One life stand
by Vendelin

Summary

Stiles is used to selling himself to make ends meet. But it's getting harder to keep those ends meeting, and there's only so much of Stiles to go around. Until a too-fancy car shows up in his neighborhood, and he meets Derek Hale.

All Derek wants is Stiles's time, someone to stay on his arm for events and smile for the cameras. It's the easiest job Stiles has ever had, the best-paying one he's ever had, and he's more than happy to sign up.

Derek is everything and nothing Stiles expects him to be, with his tailored suits, sharp mind and his quiet way of caring. But it's just a job and Stiles never meant to fall in love.

Notes

It's been almost three (!) years since I started writing this fic, and I can't believe that it's finally finished.
I want to thank everyone who cheered me on, and believed in me – I wouldn’t have been able to finish this without you! There are a few people I want to thank a little extra, though, because they’ve put as much effort into this as I did.

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Now, I’ll leave you guys to it. If you have any questions about the tags, please feel free to reach out to me either on [tumblr](http://tumblr.com) or on [twitter](http://twitter.com), and I’ll be happy to clarify or explain more!
Stiles shifts the messenger bag to his other shoulder, wincing at the weight. It’s ten-thirty and he’s on his way home from the library. He’s been studying late, hoping to catch up on the assignments he’s behind on, and trying to forget that he’s low on money again.

He scans the street quickly before he crosses to avoid a man who wears his hoodie a little too low over his face, who approaches another sketchy-looking dude further up. Stiles is pretty sure that there will be a deal happening soon, and he doesn’t want to see too much.

There’s a stale loaf of bread and a couple of potatoes beginning to sprout waiting for him when he gets home. His bank account is close to empty, and a particularly big group project has limited his time to work. So it’s only natural that he slows for a second when he notices the sleek, black Porsche coming down the street. That kind of car doesn’t show up in a neighbourhood like this without a reason. Especially not when driving that slowly.

However, given his regular outfit of jeans, white t-shirt and plaid button-up, it’s a surprise when it slows enough for him to catch up to it. It’s even more of a surprise when the window rolls down. He makes a quick decision; someone in a car like this could probably pay a lot of money for someone like him.

He leans down to peer through the window. “Looking for company?” He never does this. He never walks the streets. He isn’t that stupid. Until now.

To his surprise, the person in the car isn’t some sleazy old man or woman, but a guy who looks like he’s in his thirties. A hot guy in his thirties.

The guy blinks, then frowns, and Stiles realises immediately that he’s made a mistake. This isn’t a john. During the few seconds of silence, Stiles’ pulse manages to skyrocket and he feels a little bit dizzy.

“I’m not,” the guy says, clearing his throat. “I was going to ask you for directions.”

Shrugging, Stiles tries to look like he’s not embarrassed or halfway to a panic attack. “To where?”

The guy looks down at a note lying on his dashboard, and then gives him an address in the fancier part of Manhattan. Stiles isn’t surprised. He’s been in the neighbourhood a couple of times.

“Yes, you’re definitely in the wrong place, buddy,” he says, and the guy rolls his eyes.

“I can tell. How do I get there?”

The guy seems to hesitate. “Did I misunderstand, or are you a prostitute?” he asks bluntly.

Stiles winces. He’s been called worse things while working, but yeah, while working. The guy seems to take his expression as a confirmation.
“How much do you charge an hour?”

“How?” Stiles asks, his throat feeling a little dry suddenly. “Changed your mind about company?”

“No. But I’m willing to pay whatever you’d make with a...client, for you to get in the car and get me to my place.”

For a moment, Stiles hesitates, but then he realises that he can get enough money from this to buy groceries and other stuff that he needs without actually having sex with someone. This guy sort of looks like a serial killer, with his pale, piercing eyes and the serious set of his mouth, but Stiles hopes that he isn’t.

“I’m not sure you could afford it,” he says, stalling a little as he tries to make up his mind. All his brain chants is: stupid, stupid, stupid.

The guy gives him a sceptical look, and okay, considering the car he drives he probably can pay for Stiles to give him directions.

“Four hundred,” Stiles says, and ignores the voice in his head. It’s less than what he normally charges an hour, but he’s pretty sure no one is willing to pay that much for giving directions.

The guy immediately leans across the passenger seat to open the door. “Get in.”

Stiles hesitates for a second. This guy could very well be a murderer. On the other hand, that goes for all his clients. And four hundred bucks for giving directions instead of pretending to be someone’s boyfriend or having to fuck them? Worth the risk.

The car smells new, and the leather is stiff underneath him as he slides in and shuts the door. He places his messenger bag on the floor between his feet, and gets another sceptical look from the guy.

“What?” Stiles asks him.

“You don’t really dress your part, and that bag looks heavy.”

Stiles shifts in his seat, suddenly feeling a bit uncomfortable. Sometimes it’s easier to separate his work from the rest of him, like they don’t belong to the same life.

“I wasn’t really planning on working,” he mutters and wonders if this is a good idea after all, when they drive past his building. “I was on my way home from the library.”

“You in school?”

“Yeah, graduating in eight months.”

“What’s your major?”

“Turn left here,” Stiles instructs, instead of replying. He doesn’t want to talk about the real him. “So, what do you do?” he asks instead as the guy turns the corner.

“Business.”

“You’re not from New York, I take it.”

“California.”

“Me too.”
They’re quiet for a while, and it feels okay as long as they’re moving, but when they cross the bridge to Manhattan, they get stuck in a traffic jam, and the silence becomes awkward.

“Nice ride,” he says, tapping at the seat, as he watches the woman in the car next to them. She looks like the average stay-at-home mom, with a van and a child’s car seat in the back. She glances to the side, and smiles when they make brief eye contact. Stiles wonders what she sees when she looks at him.

“Thanks,” the guy replies, and then sighs. “You know, I didn’t expect there to be a lot of traffic at this time of day.”

“It’s Manhattan. There’s probably some event, or accident.” Stiles shrugs.

There’s another long silence, during which they move approximately eight feet forward. This time, it’s the guy who breaks it.

“How did you end up doing what you do?”

The curiosity is understandable in a way, and Stiles probably would be, too.

“It was an accident, actually,” Stiles confesses. He’s always worried, when talking about this, that he’ll accidentally pocket-dial his dad, who will hear his confession.

The memory of that first time always makes him cringe internally. He was out clubbing, and in hindsight, his outfit might have been a little extreme. But he felt lonely, touch-starved and stressed, so hooking up with that guy had been great. It wasn’t until the morning after, when there was a wad of bills on his bedside table, that he realised what had actually happened.

“I see. And then you kept doing it?”

At first, he’d been terrified and grossed out for accidentally selling sex. He had stuffed the money in an empty jar in his kitchen cabinet, and tried not to think about it. But then, he’d been low on money again, and had taken the jar out to count the bills. It was frightening to realise how much he’d made in such few hours, far more than he made a month working at the coffee shop.

Stiles shrugs again. “I need the money.”

“It’s dangerous.”

He wants to roll his eyes at that, because no shit. “I know, but it doesn’t change the fact that I still need the money. I figured it’s safer than living on the street.”

The guy is silent, and for some reason, Stiles feels like he should say something more.

“I tried all the minimum wage jobs already,” he says, because he has. He’s done ridiculous hours for a crap wage in coffee shops and grocery stores. “I had to work my ass off to get the same kind of money as I do now by working one night a month. I need to keep my grades up to keep my scholarship and you know, my future. I had to prioritise. And I don’t walk the streets. I’m not that stupid.”

“Except for tonight,” the guy points out.

“Well,” Stiles says, and looks out the window again. “I assumed that a car like yours can only be in a neighbourhood like that for one reason. I wasn’t going to pass up on the opportunity to make good money.”
“So four hundred is an overcharge?”

Stiles snorts. Clearly, this guy has no clue what sex costs. “No, I charge four hundred and fifty an hour. But I figured that I can’t do that for giving directions.”

“If they pay that much an hour, you have to be good.”

Shrugging, Stiles glances at the guy, briefly noting the soft-looking fabric of his sweater, in stark contrast to the sharp edges of his pressed shirt collar. “It’s not really about the sex part. Most just want a boyfriend experience, which means that I basically pretend that I’m in a relationship with them. Sometimes it’s dinner and a movie, before anything happens at all. Sometimes they just want to feel like they got home from work to someone waiting for them.” It feels awkward admitting to it. Somehow it sounds worse than just selling his body for money at street corners, when it’s said out loud like this. “I guess it’s more about being good at pretending.”

The guy hums, nodding to himself and takes a right when Stiles tells him to, effectively ending the conversation about his work.

“So, what brings you to New York?” he asks.

“Business. The company I work for has an office here, and they want me to take care of it.”

He says it in such a deliberate, vague way, like he’s choosing his words with care. It makes Stiles suspect that there’s more to that story, but he doesn’t push it.

“You never told me your major,” the guy points out, as Stiles directs him onto another street.

He decides to compromise. “I want to work with human resources. You know, talent management and stuff like that.”

“Strategic HR?” The guy nods to himself. “Could be interesting.”

“Yeah.”

“I prefer numbers myself.”

For some reason, Stiles has no trouble believing that.

They’re mostly quiet the rest of the way. It isn’t that far, and Stiles keeps the conversation to safe subjects, like what their coffee orders at Starbucks are. When they run out of safe subjects, Stiles just looks at the skyscrapers that surrounds him, towering on each side of the street, and aches a little bit. These condos probably don’t have the draft that his apartment has, or the smothering heat during the summers. The risk of getting mugged when going out late to buy milk is probably considerably less as well. But maybe that’s because people around here aren’t likely to buy their own milk.

The guy pulls up in front of an impressive building on the Upper East Side, disgustingly close to Central Park. Stiles wonders what it must be like to have this much money, because, let’s be honest, there aren’t that many people who can afford these condos.

