistic on purpose. It’s just now he’s panicking.

It looked good to him, on like the first to seventh rewatches. Him and Tyler, for the first few, comparing cuts, psyching each other up. But then Tyler was like, okay, enough. We have it. We did it. It’s done.

And Dylan doesn’t know how to just let go like that.
He still has all these other cuts on his computer. Director’s cuts, you know? Only way too many of them. Tyler would probably laugh about it. Or get a little too nervous, or something.

Like he isn’t just as obsessive about his own work, his own acting. He’s just able to be done with it. Once Dylan calls cut, tells him that was great, they have it, that’s it. It’s over. His whole body shifts, his face relaxes. He can smile again.

God, Dylan needs a hit of that.

He totally gets why people do hard drugs. Why—this kind of pressure, even if it’s totally fabricated in your own head, there’s no getting away from it. No out, no way to relax. So he totally gets it, and maybe he would, if not for the actually prescribed shit he’s already taking. He’s not looking to screw up his mental health even worse than usual, ruin Tyler’s whole life again. He’s got enough shit he’s dealing with. Dylan, like, spinning out on some fucking—heroin bender? Because yeah, let’s assume he’d go straight to the worst one. Not, like, Xanax, not some low-grade painkillers. Like Dylan knows shit about drugs besides, like, weed and antidepressants. And everything that never made a difference.

But yeah, Dylan turning into some tragic biopic, wouldn’t that be charming? Just, killing Tyler slowly with anxiety over it. Or like, converting him to using.

So, that’s a big no, from Dylan. A big, if someone’s taking out a baggie in a bathroom, he’s about to be moonwalking in the other direction.

But he gets it.

It’s just a fucking movie. But it’s not just a fucking movie. Yeah, there’s bigger things in the world. Bigger stuff on the news, it doesn’t matter. Everything you put out into the world gets put under a microscope. Every little acting choice, every microsecond gets slowed down and sliced up and spit out again. Every frame gets analyzed, every little blink, or angle, or prop placement. The coloring, the cuts, the music. There’s a million ways you can humiliate yourself.

And directing? Who actually thinks Dylan can do that? Tyler, maybe, but he thinks Dylan’s some kind of water-walking miracle worker, so since when is that trustworthy? And does anyone else, has anyone else, really? And even getting distribution, is that really based on making something sellable, or just their combined C-list star power? It is a vanity project. There’s no denying that. It is, and that almost always means becoming a punchline. And really, what were they thinking?

Thinking, like, people do this. Write with their friends, and just make the movie. But even Good Will Hunting had studio input. Or like, Superbad, that got completely punched up before they even started shooting. And once he starts going down that road, it’s just terrifying.

He’s never been to film school. He just bugged the camera crew on every set. Followed his dad around as a kid, does that qualify him? It’s insane. That whole stereotype, the overconfident bumbling white guy stereotype. He’s that stereotype. Just getting it done on privilege and assumptions alone, and once he actually stops to think for three seconds, he’s shitting himself.

“Yeah, that must be it,” Tyler says. “You can’t actually be talented, or anything.”

“Stop trying to be reasonable,” Dylan says, and Tyler laughs. “I read, like, three books about directing, I’m like, yeah, I got this. I know all the basic camera angles, I can… Oh my god.”
Covering his face, and Tyler says, “They liked the trailer.”

“Yeah, so thank the guy who edited the trailer.” Dylan groans. “I’m a better editor than director, anyway, at least I’ve done that before.”

“I’ve been directed before,” Tyler says. Dylan scrubs at his eyes. “Sometimes badly. I know what it’s like.”

“Even if I’m good with the talent,” Dylan says. “Or maybe you’re just comfortable around me. So not even that.”

“I think I’d notice if you had the camera pointed the wrong way,” Tyler says.

“Yeah, and it’s all in focus,” Dylan says. “So, you know. Instant Academy Award.”

“Maybe not,” Tyler says. “It’s still a good movie.”

“We’ve been in worse before,” Dylan says, and Tyler nods.

“Multiple horror movies.”

“Which, at least both had female characters.”

“Female bears, even.”

“You’ll still like me,” Dylan says. “Even if it’s, like, the biggest joke. And I embarrassed you.”

“You could never embarrass me,” Tyler says, which isn’t comforting at all. “Of course. Dylan?!”