“So, this is it,” he says, and rests his hand on the handle for a moment before he steps out of the car. He’s only half-expecting to actually get paid, and riding in this car is a bit of payment in itself. But the guy pulls out his wallet and hands over a wad of bills. It takes a second before Stiles realises that this is way more than four hundred. “This is too much,” he says quickly, worried that the guy will disappear into the garage before Stiles can give the money back.
“Didn’t you charge four hundred and fifty and hour?” the guy asks.

“No for giving directions,” Stiles protests, also silently wondering who has nine hundred bucks in cash in their wallet just like that.

“They were good directions.” The guy doesn’t exactly smile, but there’s a warmer tone to his voice than before. “Be careful,” he adds, before he disappears around the corner.

Stiles quickly stuffs the money in his pocket and hopes that no one wants to mug him. He knows that it’s pity money, but right now he’s grateful, because this means that he can postpone needing to work for some time.

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Apparently, fate has a different plan. His computer breaks down the same week his roommate announces that he’s moving immediately, leaving Stiles with doubled rent and a desperate need for a new computer. Nine hundred dollars won’t cover that.

When his dad calls, he lies through his teeth, but mostly he just wants to cry. “No, I’m okay,” he promises. “Matt moved out without a warning, so I need to find someone that can take his room.”

“But he’s still paying this month, right?” his dad asks, and Stiles wishes that they were in a better financial position, so that he’d be able to ask for help.

“Yeah, of course.”

Except that Matt isn’t.

Moving to New York for college was expensive on its own, but Stiles really wanted to see something other than the West Coast, and his dad supported the idea. With the scholarship and the money from his mom’s life insurance, as well as the money his dad had been able to save up for him, he had more than enough to pay for tuition and living expenses. But then his dad got shot during a drug cartel bust. Which, in itself, is something Stiles never thought he’d hear about in Beacon Hills. His dad was only able to work part-time, and the money saved for Stiles’ education disappeared frighteningly quickly when it was time to pay the medical bills.

It’s not that Stiles is bitter about it. He loves his dad, and honestly, having his dad is way more important than a college degree. So, prostitution was never a thing Stiles considered, until he had to. Until he realised that his grades were starting to slip, because of how much time work took from studying. Until his dad asked how his financial situation was, and Stiles lied again.

He knows there are a lot of people who do sex work and enjoy it. That there are people who do the same thing he does because they want to, deciding that they might as well get paid for doing something they like. But Stiles isn’t one of them.

He doesn’t do it that regularly. A couple of times a month at most. He finds his clients online and he sticks to hotel rooms they have to pay for. He doesn’t feel as disgusting anymore, and he’s able to keep his grades up. He’ll never have to do it again after graduating, and there’s only eight months left. It’s nothing compared to how long he’s been doing it for.

In the end, Stiles ends up on his usual site and realises that he’s going to have to make some kind of long-term contract. *Long-term* meaning more than a couple of sessions, in case it takes him a while to find a roommate who isn’t a complete psychopath.

As he updates his ad, he thinks about removing some of the things he won’t do, just to attract more
people. Many of the really rich dudes are into bondage – which Stiles definitely isn’t up for with someone he doesn’t trust – and way heavier stuff than that. He’s always refused to do that sort of thing before, but maybe that’s what will save him from living on the street.

He bites the pad of his thumb for a moment, weighing the pros and cons. The pros being a bigger target group for his services. The cons...well, pretending to be some creep’s kid. For his own sanity’s sake, he decides against it, and keeps his usual Wills and Won’ts. If he doesn’t get a good offer within the week, he’ll make the changes then.

Within three hours, some dude offers him an outrageous price, and if Stiles wasn’t so desperate he’d decline. There’s always something fishy with someone offering that much so soon. Instead, he agrees to a dinner the following night to talk things through, to see how it feels.

It turns out that the man – because he’s very much a man, probably in his forties – must be quite wealthy. He takes Stiles to one of the better restaurants, and even offered to send a car to pick him up, but honestly, Stiles trusts the druggies in the subway more. He calls himself Deucalion, and he orders oysters and bitter champagne that makes Stiles’ stomach churn.

Deucalion is dressed immaculately, and he’s got perfect teeth – probably veneers. There’s too much jewelry for Stiles’ taste, with a ring on each finger, slim gold chains around his neck, and a Rolex that probably costs more than Stiles’ tuition. Stiles wouldn’t be surprised if he turned out to be a part of the mob.

Deucalion is very nice, and he talks with a smooth voice that makes Stiles suspect that he’s used to convincing people on a daily basis. He doesn’t push any sexual subjects, doesn’t look at Stiles like he’s a piece of meat, and doesn’t grope him when he takes Stiles’ jacket. Everything seems good, but still, there’s something. Something in his eyes that makes Stiles’ stomach turn itself into knots, that makes him feel queasy. If it wasn’t for the money, he’d be out of here already. He’s never even thought about ignoring his gut feeling. Well, until now.

He looks around the restaurant to get a break from his own brain, and also to avoid watching Deucalion eating his oysters, because ugh. His gaze doesn’t pause until he spots someone familiar.

“It just need to use the bathroom,” he says quietly, and gets up before Deucalion has a chance to say anything. He doesn’t really need to use the bathroom, but he needs a breather and a moment to think. The restrooms are empty, and in the dim light from a crystal chandelier (in the bathroom!), his reflection looks pale and lost. As he leans over the sink to splash water over his face, someone else walks in.

“I would stay away from him,” a familiar voice says, and Stiles looks up. It’s the directions guy again, and he’s frowning.

“Who?” Stiles asks, but he already knows.

“Deucalion. He’s bad news.”

“How d’you know?”

“I don’t know him, but I know of him. He’s got a reputation for exploiting prostitutes and some of them never seem to show up again. I would stay away from him.” He repeats the last few words with more determination this time.
Stiles sighs, sagging against the sink. He doesn’t even ask how the guy can know all this when he’s only been in town for a month. “I had a bad feeling,” he confesses, because why not? He might not know the guy’s name, but he seems to be an alright dude. He paid Stiles nine hundred for directions.

“Then why are you still here? Did you already agree to something?”

“No,” Stiles shakes his head. “But I really need money. A lot, and fast. And he’s really my only option if I don’t want to become homeless and fail to graduate.”

“How’s that?”

Stiles swallows. He thinks about lying, but it’s not like this guy doesn’t already know what he does for a living. “My roommate moved out without a warning. Left me with the entire rent. My computer crashed and I really need to buy a new one for school.” He sucks in a breath. “And you know, maybe live a little. Eat food and maybe treat myself to Starbucks from time to time.”

The guy is quiet for a while, before he opens and closes his mouth once, then opens it again. “Do you ever offer just your company for money? No sex. Just company?”

“No really,” Stiles shrugs. “I guess I could, but the money wouldn’t be enough. They pay for the sex, not my awesome sense of humour.”

“How much do you need?”

“A lot.”

“Give me a number,” the guy presses.


“And for living,” the guy supplies.

“Yeah.”

“I could use someone to accompany me to things,” the guy says casually. “I get invited to a lot of events and dinners that I’m expected to bring a date to. In California I would’ve had my sister do it, but that won’t be possible here.” He looks at Stiles for a moment. “I’m not interested in sleeping with you, but I’d be willing to pay you whatever you need for your company a few times a month, as long as it works with your class schedule.”

Stiles gapes. “What?” he asks after a moment.

“Just think about it. And I’m serious when I say that you need to stay away from Deucalion. He’s not a good guy.”

He hands Stiles a business card and disappears out the door. Stiles stares down at it.

TRI Skel Venture Funds
ABO Group

Derek Hale
Managing Partner
New York Office
“At least he has a name now. He hesitates, but eventually walks back out again, wondering if he’s really been in the bathroom for a long time, or if it’s only in his head.”

“So,” Deucalion says as soon as Stiles sits down. “How do you feel about this arrangement?”

Stiles is quiet for a moment. “To be honest, I think I’ll have to decline.”

Deucalion smiles. Stiles can’t exactly pinpoint why, but it sends icy shivers down his spine. “You know how to get a hold of me, should you change your mind.”

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Stiles stares up at the ceiling in his bedroom a few hours later. He’s sick to his stomach, knowing that he needs to pay his rent in a few days and he doesn’t have enough money. He’s checked his bank accounts ten times, just to make sure. Sighing, he picks up his phone and types in a text for Derek, not wanting to call since it’s the middle of the night.

< I’ll agree to this, but I will need an advance to be able to pay my rent, and get a computer for school.

It takes forty minutes before he gets a reply, during which he’s imagined a few hundred possible ways that he won’t be able to come up with enough money. Unless he wants to call Deucalion and take him up on his offer.

> I’ll see to it. Come by the office tomorrow and we’ll discuss the details. I’ll make sure that you have a check when you leave.

Stiles lets out a breath, and something tight in his stomach loosens.

< Thank you for doing this.

> You have no idea how horrible it is going to events alone, when you’re expected to bring a date. I’m doing this for selfish reasons.

Stiles doesn’t believe that for a second.

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TRI Skel Venture Funds is located in a fancy business district in Manhattan. Stiles pretends not to see the names of the other companies around here, because that’ll only force him to realise how much money Derek must be making. Well, that only works until he steps through the entrance, and everything is marble and glass, and there’s a man who asks him for his ID and who he’s supposed to meet.

“I have no scheduled meeting for someone with your name, sir,” the man says and squints at Stiles’ driver’s license. Stiles’ heart begins to race, anxiety clawing in his chest. He’s been played.

Just as he starts thinking about having to take on Deucalion’s offer or end up homeless, the man continues, “But Ms. Martin told me that Mr. Hale would have a visitor around this time. I will give them a call. Please wait here.”

Stiles breathes through his nose, terrified that he won’t even be let inside the elevator, and watches the men and women in crisp suits hurry past him, scanning their ID badges before walking past the turnstiles. His skinny jeans and plaid have never felt more out of place than here, and even touching the sleek desk, behind which the man is now speaking on the phone, feels wrong.
“Mr. Hale is awaiting you. Take the elevator to floor sixty-five, and Ms. Martin will meet you there.”

The man opens a side gate to let him through, and hands Stiles a badge that says visitor to put on his shirt.