“It’s okay, I’m kind of getting used to it, you know,” Dylan says. “The like, mad, manic high of social terror. Kid me thought I’d be done with it! Nope.”

“It’s a good movie,” Tyler says. “Not everyone has to like it. It doesn’t say anything about you.”

“Sure,” Dylan says brightly, like he’s not halfway to starting to hyperventilate. “Sure! Yeah. Sure.”

“People love you,” Tyler says. “I love you. Not because of a movie.”

“You are… very weird,” Dylan says. “Can’t really account for you. Data-wise.”

“Do more tests,” Tyler says. “There’s more to life than high school.”

“Then it’s because of movies,” Dylan says, and would you look at that, there’s glass in his throat. That’s so, so awesome. Just terrific.

“It’s not,” Tyler says. “That’s just something you’re good at.”

He says, “I hated high school.”

“You,” Dylan says, disbelieving. “Lemme guess. Too popular? It’s draining, to be so beloved by everyone. You know, so handsome, and so likable.”

“You know what I looked like in high school, right?” Tyler says. Like he’s confused, like his weird little brain doesn’t understand growth spurts. And how Tyler has nothing to complain about.

“Cute, and then teen cute, and then you but less muscle,” Dylan says. “Versus, let’s see, weird, in three sizes.”
“Sounds inaccurate,” Tyler says. “I wasn’t that popular, either. I think you’re forgetting the years of home school?”

“Tons of actors are home-schooled,” Dylan says. “Because they’re off being famous actors. Who everyone then wants to be friends with.”

“Yeah, that’s one way of looking at it,” Tyler says. “Or maybe some people just don’t like anyone they think is different. Or anyone they assume thinks they’re better than them. Even people they claim to be friends with.”

And that’s—like, holy shit. That’s the most detail Tyler’s ever said about anything. Anything shitty, that wasn’t his mom, or something Dylan was involved in.

“Sounds like some people are assholes,” Dylan says. “In this hypothetical.”

“Maybe,” Tyler says.

Game, game, game face. Time for a big gay game face. They already missed one screening, with Tyler’s plane migraine, so Dylan’s ongoing panic attack is just gonna have to handle itself for a while.

It takes him about five minutes to half-tie a tie, his hands are shaking. Tyler walks by and does it one-handed.

Competent! Dylan feels so competent. So, yeah, he can do this! Unless he can’t.

“We’ll be okay,” Tyler says. “We’ll walk the carpet, we’ll do some interviews. I’ll introduce the movie. Unless you want to.”

“No, please,” Dylan says, are you kidding. “I will vomit all over the stage.”

“Right,” Tyler says mildly, looking kind of freaked out about the possibility. “You don’t have to do that. I can do that.”

“No, I’ll be fine,” Dylan says. “I’m just bein’ a big baby. It’s nothing.”

“I’ll introduce the movie,” Tyler says. “Yeah. I’ll introduce it. And then we’ll go watch it, and then there’ll be a party.”

“Fun,” Dylan says, not entirely sure his forced enthusiasm isn’t making him smile like a serial killer. “People and their opinions. All my... industry colleagues.”

“They’re gonna love it,” Tyler says.

And Dylan’s mildly suicidal, he looks up the Rotten Tomatoes page. The total lack of critical reviews, the anticipatory want-to-sees.

And then there it is, their own log line. They wrote two, for both their characters, but Tyler liked this one.

ENSWELL (2017) – When a small-town cornerman (Matthew Broderick) attempts suicide, his son fights to uphold his father’s legacy, while struggling with a growing protectiveness for his star
boxer. R for language, violence, sexuality.

Starring Tyler Hoechlin and Dylan O’Brien. Directed by Dylan O’Brien, written by...

God, he’s gonna be sick.
“Can I just say,” says the girl with the microphone, and Dylan’s head goes, no women, it’s gonna be the no women. He can’t believe he didn’t think about having no women in his movie, about what that looks like, in 20fucking17. And she hesitates, and her voice is shaking. “I, I just really—”

Dylan’s a scumbag. That’s it; he’s a sexist scumbag. He’s basically a more self-loathing Trump.

“I really loved how it was a gay movie?” she says, and Dylan blinks. “But like, not about them being gay? That it was just normal. That it never, like—that they were just real people, just living.”