It feels like the longest elevator ride in Stiles’ life. There are two other people in the elevator, but they get off on floors forty-one and forty-seven respectively, leaving him alone for almost twenty stories. The walls inside the elevator are metallic and shiny, making him wonder if no one ever places a hand there after eating a donut, or if there are employees who constantly polish them.

As soon as the elevator stops and the doors open with a ding, a petite girl with red hair and a sharp look in her eyes that makes Stiles feel like he’s being observed, rises behind her desk to meet him. Her name tag says Lydia Martin.

“Mr. Hale is this way,” she explains, and motions for Stiles to follow her. She walks very quickly in her shoes, and even though her legs are much shorter than Stiles’, he has a hard time keeping up.

“He’s very busy today, but told Isaac to make time in his schedule for you.”

“Oh,” Stiles says, hoping that his face isn’t as hot as it feels.

“I wouldn’t expect you to be his type, but really, no one knows his type. I shouldn’t be surprised.”

It takes Stiles a moment to realise that she probably thinks that he’s Derek’s boyfriend. For a second, he wants to protest, but what’s he going to say, anyway? No, I’m not his boyfriend, I’m just going to accompany him to all these events and get money for it. So he just stays quiet.

Derek’s office is huge. It’s almost the size of Stiles’ apartment, not that that’s saying anything. The entire back wall is made of glass, with a great view over Manhattan, and there’s a collection of baseballs in a cabinet. Stiles wonders briefly why one needs a few couches, a lounge area and a desk in the same office, but maybe that comes with being the managing partner of an entire company like this.

“Hey,” he says awkwardly, when he spots Derek behind his desk, phone pressed against his ear. Derek holds up a finger, and continues to talk for a few minutes, sounding stern and displeased, before he hangs up with the words: “Just get it done today.” He’s wearing a suit, and the frown on his face smooths somewhat when he looks up again.

“Please sit,” he says, gesturing towards the chair opposite of his desk.

Stiles does so, awkwardly, looking anywhere but at Derek. He feels like he’s in a job interview. But the view, the view is absolutely incredible. He doesn’t understand why Derek sits with his back against it all. He thinks he can see the Empire State Building from here.

“So,” Derek begins and leans back in his chair. He’s wearing a tailored button-up, crisp white, with cufflinks that sparkle in the sunlight when he moves his hand. The suit jacket is hanging over the back of his chair. “I’m glad you could make it.”

“Sorry I’m a few minutes late. The subway was delayed and this isn’t my usual neighbourhood, so it took me some time to find the right place.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Derek reaches for a tray placed on the edge of his desk, and his shirt stretches a little over the muscle curving his shoulder. Stiles really doesn’t understand why he needs to hire someone to accompany him to events. There must be models flinging themselves at his feet for a chance to be his plus one. “Anything to drink?”
Stiles glances at the tray for a second. He’s pretty sure that one of those crystal bottles contains whiskey and the other one bourbon.

“Do you have water?”

“Sure,” Derek says and pours himself a glass of whiskey before he presses a button on his desk. “Lydia, could you get someone to bring a glass of water for my guest, please?”

A moment later, a guy walks in with a glass of water, placing it carefully in front of Stiles on a coaster, and then leaves immediately.

“Have you had time to think about this?” Derek asks, and Stiles pauses as he reaches for his glass.

“Have you?” he counters.

The corner of Derek’s mouth quirks upwards slightly, but it’s only for a moment. “Yes.”

Stiles takes a breath, because he truly has been thinking about this, and there are a few things that bother him. “Okay, so there are a few issues.”

“Do tell.”

Stiles spins the glass on the coaster, watching the ice cubes slowly turn with the motion. “I doubt that I have the right clothes to wear. I mean, this--” he gestures towards his body “--is basically the fanciest outfit I own.”

“I’ll arrange for suitable clothes for whatever event we’ll attend. I’d have to arrange for my own anyway.”

Stiles nods his understanding. He’s okay with that. Clients have asked him to wear all kinds of weird stuff, so this will be no different. “I’m not sure I’d be able to pass for a real date. I’m not a socialite.”

“You’re a college student,” Derek points out, like this is something that changes everything.

“So?”

“You’re obviously smart. I also have connections at NYU, which would explain how we met.”

Blinking, Stiles turns that over in his head. “So you’re suggesting that we fake a relationship?”

Derek shrugs lazily. “Not necessarily, but if you’re repeatedly going as my date, someone will eventually ask how we met. I doubt they’d find the real version very satisfying.”

“They might, if they want to sell your ass to the tabloids.”

Derek snorts. “Very true.”

Stiles is silent for a while, drawing in the condensation of the glass with his fingertip. “No sex?”

“No sex,” Derek confirms. “How often will you be able to attend an event?”

“Dunno.” Stiles shrugs. “Maybe once a week, depending on deadlines and exams and stuff.”

“We could work that out. I have a price proposal. I’m willing to negotiate.”

He pushes a paper across the desk and Stiles glances at it. For a moment, he’s sure that he’s
mistaken. There has to be a comma missing there somewhere.

“Um. Is this the total price, or...?” he asks, despite the fact that there’s a *per month* at the end.

“A month. I figure we could keep the arrangement until you’ve graduated, unless you change your mind, which you’re perfectly open to do. But this will require some standby, hence the number.”

Stiles swallows. It’s a lot of money. For nothing, really. He knows that you should never settle for the first price proposal, but this is already a lot more than he hoped for. “It looks good.”

The problem is that he can’t really ask for an advance now, can he? Maybe he can use the computers at school until he’s able to buy himself a new one. They’re slow and it would require him to be there as soon as the library opened in the mornings, to make sure he got one. On the other hand, that would be good for his self-discipline. But then he thinks about his rent, and his stomach drops. It’s not possible to ask for more than this.

“Do you want to sign a contract?” Stiles asks.

“So that there will be proof of me buying your company for money?”

“Yeah, probably a bad idea,” Stiles agrees. He knows that he has the upper hand in this anyway. Even if not everyone would believe him if he went to the tabloids with the story, it would still be interesting enough to sell issues, and Derek’s image would be tainted.

“You’ll be paid in advance,” Derek assures him. “It’s not a lot of money for me to lose if you’d decide not to show up and disappear, but it’s a lot of money for you not to receive if you accompanied me to an event and I didn’t pay.”

“Yeah, that’s true.” Stiles shifts uncomfortably, because those nine hundred bucks for directions were okay somehow, but now it feels a lot more awkward, knowing that this guy is paying him an overpriced rate for just hanging out with Stiles, just to make sure that he doesn’t sell his ass – literally.

“What would be the best way to contact you?” Derek asks.

“Text, I guess. I study a lot, and I tend to find calls annoying when I’m concentrating on something else. I can choose to answer the texts when I take coffee breaks.” He shrugs.

“Alright, I’ll stick to texts mainly.”

“I mean,” Stiles hurries to say, realising that he should probably be on hold 24/7 for that salary, “if you need to get a hold of me fast, you can always call. It’s just that I prefer texts.”

“I’ll be sure to notify you a week in advance for every event, if possible. If not, you’re free to decline. You’re also free to decline if you’re too busy with school and classes.”

“So I’m really getting paid without actually having to do anything?”

Derek shrugs. “If it happens too often, we should probably think about cancelling the arrangement.”

Stiles nods. “Yeah, that’s true.” He feels sort of numb. More so than he ever has before, even that time when he told someone that he doesn’t do oral without a condom, even if they have a fresh STD result available. He felt so much like a prostitute then, and now, he can’t shake the feeling of being someone’s charity project.
“I also want an exclusive arrangement.”

Stiles looks up at that. “So I can’t date anyone during these months?”

Nodding, Derek pins him with his gaze. “Yes, will that be a problem?”

Stiles looks down at his glass again, realising that he still hasn’t had any water, and shakes his head. “No, it’s not like I’d have the conscience to date someone while doing what I usually do anyway.”

“It’s not a control thing,” Derek explains. “It’s just that it could cause a stir if the tabloids found out.”

“Are you famous or something?”

“Not in the sense of actors or reality stars, but my name is quite well known in the business world. If there was a lack of news, I guess it could be of interest.”

Stiles looks at him for a moment, briefly wondering how old Derek really is. “You’re taking a big risk here.”

“Regular dating is a risk, too.”

An odd, prickling sensation spreads across his scalp, and his gaze gets stuck somewhere outside the window. “I just realised something,” he says absently, ignoring the previous topic.

“What?”

Snapping his gaze away from the window, he finds Derek looking at him intently. His eyes are very pale, compared to the black of his hair and beard, and the tan of his skin. “You don’t even know my name.”

Derek smiles slightly at that. “I was wondering when we’d get to that.”

A part of him feels as though he should show his ID, and probably his birth certificate, too, but that feels too personal. Barely anyone knows his real name. “You can call me Stiles.”

“It’s not your real name?”

He knows what Derek must be thinking, because don’t all prostitutes work under fake names? Stiles usually goes with Jamie.

“No,” Stiles confesses, shaking his head. “It’s my nickname since I was a kid. Only my mom and dad can pronounce my real name.”

Derek looks at him for a long moment, before he nods, as though he’s accepting this answer. His phone starts ringing a second later.

“I guess I better go,” Stiles says, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. Everything is conflicted right now, it seems. He’s worried about his rent, but still relieved that he’ll have an income for the foreseeable future. Has their agreement even started yet? If not, he might be able to work tonight to pay for his rent. Paying for food usually works out somehow.

He blinks when Derek waves a hand in front of his face, realising that he’s zoned out.

“Sorry.”

“Here’s a bunch of information. Read it before Wednesday.” Derek pushes a folder into his hands.
It’s a bit heavy and Stiles sighs internally. He doesn’t have the time for reading anything other than research right now. Well, either way, it’s better than any other option that he has.

“Alright. Thanks. See you.”

He exits just as Derek reaches for the phone. Lydia stands up behind her desk when he walks past her, and presses the elevator button for him.

“Thanks,” Stiles says again.

“You’re welcome. Next time you drop by, you only need to ask for Mr. Hale in the lobby, and you will be let through.”

Stiles just nods, feeling too dizzy to speak. As soon as he sits down on the subway train, he feels like crying again. There’s only been a few times he’s cried over his work before. And now...it’s not exactly because he’s going to sell his company to Derek for money – he’s done way worse than that. But when he spots the homeless man on the other side of the window, as the train slows at the next station, realisation dawns on him: he’s going to be there soon, too.

A few people crash in the library at school on occasion, but he’s quite sure that not a lot of people manage to spend entire nights there without getting caught. Possibilities spin in his thoughts, but none of them seem doable. He’d have to win the freaking lottery to sort this out, and he doesn’t have any money for a ticket.

He briefly thinks about asking Derek for an advance again, but maybe he’ll cancel the entire deal if Stiles gets pushy. He can probably survive on the street for a couple of weeks, before he gets his first paycheck and is able to find a new apartment.

Or maybe he can talk to his landlord, explain the situation and promise to pay double next month.

He runs the couple of blocks from the station to his apartment, pretending that his shortness of breath is because he’s way out of shape, and not because he’s tiptoeing the line to a panic attack. Deciding to talk to his landlord tomorrow, prepared to beg on his knees and everything, he uses his phone to post an ad on Craigslist looking for a new roommate. Hopefully no psychopath contacts him.

He tries studying, but his thoughts are somewhere else, and things get boring quickly without access to a computer. Instead he decides to go to bed early, and grabs the folder Derek gave him on his way to the bedroom. Sleep isn’t likely to happen anyway.

Most of the information consists of copies of articles mentioning Derek’s family. Stiles suspects that he asked one of his employees to put together some information, because he has a hard time picturing Derek googling himself. According to an eight-year-old article, Derek’s family consists of three kids, including Derek, and two parents. Stiles’ own family feels measly in comparison, since it’s only him and his dad now.

Sometimes he wonders what it’s like to grow up with siblings. He’s suspected for quite some time that his parents wanted to have more children, before his mother got ill. Stiles was five at the time, and she was sick for years and years. She was gone long before she actually died, and sometimes he thinks about when he really lost her. Maybe it was when she no longer recognised him. But, then there was that last night, when he sat with her and she was suddenly so clear and present, like she wasn’t dying at all.

He shakes his head, forcing himself to concentrate on the task at hand. It’s not like he needs to think about even more depressing subjects right now.
Derek’s family seems to be one of generations of success. The company he works for is huge and disgustingly successful. From what Stiles can figure out from reading the articles, the money Derek’s paying him isn’t anything but pocket change to him. To Stiles, it’s a fortune.

Just as he starts thinking about his rent again, wondering if it’s worth taking the risk to put another ad on the usual site before this whole business thing with Derek starts, something falls out between the sheets of papers.

And there it is. A check. He picks it up, fingers trembling slightly, and as he turns it over he prays to all the higher powers he can think of that it will at least cover his rent. He reads the amount, and then again, wondering if he’s mistaken.

Four thousand dollars.

Four. Thousand. Dollars.

It covers his rent and a computer. Just like Derek promised.

He sucks in a shaky breath and presses the check to his chest for a moment, closing his eyes before he looks at it again, just to make sure that he isn’t dreaming. He types out a text for Derek.

< Thanks for the check. You just saved my ass from being homeless.

It takes half an hour before he gets a reply.

> I did promise to cover your rent and a new computer, didn’t I?

< Wasn’t sure if you remembered.

> Why didn’t you ask when you were here?

Stiles rolls his eyes at that.

< You offered me a lot of money every month. I couldn’t ask for more than that.

> 1st rule in business: always make sure you get what was agreed upon.

< I’ll remember that.

< Also “here”? Are you still at work?

> I’m always at work.

Stiles snorts to himself. He doesn’t have any trouble believing that. Being a workaholic seems to be a common trait among successful businessmen.

< It’s past midnight. You should get some sleep in that fancy new place of yours.

> If you say so.

Stiles doesn’t believe him, until he gets another text forty minutes later.

> You got your wish. I’m at home, in bed, already bored.

The relief from realising that he won’t be homeless at the end of the month has made him full of
energy and so giddy that he can’t sleep, so Stiles replies.

< You’re supposed to sleep, not have fun.

> I do think this is why people are in relationships. Talking in bed before going to sleep is probably more fun than going over contracts.

< I thought you weren’t supposed to work. PS I don’t think that’s all they do tbh

> Let’s pretend that I didn’t have to google “tbh”

> And you only told me to go home, not to quit working.

< Quit working!

Almost instantly, he gets an exclamation point in reply, causing him to smile. Derek’s probably going to bed, then. It’s weird, Derek feels less formal and stiff on text than in person, and Stiles assumed that it would be more the other way around.

Thirty minutes later, he falls asleep, still smiling. His ass has just been saved, and his chest feels lighter than it has in a long, long time.

The following day, he goes to pay his rent and buys himself a brand new computer. He’ll have a steady income over the next six months or so. Hopefully long enough for him to have time to get a real job after graduation.

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The first time he hears from Derek is on a Monday, two weeks later. It’s a short text, only informing him of an event next Friday. Thankfully it’s just a show-and-mingle thing, but Stiles still needs to dress better than he usually does.

> Drop by Suit&Tie on Thursday at 6 PM for clothes.

Stiles googles the address to find what subway station is closest. He hurries from his Corporate Social Responsibility class, feeling overly warm and a little sweaty, with his bag digging into his shoulder from the weight of his books. He doesn’t expect Derek to be there, but as he half-stumbles through the door, the first thing he sees is Derek leaning against the desk, talking to some guy who looks exactly like every other douchebag Stiles has ever met.

“Sorry I’m late,” Stiles says, trying to smooth the wrinkles on his plaid shirt with his hands as he looks around.

“Only just got here.” Derek shrugs, and when Stiles checks his phone, he notices that he’s only two minutes late. Thank god.

“I didn’t realise you’d be here.”

“Wasn’t going to, but then I figured I could use an early evening from work.” Derek shrugs again. “This is Aiden. He knows what’ll be appropriate for you to wear.”

“Oh.” Stiles feels a little uncomfortable under Aiden’s scrutinizing glare. “Well, I’ll wear whatever you want me to.”

“You have this hipster thing going on,” Aiden says, and it’s clear that he doesn’t approve. Stiles
doesn’t agree really, but he assumes that it would be stupid to voice this now. It’s just clothes. “We’ll go with something similar.”

During the next forty minutes, Stiles tries on pants, shirts, more pants, more shirts, and he ends up with something that looks semi-casual and doesn’t completely go against his entire identity. It’s pretty comfortable too, and he’s allowed to wear Converse – albeit clean ones – so he’s pleased.

He feels awkward when Derek pulls out a black AmEx and pays for his bags, but it’s a part of his job, so what’s he going to say? It’s not like he can afford these clothes anyway. It’s a little weird when they step outside, because how do you say goodbye to someone who’s not quite your friend, but isn’t exactly a stranger either?

Derek fishes out his car keys, and hands Stiles the bags. “Want me to drive you home?”

“Nah, it’s too far.”

Derek rolls his eyes. “It isn’t. Come on, get in.”

Stiles manages to somehow get in the car with all the bags, without causing himself or the car fatal injury, so that’s a win at least. The rumble of the engine is familiar, even though he’s only ridden in it once before.

“Thanks,” he says quietly as Derek drives them through endless streets.

“No problem.”

The rest of the ride is quiet. Stiles feels like he should say something, considering that his new job is to socialise with people. Clearly, he’s not really proving to Derek that he’s worth the hefty salary.

“Nervous about next Friday?” Derek asks him suddenly, as they stop at a red light.

“Yeah,” Stiles confesses. “I’ve never been to this sort of thing before.”

“I’ll pick you up at five, and we’ll go together.”

Nodding, Stiles drags his fingertips over the leather of the car seat, trying to distract himself. “Will there be photographers?”

“It’s not a red carpet event,” Derek clarifies. “There might be photographers inside, but it isn’t likely that the pictures will end up anywhere but on the website.”

Relieved, Stiles nods again. “Okay.”

“Did you get yourself a new computer?” Derek asks then, changing the subject.

“Yeah, of course.” He still gets that bubbly feeling in his stomach whenever he uses it.

“Good.”

Derek’s voice sounds a little odd, but Stiles can’t pinpoint why.

“What? Did you think I bought drugs with the money?”

Derek shrugs, but when Stiles looks at him more closely, he seems embarrassed. “I can’t possibly know, can I?”
“Do you think I’m some sort of crack whore?” It just sort of slips out. And yeah, it’s a little harsh and a lot judgmental.

Derek blinks, and he glances over at Stiles for half a second, before turning his attention back to the road. “No, of course not. It’s just that...well, drug use is more common than people seem to be aware of. I just wanted to make sure that the money was spent on something you have use for.”

“If I was a drug addict, I’d probably have use for meth.”

Derek snorts as they come to Stiles’ block. “Touché.”

“If you want to check for yourself, it’s sitting on my kitchen table.” There’s this heavy weight behind his breastbone, but he doesn’t know why. All things considered, it’s not an weird question at all.

“It’s okay,” Derek assures him. “Thanks for offering though.”

He still feels a bit offended. Like it isn’t a common enough thing to suspect that someone who sells his body for money might be doing drugs as well. That’s not unheard of, is it? But he isn’t one of them.

“This is me,” Stiles says, as they come to his building.

“This one?” Derek asks, slowing down. And yes, Stiles can understand the scepticism on his face. The building is old, made of brown bricks. The fire escape on the outside looks like it’s going to fall down any moment, and considering what it feels like climbing it, it probably isn’t that far from the truth. There’s a lone front wheel from a bike chained to a lamppost outside, left behind when someone stole the rest some time last year. It’s not a well-off neighbourhood, and it shows. It’s not as bad as it could be, though, and Stiles is grateful for that.

“Yeah. Thanks for the ride.”

“You’re welcome. See you next Friday.”

“See you.”