Dylan swallows.

“Yeah,” he says, a little hoarsely. “That, um—that was always really important. To both Tyler and me.”

Tyler’s nodding, nodding.

“Um, what’s your name?” Dylan says, and the girl says, “Uh, Caroline.”

“Caroline,” Dylan says, and smiles at her, and she smiles back. And this isn’t even hard, Dylan knows this. He’s done this a thousand times already.

“I’m really, really glad you said that,” he says. “I uh—I get really in my head sometimes, and question—like, all the different little decisions I possibly could’ve made. And I forget the whole point of this, which is—yeah. Thank you.”

“Thanks,” Caroline says, and there’s some cheering, and Dylan looks out at all the staring-back faces again.

It’s not entirely intimidating.

“Tim,” says Tim, next. “Uh, seconding what Caroline said, first of all.”

Some more cheering, Dylan’s breathing easier already. He looks over at Tyler, who tips his head at him, like, See?

“So I’ve had anxiety pretty much all my life,” Tim says, “and not a lot of movies get—I mean, it’s the same thing. Where it becomes the uh, the like defining trait, it becomes, like a joke almost, even taken seriously. Like how it’s exaggerated, because, like… ‘Everything’s bigger in movies.’ Or whatever. And ENSWELL never did that.” More cheers. “Like with Seth, I never thought… Like, he could be me. And especially when it’s not the main thing in a movie, you almost never see that.”

Dylan finds Caroline in the audience, she’s nodding. He takes another breath.

“And even TJ, the way he dealt with it,” Tim says. “How he just related to it. I don’t know.”

Tyler nods, nods.
“I think I always needed to see that.”

“So, that was unexpected,” Dylan says. Slinging an arm around Tyler’s shoulders, yeah, party time! He’s ready.

“Was it really?” Tyler says. “Everything they said was true.”

“Yeah, but.” Dylan can’t understand how it’s so easy for him. Even if a million other things aren’t, he’s still unfathomably cool under the pressure of public opinion, and Dylan does, not, get it. “Like, the women thing.”

“It can’t be everything for everyone, every time,” Tyler says. “It doesn’t have to be.”

“It’s not because of your mom. Right?” Dylan says, and instantly regrets it. “No. We’d notice.”

“Well, we didn’t, so...” Tyler says, but he shakes his head. “Not everything’s that much deeper.”

“If we had a bigger cast,” Dylan says, “or like, a B story. Definitely.”

“It has to be organic,” Tyler says. “Just write what you actually want to write.”


“Or it’s like anything,” Tyler says. “Anything you just force in. Without believing in it.”

“Right,” Dylan says, but he’s not sure about that. “Like, I believe in women. In movies.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says.

“It would be a really bad trend, having no women in our movies, ever,” Dylan says. “Just because it’s not like—the most natural thing. That’s bullshit, that’s the kind of bullshit that keeps, like, assholes like me—”

“You’re not an asshole,” Tyler says.


“You’re not,” Tyler starts, and Dylan says, “I don’t mean I’m boring. I’m just, like—It’s a problem. In the industry.”

Tyler nods.

“And like, white, too,” Dylan says. “We’re so fucking white.” Blushing, frowning a little. ‘I know that’s like—whatever, how it sounds. But look at the times we live in.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says. “You don’t wanna be—associated.”

“Or like, the same thing,” Dylan says. “But just going through the motions. Like, pretending.”

Like, he gets points for it, too easy. For even acknowledging it. When, in his own work—and no one’s even calling him out.

“There was that interview,” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “That wasn’t anything. That was like, a
launching pad.”

He needs to do something. Like, something real. He needs to be consistent, to actually—like, have someone call him on his shit. Like that interview, if that interviewer was actually well-meaning. And not just trying to bully Tyler into an exclusive.

“We made a movie,” he says. Tyler nods. “Like this whole other movie, that split away from that one.”

“Oh,” Tyler says. Frowns a little. “We’re still… We’re still using that?”

“It’s like half a movie,” Dylan says. “It’s not just, like, scraps.”

“I guess,” Tyler says.

“And the festival, and everything,” Dylan says. “We could just re-write a little. Just, make it a little more coherent.”

Tyler nods.

“And then switch the genders,” Dylan says, and then rushes on, a little nervously, “like, we have a million ideas, we’re having new ones all the time—”

“Yeah,” Tyler says, a little stiffly.