He feels awkward as he walks up the stairs. Derek waited for him to get through the front door, clearly, because Stiles could hear him drive off just as he started climbing the staircase.

Somehow with their arrangement, Stiles thought this was more of a pity job for Derek. But now he realises that Derek just sees him as a prostitute. Which he is.

The computer sits on his kitchen table, just as he told Derek, when he gets home. Silvery and shiny. He snaps a picture of it with his phone and sends it to Derek before he can stop himself. No caption, just the pic.

It’s chilly indoors. It’s the middle of October, so the temperature is dropping, and the heating in the apartment is expensive. Right now, he sticks to an extra hoodie and two pairs of socks. Going home to California over Christmas break will be amazing, considering how chilly it’s going to be in NYC by then. Thank god his dad bought the plane tickets several months ago.

Living with Matt, he became used to being locked up in his own room constantly, and the furniture in the combined living room and kitchen has mostly been used by Matt and his asshole friends. Sometimes Stiles is certain that he can still smell alcohol and smoke on the cushions, and has to open a couple of windows. Right now, though, it feels like a quiet relief to sink into the couch with his new computer and go over the responses to his Craigslist ad. Up until today, there have only been
creeps replying. Creeps that are so creepy that he can even tell that they’re creeps from their messages.

But today, there’s one. A guy named Scott McCall has replied, and he seems like a pretty legit dude. He’s even linked to his Facebook profile, and based on the little information that is available for the public, Stiles thinks he seems pretty cool. He’s in a relationship with someone named Allison Argent, and he’s from a small town pretty close to where Stiles grew up. They’re even the same age and Scott is also a student at NYU.

Suddenly his skin buzzes, and there’s that little spark of hope. Of things looking up. Maybe, maybe. He replies to Scott’s email quickly, asking for a meet-up over coffee to see if a roommate thing can be arranged. Then he just sits there, stalking Scott’s Facebook profile for fifteen minutes, searching for something that will blow his cover and expose him as a psychopath. But there’s nothing. Scott replies just as Stiles has put Derek’s name in the Facebook search instead. There’s a number of smiley faces and a YES in capitals. Stiles thinks that Scott must be too good to be true.

The heavy feeling from earlier has disappeared. The new hope of Scott being a good roommate makes it easier to go to bed that night, and he even makes sure that he looks decent when he goes to meet up Scott at the coffee place around the block the next day.

Scott is a ray of sunshine, captured in human form. He’s all smiles and hugs Stiles, even though it’s the first time they’ve met.

“Wow, this is so awesome, dude! I lived in a dorm until now, but I can’t stand it. Honestly.”

Stiles grins, knowing exactly what that’s like. “I feel you. That’s why I had to move out.”

“So, what’s the place like?” Scott asks after two hours of talking about everything. Stiles feels like he’s known Scott for a thousand years and then some.

“It’s a two-bedroom apartment, so you’d have your own room. We share a bathroom, and the kitchen and living room is combined, but I think it could work out. I’m not a neat freak, but not too messy, either.”

“It’s cool. I usually keep my messes in my own space, you know?”

Stiles knows exactly.

“So, what’s your personal life like?” Scott asks suddenly, when he’s gotten a refill of his coffee. “D’you have a special someone?”

Scott has already mentioned Allison, who seems to be the most perfect human being ever. That’s probably why they’ve been together since first year of high school, Stiles assumes. He hesitates now, though. Explaining Derek is difficult, but it feels like he has to, on some level. It seems like Scott wants to be his friend, not just someone who shares a front door with him, and he’ll probably realise that something’s going on.

“Oh, I’m sort of seeing someone. It’s very new, so.”

“Cool, dude. Gimme a name!”

Stiles flushes a little. “Derek.”

Scott cracks the brightest, warmest smile Stiles has ever seen. “Aw dude, you look so happy.”
Against his better judgment, Stiles nods. What else is he going to say? This arrangement will probably last for quite some time, and it’d be awkward if Scott didn’t think that he liked Derek for real.

It’s not like Stiles hasn’t already decided that Scott will be his new roommate, but he still waits to make his decision when he gets home, just to make sure he’s not rushing anything. Scott replies with a heart, the goddamn dork. Stiles thinks they might become best friends.

As he’s lounging on the couch, eating in front of the TV with a window open, he gets a reply from Derek. He had forgotten about even sending that picture, and now he feels like an idiot when he sees Derek’s text.

> I want to apologise. It was never my intention to be offensive. This is all very new to me, and I don’t know much about your world. I have a lot of assumptions that most likely are incorrect.

Stiles feels like he’s some kind of alien specimen. He doesn’t want to be rude, but he replies anyway, against his better judgment. At least he has a roommate now.

< Well, “my world” isn’t some exotic place. I’m a college student. I don’t have time or money for drugs.

< Sorry, I’m overreacting

He sends the second text a moment later, realising that he’s risking his employment. It isn’t like Derek really needs him.

A second later, Derek calls him and Stiles hesitates for a moment, before he accepts the call.

“I know you prefer me texting you, but I’m not great at expressing myself like that, so I hope it’s okay for me to call.”

“Yeah, sure.” It’s odd, hearing Derek’s voice in his ear. There are only a few days left until the event now, and Stiles really doesn’t want to get fired before even getting a chance.

“I didn’t mean to offend you,” Derek says, repeating his text. “I don’t know a whole lot outside of doing business, and, you know…”

“Socialite stuff?” Stiles provides, when Derek trails off.

“If you want.”

“I’m sorry for being rude,” Stiles says, swallowing his pride. “I was just frustrated.”

“I get that. I was being ignorant.” The other end is quiet, and considering that it’s late, Stiles suspects that Derek is alone at the office. Working late, probably. That seems like a standard thing for him.

“Who isn’t, though? It’s not like it’s the most prestigious line of work.”

“Well,” Derek says slowly, and it seems like he’s choosing his words with care. “Sometimes you don’t have much of a choice, do you?”

Stiles shrugs to himself. Like he doesn’t know that already. “Yeah. At least I’ve found a roommate.”

“That’s good,” Derek tells him, and the conversation becomes awkwardly quiet after that. “Are you
still available on Friday?”

Frowning, Stiles pushes a couple of forgotten spaghetti noodles around on the plate. He’s made tomato sauce from ketchup and garlic. It’s not that great. “Yeah, of course. I thought you were going to fire me.”

Derek snorts at that, like it’s something funny. “I can use a reality check every now and then.”

Despite the seriousness of the matter, Stiles smiles to himself. He’s trying to figure out who Derek is, but it’s hard. They haven’t known each other for long, but Stiles is usually terrifyingly good at this. “Well, I’m glad I can provide with something.”

“You’ll do a lot of providing on Friday, let me assure you.”

With any other client, Stiles would get a chunk of ice settling in his stomach. But his arrangement with Derek is different. There are no expectations of what outfits he should wear, or what back-breaking positions he should assume. He’s just gonna talk to people. Be polite and stuff. He can do that. Totally.

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Come Friday, Stiles’ stomach is in knots. He’s standing outside, waiting for Derek to pick him up. His new clothes are a bit stiff, feeling like restraints compared to his regular, well-worn jeans and t-shirts. Still, he thinks he looks pretty good. That douche Aiden seems to know what he’s doing, because even though Stiles can’t put together an outfit to save his life, he can at least tell when someone looks well-dressed or not. Today, he’s part of the former group.

> 5 min late

He sighs when he sees the text, but that at least postpones getting to the event with an equal amount of time. He’s terrified. Surely, he’s going to say a lot of inappropriate things, or spill something very colourful on his very white shirt, or on someone very important.

He’s far away in thoughts of his own failure when a limousine slows down in front of him. Stiles panics for a second, until the door opens and Derek’s on the other side.

“Wow, fancy,” Stiles remarks, and gestures vaguely at the car, before he climbs in.

“I figured I might want a drink.” Derek shrugs. He’s wearing a suit, but then again, when is he not? He looks good, and his beard is trimmed shorter than usual. “You ready?”

“Not really,” Stiles confesses. “I’m mostly terrified.”

“So am I. Most people don’t get used to these things, to be frank.”

Stiles eyes him carefully. He looks as immaculate and confident as always, but the glass of whiskey in his hand is a telltale sign.

“Will there be important people there?” he asks, and winces internally when Derek nods.

“Yes, to me and my company, but that’s nothing you have to worry about.”

“Unless I offend them.” Which he might, because it’s happened before. When he gets nervous, all his filters just seem to disappear.

“Unless you offend them,” Derek agrees, and the corner of his mouth quirks upwards.
Stiles kind of wants to have a drink as well, just to calm his nerves, but he’s quite certain that he’ll only make a complete fool of himself if he does. Instead he tries not to pull at his clothes too much, and stares out the window. The ride is short, and he feels like he’s trembling all over when the driver opens the door for them.

Stiles does his best to exit smoothly, and thinks that he succeeds somewhat, since he doesn’t trip over his own feet. When Derek gets out behind him, he feels a little less awkward and terrified. Until he notices the red carpet in front of him. Shit.

“You said that it wasn’t a red carpet event,” he whispers accusingly.

“Relax,” Derek says, his voice low, and he grasps Stiles’ elbow to urge him forward. “There’s not a huge crowd. It’s not a red carpet event by definition. There just happens to be a red carpet. You’ll do great.”

Stiles feels like he’s in a daze. There are people around him, dressed in suits and cocktail dresses. He feels a bit lost, like the world is spinning too fast around him, as Derek leads him up the red carpet. He’s pretty sure that Derek exchanges a few words with people along the way, laughing politely and Stiles just tries to smile. The blood is rushing in his ears, so he can’t hear a thing.

The press of Derek’s palm against the small of his back is oddly comforting, and grounds him a bit. As they enter the doors, they face even more people. However, unlike walking down a red carpet in front of a crowd outside, Stiles doesn’t feel like he’s being watched. It’s more private, despite the crazy amount of people around them. Letting out a breath, Stiles relaxes a little, and Derek turns to him.

“You okay?”

“Yeah.” Stiles nods and shakes his head at the same time, making him feel a bit like a bobblehead. “It’s just overwhelming. I guess this is why I’ve never done it before.”

“You did fine,” Derek tells him, and it sounds sincere. “It’s always overwhelming. It’s about masking your feelings. I doubt that anyone is comfortable at these events.”

“Narcissists,” Stiles says. “Narcissists are comfortable at these events.”

Derek laughs.

It gets better after that. A steady stream of people comes up to talk to them, and Stiles likes listening to their conversations. It’s mostly about business, and after an hour at most, he’s certain that a lot of business deals are made at events like this one. That must be why it’s so important for Derek to go.

Watching Derek is fascinating. Stiles had just assumed that he wasn’t very sociable and that he would be uncomfortable in these situations. But Derek is all smiles, shaking hands, laughing and cracking a few jokes. Whenever the business of his company is brought up, it’s like someone’s lit a fire behind his eyes. Stiles listens closely when Derek talks about investing in projects that people talk to him about.

“Why didn’t you want to invest in his project?” Stiles asks, as a man leaves them. “It sounded really cool.”

“It is,” Derek agrees. “But there’s a competitor coming out with a similar product next week. I’ve already invested in that project. It would be unethical to invest in this, too.”

Stiles listens even more closely after that, figuring that he can learn a few things. Derek must have an
incredible memory, because whenever someone mentions a project his company has invested in before, he can talk about it like he did the investment personally. Even the people that are turned down seem to glow when they leave.

He sticks to Derek’s side for the rest of the event, shaking hands whenever someone offers him one, which isn’t that often. For once, he really enjoys being the observer. It’s like someone has presented him with a whole new species.

He’s brought back to engaging in reality when one of the photographers come up to them. “Can I take a picture, Mr. Hale?”

“Of course.”

Stiles is just about to take a few steps to the side, when Derek snakes his arm around his waist. He manages to find his smile just before the flash goes off. Hopefully that picture never sees daylight.

“Is this your date, Mr. Hale?” the photographer asks, scribbling on a notepad.

“That’s correct.”

“What’s your name?” the photographers asks, barely looking up at him, still scribbling furiously. Stiles glances at Derek for a second, who nods.

“Stiles Stilinski.”

There’s a pause in the scribbling. “Could you spell that for me, please?”

Sighing internally, Stiles does so and turns to Derek as soon as the photographer has left them. “Is it always that awkward?”

“More or less,” Derek says, and the next moment someone else is there to shake his hand, allowing Stiles to breathe.

It’s a little past eleven when Derek finally asks him to leave. It’s a blessing, a very quiet blessing, when he slides into the limousine and the door closes behind him. Collapsing back against the seat, he’s suddenly extremely tired.

“You alright there?” Derek asks him as he gets in on the other side.

“Yeah, just overwhelmed. And tired.”

“It’s draining,” Derek agrees. “Was it too much?”

“What do you mean?” Stiles asks, looking over at him.

“Do you want to call the deal off?”

The question surprises him. Sure, it’s draining, but pretending to be someone’s boyfriend for a night is even more so. At least he doesn’t get the urge to shower for five hours after this. “No, it wasn’t so bad. I’m sure it’ll be easier next time. I’m just not used to it.”

Derek nods at that, staring out the window on his side. He looks tired too, Stiles notes, and the brilliant smiles are suddenly gone.

“Tired?”
“A little bit, yes,” Derek confesses.

“When did you get to work this morning?”

“Five-thirty. I had to make up for lost time, since I would have to leave earlier to get here on time.”

Stiles can’t help but shake his head at that. “I’m sure all the work you did in bed the other night would make up for that.”

Derek shrugs. “I don’t have a whole lot to do that isn’t work-related.”

“Figures.”

They’re quiet for a while after that. Stiles enjoys being able to hear the sound of his own breathing. The car turns heads from people on the street sometimes, and he wonders if they’re curious about who’s inside. A rich dude and a prostitute. Probably a more common combination than you’d think at first.

“How’s school?” Derek asks him suddenly.

“Good. Busy.” Stiles forces his gaze from the window to look at him. “I have some assignments to hand in and stuff like that.”

“Are you getting enough time for studying?”

“Yeah, for once I feel like I’m actually on top of things.”

Derek nods, and for a moment he looks pleased. “Good. How’s your computer?”

“It’s my new best friend.” Stiles actually looks forward to getting home just so he can use it. It’s so fast.

Derek snorts.

“Thanks. For the check. I can’t explain how much that meant to me.”

“I’m just glad to help.”

“Thanks,” Stiles says again, but it feels inadequate somehow.

Saying goodbye is a little awkward when Derek drops him off outside his building. Mostly because he isn’t sure what level their actual, personal relationship is on. If they continue this deal, he assumes that they’ll become friends sometime down the road. However, before tonight he never considered that this isn’t at all about pitying Stiles, but that Derek actually wants someone to accompany him to events. But the question still stands: someone like Derek wouldn’t have a hard time finding a date. He doesn’t even have a nasty personality, as far as Stiles can tell.

The apartment is dark when he locks the door behind him. Scott’s moving in within the week, but it still feels strange being here alone. The feeling of freedom has been wearing off quickly, and now he mostly feels lonely and exposed. After undressing, he hangs the clothes in his closet. Maybe Derek wants him to give them back. Probably. He read somewhere that it’s common to rent outfits, so maybe that’s what Derek did.

He lies in bed for a while, unable to fall asleep. Derek’s life is so very different from his own. It’s a world that Stiles wasn’t even sure existed outside award shows and those reality TV series about rich people.
He pushes the thoughts away when his phone lights up with a text from Derek.

> Thank you for your company tonight.

Someone really needs to teach Derek what a smiley is.

< Thanks for bringing me along. It was fun!

> 2nd rule in business - be a good liar.

Stiles scoffs. He is a good liar! He’s been doing things no one can find out about for years, and no one knows. If anyone’s a good liar, it’s him, he just picks his moments.

< Maybe I wasn’t trying very hard

> Let’s hope so.

He’s quite certain that Derek is smiling, wherever he is. It’s just hard to tell in written text.

< Are you at work?

> Yes. I had to go back to brief a few things.

< You should value sleep more

> I’ve already told you that I find it too boring.

< Sleep isn’t boring, it’s heavenly

He sets the alarm for tomorrow morning, and puts his phone on his nightstand, before passing out almost immediately.

◊

The following week, Stiles is preoccupied with school work. He’s got a couple of assignments to hand in (really, who decided that a personal development plan was a good idea?) and quizzes to do. His paper isn’t exactly writing itself, either. He hasn’t heard from Derek since Friday, so it seems like their contact is strictly tied to the professional stuff. That’s fine, of course, so naturally he’s a bit surprised when he gets a text while studying in the library.

> How does your weekend look?

< As in: do I have space for an event?

> Exactly.

Really, he needs to teach Derek how to use smileys.

< Depends on what kind of event. Will be super busy til Friday, but should be OK after that if it’s nothing major

> It’s short. I need to attend a launching event for a new product, but I don’t need to stay for more than a couple of hours.

Stiles kind of feels like he doesn’t have time, but he gets paid for this and a few hours won’t be so
bad. Also, the alternative is way worse. He’ll just switch out his video gaming time for the event, and he’ll be good.

< Okay! What should I wear?

> Semi-casual clothing. Drop by Suit&Tie whenever you have the opportunity. Let me know a couple of hours beforehand.

< Aye cap

He should be able to squeeze in a trip there tomorrow after his last class. It won’t be that much of a problem. As he turns to his books, his back aching from sitting bent over them for too long, he decides to stay an extra hour tonight just to make sure that he doesn’t get behind.

In the end, he stays an extra four, which has him leaving for the subway at two am, dead tired and probably with marker spots all over his face. When he looks at his phone, desperately trying to distract himself from falling asleep at the station, he notices another text from Derek.

> Great. It won’t involve the same amount of mingling.

< Good. Mingling isn’t my forte

> Why are you awake?

< Heading home from the library

> Now?

< Yes, now

> It’s past 2 AM.

< Had to study

When the train arrives, he gets on the car with the most people. It’s a relief when an old lady gets off at the same stop as him. He has no clue what she’s doing up this late, or why she’s alone, but he hates walking alone on nights like these, so he’s grateful. But studying requires late nights at campus sometimes, and he likes his bed too much to sleep in a chair somewhere.

It’s only when he’s locked the door safely behind him that he picks up his phone again.

> If you’d rather postpone until next weekend, that’s okay by me.

< You gonna ask them to have the release event a week later?

> No, I’ll go there by myself and you can come to another event with me next weekend instead, if you have more free time then.

< It’s fine. I got most things done tonight

> Let me know if you change your mind.

Stiles feels a bit uneasy with the way Derek allows him to decide for himself. It makes it hard for him to see this as a job-only thing.
< 1st rule in business, make sure you get what was agreed upon.

> Touché, but education is more important.

< Fret not. I’ll attend both events with you, should you wish

Stiles doesn’t know how he’ll make his schedule work with that, but it shouldn’t be impossible. Truth be told, if he is forced to go back to his old ways, he would have much less time for studying, since planning and worrying would take up so much more brain capacity.

Maybe he can do a fitting for both events tomorrow. That would make things easier.

◊

Scott moves in the next day as well, and Stiles loses a couple of hours since he can’t resist helping Scott getting settled in. It’s just so nice having someone around the place again.

“So, how’s Derek?” Scott asks, when they’re on the couch eating pizza.

“He’s good.” Stiles checks his phone briefly. Still fifteen minutes left before he has to leave for class, and then clothes fitting. He wonders if he’ll ever feel not-awkward when Scott brings Derek up in the conversation.

“Yeah? Still unsure of what you guys are?”

“Pretty much. I think it’ll stay that way for a while.”

Scott shrugs. “That’s okay though, as long as you both feel okay with it.”

Clearing his throat, Stiles concentrates on picking the mushrooms off the pizza. “Yeah, it’s easier like that for now.”

Scott looks thoughtful for a moment, and then nods. “What are you doing this weekend?”