“Like the, the Superman one, the Clark and Lex, it’s too many...” But he trails off, looks at him. “It’s too many to just do ourselves,” he says. “Like, we’d waste it. You weren’t gonna use it, anyway.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says.

“Are you mad at me?” Dylan says. “Like, it’s your idea too. And your writing.”

“No,” Tyler says. “I don’t know. It’s just—sudden.” He shakes his head. “I’m not mad at you.”

“Just disappointed,” Dylan says, and Tyler gets this look like, I’m not fucking doing this again.

“No.”

“Tyler,” Dylan says, he’s sorry.

Tyler shakes his head, scrubs at his jaw. “It’s, it’s a good idea. It’s interesting.”

“It’s walking all over you,” Dylan says. “And like, just assuming...”

“I wanna think about it,” Tyler says. “Can I think about it?”

“Of course,” Dylan says. “Or we could do both versions. Like, ours, but also… hand it off.”

“I’ll think about it,” Tyler says. “We’ll work it out.”

“It’s just one idea,” Dylan says. “It doesn’t have to be this idea. We could pitch other stuff to people.”

“I really liked working on it,” Tyler says. “With you.”

Dylan looks at him. “We’re always gonna work together.”
Tyler nods. “I liked what we did.”

“So we’ll patch it in, we can still be—” Ugh, Tyler looks so disappointed. “We can still be a part of it. Or both versions can, like, link together.”

“You proposed to me,” Tyler says. “On that set. With that lighting.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says. “And it went off too early.”

“It wasn’t too early,” Tyler says. “I loved it. I love you.”

“Yeah,” Dylan says, his eyes are burning. “Yeah, me too. I’m not giving that. Even if—you agree, to everything.”

“Oh,” Tyler says, and Dylan hugs him.

“You thought I’d give that away?”

“No,” Tyler says. “I don’t know.”


“Oh,” Tyler says, he’s kind of dry-crying. Like, everything but the tears. “Then, whatever. I don’t care.”

“It’s my favorite thing of us,” Dylan says. “I can’t believe you thought I’d give that away.”

He says, “I don’t even wanna, like, share it.”

“Oh,” Tyler says, and Dylan hugs him again. “I thought… For the new movie. It makes sense.”


They both get a little too tipsy, at the party. A little too clingy, a little too overly fond.

And Posey’s there, which, Dylan forgot about that. Posey, and Colton, all their actual friends. Brittany, and this makeup artist from Harvest, India. Who Dylan’s literally never had an inkling about before, but she’s really warm with Tyler, really proud of him, and the more of that he gets right now, the better. From all, like, parental female figures. Dylan saw how he was, around his mom, those five seconds with Dylan’s mom. With someone actually treating him like a person.

Dylan’s never not gonna be encouraging that.

Mom loves Tyler, seriously. She kind of always has. Kind of, even in the very beginning, the first rough patches, it was almost, like, harder for her than for him. Because of how sure she was.

She kind of always had a better eye about it.

And Dylan would just like, plug him into that, if he could. Like, go with him to see her, nonstop. They could’ve spent Christmas with her, it would’ve been, like… Like, so insanely different. Like, the second Dylan knew something, and told her, she was on board for it. Was like, the biggest supporter of him. And his dad, too, it wasn’t ever like that, he was never bad about it. But he was just like, Yeah, Dyl, don’t worry about it. Of course I still love you, of course it’s not—You know I don’t believe that bullshit. You’re my kid, I’m gonna love you no matter what you do.
Which is kind of a mixed message, *maybe*. Just maybe. But whatever. Dylan only freaked out about it for like, the entire rest of his life.

But he knows he didn’t mean it like that.

“Dude,” Posey says. “That was *awesome.*”

“*Right?*” Dylan says, which, stay humble, Dylan. But he’s a little too drunk for that. A little too swimming in relief, and Posey wouldn’t lie to him. No one was more honest about Blue Mind than him. “And, and you’re being in the next one.”

“With Colton,” Posey jokes, and Dylan says, “Going that well, huh?”

“Maybe,” Posey says. “You never know, you know?”

Right, yeah. Dylan’s seen how that turned out for him. There’s this insane part of being in a public relationship, where it’s like, every good thing you ever said about the person is taken down, and recorded. And then the second things fall apart, it’s like, “Here’s what a fucking idiot Dylan O’Brien is! Here’s everything they said about love and relationships, and fuck them for being optimistic about it.” It’s crazy. And then you have to like, backtrack, every new optimistic thing, because you just know it’ll come back to bite you later.

Not that it’s ever happened with him. He’s done a good job of being obsessively private about it, before Tyler. And then they never had a breakup that lasted long enough for someone to write about it. They never took it that public. Never saw other people, or… And most people don’t know the Camille thing ever happened. It *didn’t* happen, not in reality. But even the rumor of it. They’ve never felt the need to like, shut it down.

And thinking about his press persona always makes Dylan insane. Thinking about, like, what other people are thinking of him, and how he comes off. So mostly he just disengages from it. Mostly, and then every so often he Googles himself and loses his mind for a while. Or searches Twitter, likes a bunch of things he couldn’t’ve found without that. Without that nervous little bad habit.

But Posey, like, he’s never been that guarded. He was always so open-hearted, about everything, and spur-of-the-moment.

It seriously fucking sucks how careful he is now.

“You will know,” Dylan says. “Eventually.” And maybe that’s a shitty thing to say. Like Posey hasn’t had real, long relationships, like Dylan’s this beacon of wisdom about it. Just because he got married and Posey didn’t. He’s such a smug fucking tool. “I mean, it feels obvious now, to me.”

“It’s obvious to everybody,” Posey says. “It’s like, sickening.”

But he says it warmly.

“Aww,” Dylan says, and then there’s that tiny flash of fear, like, imagining all the headlines, and reactions. If it all came tumbling down. And like, being heartbroken, *and* seeing that. Because there’s no way he’d initiate it.

“Don’t freak out!” Posey says. Grabbing his arm, steadying him. “You know he loves you! *And* I love you, dude. So I know you do.”

“Stop reading my mind,” Dylan jokes, and Posey puts an arm around him. “*God.* You’re the best best friend.”
“Is he?” Posey jokes. “*Wondered* if you were getting more religious.”

“Shut up,” Dylan says. “I love you. You complete me.”

“You had me at ‘You come,’” Posey says, and snickers, and then they’re both laughing.

“What’s so funny?” Tyler says, coming back over, and Dylan says, “It really wasn’t. We’re just both out of our minds.”

Still laughing, and Posey’s still laughing, and Dylan pats him on the back. And Posey’s arm tightens around him, and it’s too tight, and Dylan’s head lightens.

“Sorry, so sorry to interrupt,” Dylan says. “And like, dampen the mood. But I’m about to have a really belated panic attack.”

“What, now?” Tyler says, and Dylan says, “Sure is looking——” and then that way gets trapped, can’t get out.

“Whoa,” Posey says, and Dylan dips his head down, covers his mouth, tries to count. Five, five things you can see… He’s gonna need to look up for that. And then he’s not gonna be able to breathe. So just the amount of things in his direct blurry vision, that’s… And his heart is pounding, and pounding.

Things, things. Things he can see, with his irises. If irises are even the part that does that. Isn’t that, like, the retina? Dylan doesn’t know fucking anything. Irises are like, the lens, maybe. Or the shutter.

No, that doesn’t make any fucking sense.

Okay, skip that. Four, four… Four things you can touch. That’s it, right? Or is it hear? Four things you can hear? Dylan can’t *fucking* breathe.

And what if this is another heart attack? He had one, already, he just didn’t take it seriously. Isn’t that insane? Who has a heart attack, at twenty-three, and just moves past it? Just, it’s my heart, it’s whatever. Who ever needed that?

“Dylan,” someone’s saying, but they’re a million miles away. He’s gonna fucking drop dead on the spot. Just drop dead, and it’s gonna fuck up everybody. It’s gonna fuck up Tyler, he’s *already*— With Dylan’s million health things. He’s already so traumatized. And Posey, he *found* him, he found him once already. He *found* him, not breathing.

“Dylan,” someone says, and then, “Get your arm off him. Get your arm off him, let him go!”

And then the weight’s gone, and he’s gasping. Just gasping for breath.

“Dylan,” Tyler says, and it is Tyler. Of *course*, of course it is. “Dylan. You’re… Are you okay?”