“I have this thing with Derek on Saturday, and then studying. You?” He says the first part quickly, hoping that Scott will concentrate on the studying and Stiles’ attempt to steer the conversation back on him. Of course, he has no such luck.

“A thing?” Scott echoes.

“Yeah, like some kind of release event. Not sure. No big deal.”

Scott looks like he wants to ask, but then decides against it. “So it’s okay if Allison comes here on Saturday?”

“Yeah, sure. Just don’t let me hear or see anything if I’m home.”

Grinning, Scott grabs another pizza slice. “I’m making no promises, dude.”

Rolling his eyes, Stiles gets up and crams the last bit of his pizza slice into his mouth. “Hey, I’m glad you’ve finally moved in, but I really need to get to my class. You okay from here?”

He has no clue how Scott gets any of that, through all the pizza. “Sure thing. When will you be home?”

“Not sure. I have to do this thing after class.” It’s so new to him, living with someone who asks
where he’s going and when he’s coming back. His dad will be thrilled to find out.

“You have a lot of things to do,” Scott remarks.

“Ugh,” Stiles sighs. “Tell me about it. I have to go and get fitted for clothes for Saturday.”

“Ah,” Scott nods knowingly. “It’s fancy?”

“What?”

“The thing you’re going to?”

Stiles doesn’t know why he doesn’t want to talk about this. If Derek was his boyfriend, he’d take Stiles to these things, too. It’s not like Scott suspects anything, unless Stiles doesn’t stop making it weird whenever it’s brought up. “It’s a release event for a product. I don’t know what it is.”

“It sounds fancy.”

“Yeah, I think it is. I don’t know a lot about these things. It’s not my world.” He picks up his messenger bag from the kitchen chair, grimacing at the weight.

“But it’s Derek’s?”

“Yeah. It’s kinda what he does. I mean, except for working twenty hours a day. I’m barely even exaggerating.”

Scott’s eyes grow big at that, and yeah, Stiles just made it obvious that Derek’s no college student. “Wow, I can see why you’re not sure what you guys are.”

Stiles would give a lot of money to know exactly what Scott is thinking right now: if he’s confused about whom Derek is, if he couldn’t care less, or if he suspects something. Stiles hopes that he doesn’t. Hopes, because he’d be too ashamed to ever look Scott in the eye again, and he very much wants Scott as a friend. He could use a friend.

He texts Derek as soon as he’s out the door.

< Dropping by S&T after my class in 2 hrs ish

> See you there.

◊

He’s a bit early, and another douchewad is working today. He looks like someone Stiles would find on billboards, wearing expensive brands or maybe nothing but a watch.

“Uh, hi,” he says a bit awkwardly, as he enters. He had hoped that Derek would be here already, but he’s not. “So, um, I was gonna…”

“I don’t think we have your kind of style here,” the guy says after giving Stiles a very disapproving once-over. “And not in your price range.”

Stiles doesn’t know what to say to that. He can feel his face growing hot, and probably bright red. “No, I was supposed to be here.”

“We’re not accepting resumes right now.”
“No, I was supposed to be here for a clothes fitting?”

“I don’t think we’re in your price range,” the guy repeats again.

“How about my price range?”

Stiles turns around, only to find Derek standing there. He’s wearing his usual suit, crisp button-up and in this very moment, Stiles is able to see him the way the clerk probably does right now. He looks like he belongs on Wall Street, with a watch that probably costs more than this guy makes a year very visible on his wrist. There’s just this air of power around him that makes Stiles kind of want to bow his head.

“I’m sorry?” the guy says.

Derek gives him a level look. “Unless you’re able to explain this misunderstanding in a way that satisfies me, I’ll take my business elsewhere.”

Suddenly, Stiles has to bite his lip to prevent himself from grinning.

The clerk looks from Derek to Stiles, and then back to Derek. “He’s with you?”

“Yes. I called you earlier, didn’t I?”

“Oh, yeah, you did, Mr. Hale.” The guy starts looking through the papers in front of him. “I’m sorry. I thought the fitting was for you, not…” He gestures at Stiles, like he’s a smudge of dirt on Derek’s shiny shoes.

“What’s your name?”

Uh-oh. Stiles has worked similar jobs long enough to know that that’s never a good thing.


“Thank you, Jackson. I assume that from now on, you will accommodate Stiles here in the best way possible. We are attending a semi-casual event on Saturday. He needs something to wear.”

The look on Jackson’s face says: clearly. But Stiles doesn’t care, because he’s got this buzzing going on underneath his skin. He might be slightly attracted to Derek just because of the way he radiates power. It’s also scary, because Stiles realisesthat he’s sort of become the person he used to hate when he was in Jackson’s position. Well, Stiles would’ve never refused someone for not looking like they belong in an Armani ad. Isn’t that what these places are for?

The following hour, Jackson really makes an effort. He makes Stiles try on pants in smooth materials that he doesn’t know the name of, and he even takes measurements to get the fit just right. Even for the shirt. Jackson explains that semi-casual clothing means that he’s allowed to skip the tie, but that a button-up is appropriate. He also suggests a pair of loafers that make Stiles think he’s going to look like a pimp, but when he tries them on, they look quite good.

“I might suggest a cashmere cardigan to look approachable.” Jackson says, when he steps back, as if to scrutinize his creation, then he turns to Derek. “What do you think?”

Stiles is surprised to find that Derek isn’t busy with calls or answering emails on his phone. Instead, he’s sitting in the armchair Jackson provided to him, fingertips resting together, as though he’s trying to solve a puzzle.
“I’d agree with that, yes.”

“Glad to hear I have a say in this,” Stiles mutters.

Jackson glares at him. “Considering how you dressed when you came here, your say should be revoked permanently.”

Stiles makes a face at that, but Derek snorts out a laugh. Oh well, clothing has never been his favourite thing anyway.

“He scrubs up nicely,” Jackson comments, again towards Derek.

Derek fixes Jackson with a look that suggests his comments aren’t entirely welcome, before he gives Stiles a quick once-over.

“He does,” Derek agrees and Stiles resists the urge to unbutton his shirt at the neck.

“It sounds like I wasn’t nice before,” Stiles complains, as Jackson holds up the softest freaking cardigan for him to stick his arms in.

“Never said that.” It even looks like Derek’s smiling.

So Stiles concentrates on trying on the cardigan, turning around whenever Jackson tells him to.

“Remember to use discreet cufflinks and watches. It’s semi-casual.” Jackson doesn’t even look up from where he’s entering everything in the cash register. He’s made sure that Stiles now has two quite similar outfits, for the two upcoming events. Stiles pretends to be blind and deaf when he says the amount.

Derek doesn’t even blink. He just hands his card over and doesn’t seem to realise that this is more than what Stiles’ entire wardrobe cost before Derek came along.

“About the clothes,” Stiles says as soon as they’re outside. “Do you want me to give them back?”

Derek frowns. “We’re not the same size.”

“No, but they’re expensive. You could sell them.”

Derek shrugs. “It would cost me more to spend an hour selling them on Craigslist than on my work.”

That...Derek’s life must be so easy.

“So...they’re mine?” Stiles asks to clarify.

“Yes. If you want to sell them, go ahead.”

“No, no. I actually rather like them. Um, I might have use for them when I start working, too.”

Derek nods, smiling slightly. “An HR strategist can’t wear plaid and jeans?”

“In my book he can, but sadly I can’t employ myself.”

At that, Derek’s smile widens. “Maybe you will in the future. Can I drive you home?”

“I’m assuming that you’re gonna protest if I say it’s too far, so yeah, if you don’t mind.”

Derek gestures towards his car. “ Wouldn’t ask if I minded.”
Scott is sitting in the living room watching TV when Stiles gets home. Derek dropped him off with the promise to pick him up on Saturday.

“Sup?” Scott asks, with a handful of chips halfway to his mouth.

“Good.” Stiles holds up the bags as some kind of proof of what he’s been up to. “Settling in okay?”

“Dude yeah, I’ve been running around in here all afternoon! The fact that I can’t even touch both sides of the room at the same time if I stretch my arms enough is amazing. I’m basically living the dream.”

Stiles can’t help but laugh. Somehow he doesn’t have trouble picturing Scott running around in the kitchen for hours.

“How was Derek?” Scott asks.

“He was good.” Stiles holds up the bags again, like they’re proof of him meeting Derek.

“You should’ve brought him in so I could meet him!”

Stiles blinks. Of course Scott, being the incredibly friendly person that he is, would want to meet the guy Stiles is supposedly dating. It’s just that he never counted on this, because Matt never cared about anything Stiles did.

“He had to go back to work.”

“Dude, it’s eight-thirty.”

Stiles laughs a little at that. “Yeah, which means that he’ll be there for another three hours or so.”

“Dude, you need some chips, clearly. Here.” Scott holds out the bag. “And maybe text him and say that if he wants to live past thirty, he might need to calm down.”

Stiles snorts, but grabs a handful of chips and sits down on the armrest of the couch. “He’s already past thirty.” Or so he assumes at least.

Scott waves him off. “You know what I mean.”

When Scott turns his concentration back to the TV, Stiles takes his phone out of his pocket and sends Derek a text.

< So my new roommate is under the impression that we are sort-of dating. It’s the easiest explanation. Also how old are you?

> That makes sense. 34.

It’s not as old as Stiles thought, considering Derek’s position in the company, and not as old as some of his former clients. But it’s still twelve years older than Stiles.

“You look thoughtful.”

Looking up, Stiles finds Scott watching him. There’s a pinch between his eyebrows, like he’s worried.
“No, I was just thinking that you’re right. He works way too much.”

“Maybe we could go out for dinner when Allison is here. And a movie?”

It’s not going to happen, but he can’t tell Scott that right away. A boyfriend would probably want to meet Stiles’ new roommate.

“Uh sure yeah, I’ll see if he’s up for it. How long is she staying?”

“Friday to Monday? Her flight is Monday evening.”

“I’ll ask him about Sunday? Since we’re busy on Saturday.”

“With that thing.” Scott grins. “But yeah, do! We need to set his priorities straight.”