And Dylan nods, and tears fill his eyes, and Tyler moves close to him. Moves close to him, helps him keep breathing.

“Sorry,” Dylan says, blinded, but he knows Posey’s there somewhere. “Sorry, Tyler——” He should’ve just spoken out. Just spoken up, instead of choking—

“Don’t worry,” Tyler says, “Don’t worry.” And that’s not even the Tyler he means, but he’s sorry for that too.
He just didn’t know it wasn’t actually real.

“Get Tyler,” he tells Tyler. It’s like a bad joke, their names, it’s like Who’s On First or something. “Get Tyler Posey. I know I scared him.”

“He’s here,” Tyler says. “He’s still right here.”

“I’m here,” Posey says, and his voice is low, shaking.

“I love you,” Dylan says, he means both of them. “I fucking love you—” And he’s still blind, but he tries to reach. Reach out, pull in both of them.

“I know,” Posey says, comes back with his hand, makes a right angle with Dylan’s shoulder. “I know. Me too—”

“Both of you,” Dylan says, and feels Tyler untensing. “Fucking both of you, you’re both—” And he’s finally, finally breathing. He scrubs at his eyes, pulls Posey into a bear hug. “I know I fucking scare you, all the time. It’s like, petrifying.”

“I don’t care,” Posey says. “Just, like, tell me.”

“I thought it was real,” Dylan says. “Like another, real—like, not just me.”

“It wasn’t you,” Tyler says. “You weren’t breathing,”

“Yeah, but,” Dylan says. This is the opposite of comforting to Posey, it has to be. “You know. I amplify things.”

“No you don’t,” Tyler says. “Stop.”

“Like, catastrophizing,” Dylan says. “Like, already start seeing past me dying.”

Well, that’s not gonna help anyone not panic.

“You’re in therapy,” Tyler says. “You’re going back to therapy.”

Like that’s it, like that’s all it takes to calm him.

“You stopped?” Posey says, and that just cements it.


On the ride home, Tyler’s too tense. Dylan nudges him, gets him laughing again, says, “You’re always savin’ me.”

“Always,” Tyler says. “Name one other time.”

Dylan parks his head on his shoulder. “Fucking constantly.”

There’s a couple extra mini ones, once he realizes he couldn’t have controlled it. Couldn’t have just stopped it by breathing, alone. Unless he like, wrestled with Posey’s arm, or something, like, wordlessly convinced him—So that’s a little terrifying. That’s a little, no thank you, forever.
It kind of puts a damper on the whole, like, party atmosphere. All the good reviews still flowing in.

Dylan’s just a little too breathless.


And Dylan shudders, says, “I can’t—” Gasping, and Tyler says, “You just did. You just did, you’re breathing.”

“I’m not—” Dylan says, he knows he’s not. He can fucking feel it, the walls closing in.

“Baby,” Tyler says, and he’s never called him that. Literally, never, in their lives.

“Uhhhh,” Dylan says, he feels weird about it. “This is new.”

“Somehow, I expected that reaction,” Tyler says. He crowds close, touches Dylan’s throat a little. “Okay?” The side of his jaw. Like he’s a doctor, like he’s, like, testing it out. This still circulating air all right?

They’re not really a baby couple, is the thing. Unless they have a baby. But not as a nickname.

“I’m okay with that,” Tyler says. “It’s a little...”

“Infantile?” Dylan says. Which, it isn’t. People call people that all the time.

It just sounds really weird when Tyler says it. When Tyler says it to him.

“D,” Tyler says, and that’s much better. That’s much better, that’s the old familiar one. “You know you’re talking, right. And breathing?”

“Oh,” Dylan says, how about that. “Cool trick.”

“Yeah,” Tyler says, he’s grinning. “I figured.”

“So smug about it,” Dylan says, shaking his head, but he hugs him. “Thanks. Put that one in, keep that one in your back pocket.”

“I will,” Tyler says.

Dylan shakes his head again. “You’re too much for me. Too, like, unreal.” Even just the look he’s giving now. Dylan’s like, doubly lightheaded.


i can always be found
i can always be found

if you need me
if you need me
if you need me

i can always be found
i can always be found

and i want you to find me
so i’ll stay by your side

the other side of mt. heart attack - liars

End Notes

no hobriens in this fic resembling actual hobriens are representative of actual hobriens. probably.

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