Stiles isn't really planning on asking Derek, but he'll pretend. When this deal is over he'll have a great explanation for their breakup, and Scott will be none the wiser.

"I'm gonna head to my room," he says after a couple of handfuls of chips. "I have an article to read for my class tomorrow."  

"Sure man. Do you want me to turn the volume down?" Scott is already reaching for the remote.

"No, it's fine. See you tomorrow."

"Sleep tight!"

Stiles feels a little awkward. Scott is so considerate and nice. It feels wrong lying to him in a way that he’s only felt with his dad before, despite the fact that they barely know one another.

He manages to finish his article, even scribbling some notes in the margins regarding interesting points and things he finds weird. As soon as he puts it down, though, his mind starts drifting. He wants to pretend like Jackson’s greeting at Suit&Tie didn’t affect him, but truth be told, there are few moments he’s felt more degraded than that. That says a lot, considering his line of work.

Without thinking, he grabs his phone from his nightstand and types in a text to Derek.

< Hey, just wanted to say thanks for saving me at S&T today

The reply is almost instant.

> That behavior was unacceptable.

< Still. Thank you. I had no clue what to say

And Stiles is usually someone who always has something to say.

> I’m certain you can go in there in your pajamas and slippers tomorrow, and get the best service possible. It’s a shame that that wasn’t the case from the start.

Stiles sighs. Clearly Derek doesn’t realise that he’s trying to be grateful here.

< I’m trying to say thank you, just accept it already!

> No problem. You’re welcome. It was my pleasure. Et cetera.
Stiles snorts.

< You’re working, aren’t you?

> Currently distracted by your text messages, but I am at work, yes.

< Scott says you need to sort out your priorities

Stiles just types it on a whim. He can hear Scott’s muffled voice through the door, and Stiles is pretty sure that he’s talking to Allison. It’s sweet. Whenever Scott mentions her, he lights up like a Christmas tree connected to a nuclear power station.

> ?

Stiles is sort of amazed how Derek manages to write fully understandable texts with just one character. But yes, this needs explaining. Really, Stiles mostly wanted an excuse not to stare at the ceiling for an hour until he falls asleep.

< As I said before, Scott thinks we’re sort of dating. I didn’t know how else to explain going to events with you, and stuff. He’s asked a bit, so I’ve told him that you work a lot. At least that’s not a lie. Now he wants to make you sort out your priorities, since you didn’t come up with me after the fitting.

It’s weird just typing it out, like he’s crossing a line by doing so.

> I thought Scott was your new roommate who moved in today?

< He is. I don’t know. He has Jedi powers. I feel like we’ve known each other forever

> Well, tell Scott that I will have my assistant look over my priorities for me.

Laughing, Stiles rolls his eyes, wondering if Derek is this stuck-up with his employees too.

< That’s a great way to make people get a good impression of you

> And you’re wondering why I’m single.

Biting back a grin, Stiles quickly types back.

< Well I guess old men like you don’t know any better

> In Sweden, age discrimination is illegal, did you know that?

< Better not move to Sweden

> I think we both now know why you are single as well.

Stiles snorts.

< It’s pretty late. I think you should go home and sleep

< And now, when I’m being considerate, you should be confused over why I’m single

> My memory isn’t bad enough for that. I’m not that old.
> I will start making my way home, though.

He can’t help but wonder what Derek’s condo looks like. His building is flashy and looks ridiculously expensive, but Stiles also knows that sometimes the condo itself is too expensive to leave any funds for renovating.

< Don’t you like your place?

> I do. It has a bed and a fridge.

< Such luxury. Don’t tell me it’s a water bed

> I’m 34, not stuck in the 80s.

Grinning again, Stiles stares up at the ceiling. He could definitely be working for a less decent person. He really could.

Around thirty minutes later, eyelids drooping as he goes over the article’s conclusion again, he gets a photo message from Derek. It’s a picture of a bed. King size, by the looks of it, with big, fluffy pillows and well-made covers.

Stiles isn’t able to resist the urge to get up and snap a picture of his own messy duvet, papers spread out and a bunch of markers sorted by colour on a pillow.

> I think I prefer yours.

< That’s only until you’ve had the springs digging into your back

> Ah. Fair point. Studying?

< Just going over the last stuff for tomorrow. Working?

> I was about to go over contracts, but I don’t think Scott would approve of that so I’m not going to.

< I wouldn’t approve of that, either

Stiles takes a deep breath, knowing that he steps over a line here, with his next text.

< I don’t know you, and I don’t know if you’re always working this much. But it isn’t healthy to work from 6 am to 11 pm. You’ll hit a wall unless you start working less

> I’m only working because I have nothing else to do.

In frustration, feeling as though his point didn’t get across at all, Stiles sends:

< Well Scott wants you to have dinner and go to a movie with us on Sunday. But I’m assuming that you’re working so I’m going to say no

Also because events with Derek is a professional thing. It’s part of their deal. Starting to invite Derek for dinner and movies is definitely smudging the line between professional and personal. Sure, Stiles probably wouldn’t mind being friends, but pretending to be sort-of dating someone would make that difficult.
> I am, sadly. Business trip to Boston Sunday-Wednesday. Tell Scott I said thanks for the invitation, though.

< I will
As soon as he wakes up the next morning, Stiles realises that he’s crossed a line. He shouldn’t tell Derek that he works too much, or even say that Scott wants him to join them for dinner and a movie. It’s unprofessional. Derek expects Stiles to tell the necessary lies to the people around them. That’s what he’s hired for.

They aren’t friends.

Feeling stupid, he types out a text to Derek.

< Hey, just wanted to apologise for sending those texts last night. I guess my brain was too fried from studying that I didn’t realise when it’s time to shut up. I know it’s none of my business how much time you spend at work, and I have the Scott thing under control. Sorry for speaking out of turn. It won’t happen again

He decides to buy breakfast at the coffeeshop near the school library. He’s going to spend the entire day there and skip today’s classes. The personal development plan needs to be finished by tomorrow, and he still has some left.

The weather is amazing for October. It’s quite warm and the sky is clear, with the sun making the multicoloured leaves glitter from last night’s rain. It smells like autumn, like there’s a freshness to the air that summer doesn’t have.

His phone dings with a new message when he steps into the library. It’s from Derek, but he decides not to check it until lunch. He’s in such a good mood, for some reason, feeling lighter already after sending that text, so he needs to spend his energy on being productive.

Much like he predicted, he finishes the last of his personal development plan before lunch, and then finishes two quizzes that are due the next day, before he realises that it’s five p.m. and he hasn’t even had lunch.

“Crap,” he mutters, and only now realises how his stomach aches from being so empty. Oh well, he’s finished more than he hoped, so he might as well head home and read the pages for tomorrow on the couch.

He checks his phone as he heads to the subway.

> No need to apologise.

With anyone but Derek, he would’ve interpreted this text as the other person being upset with him. But, this is Derek, and he doesn’t even know how to use a smiley. For a moment, Stiles thinks about texting back just to make sure, but he’s probably texted Derek too much lately. The line between personal and professional has started to blur.

Instead, Stiles spends his evening reading the last chapters before tomorrow’s class and playing a new zombie game on Scott’s Xbox.

“Something wrong between you and Derek?” Scott asks, effectively ruining Stiles’ promise to himself to not think about Derek until Saturday.

At first, Stiles thinks about shrugging and saying that everything’s fine, but Scott seems to be one of
“Not really,” he says truthfully. “I kind of told him off for working so much last night, and…” He trails off, shrugging.

“What, did he get angry?”

“No.” Shaking his head, Stiles reaches for his soda can. “I just feel weird for being like that when we’re not even together.”

Which is basically the truth.

Scott bumps their shoulders together. “I’m sure he doesn’t mind. In high school, Allison soccer mom’ed me once. She was worried too, but to be honest, I was just happy that she cared that much.”

“Derek’s thirty-four and a businessman, though,” Stiles mutters, trying to hide the fact that he feels a bit better.

“Unless he’s heartless, he’s freaking grateful that you care.”

Derek is far from heartless. Stiles knows this for a fact.

Before he goes to bed later that night, he checks his phone. There’s no text from Derek and that makes him a bit uneasy, but on the other hand, there’s no cancellation for Saturday, either.

He has a hard time keeping himself from texting Derek. Not because he has anything particular to say, but he kind of wants to be reassured. However, during his afternoon class on Friday, Derek texts him first.

> Still free for the event tomorrow?

Stiles doesn’t even bother with hiding the phone under his desk as he replies.

< Absolutely. What time?

Derek’s reply is almost instant.

> Pick you up at 2?

Stiles sends the emoji thumb in reply. He feels a little lighter when he takes the subway home, knowing that Derek still wants him to go. Stiles can really get used to not living with the suffocating anxiety that comes with the knowledge that at some point in the near future, he’ll have to have sex with someone he doesn’t want to have sex with. Lately, after making this agreement with Derek, he’s felt younger. Lighter.

“Worked things out with Derek?” Scott asks him immediately as Stiles walks through the door. He’s studying at the kitchen table.

Shrugging, Stiles puts his bag on the nearest chair. “Sort of.”

Scott beams at him. “That’s so awesome, dude.”

“So, Allison is coming tomorrow, right?”

“Yep.” Scott underlines something in his textbook. “Still wanna have dinner and go to a movie with us on Sunday?”
“Yeah, I already promised, didn’t I?”

“What’s Derek doing in Boston?” Scott asks him, then.

“Business stuff, I assume.”

“Good thing you’re gonna hang out with us, then, so you won’t miss him as much.”

Stiles is more grateful than he wants to let on. When he’s alone he tends to overthink things, and lately it has all been about Derek. Maybe because he doesn’t have to overthink his life choices and financial situation at the moment.

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He’s a bit nervous as he stands outside his building, waiting for Derek to pick him up. Expecting a limousine, like last time, he doesn’t realise that another familiar car has stopped in front of him before it honks. Stiles knows that car so well. Maybe because he tried to sell himself to Derek the first time it stopped in front of him, just a couple of blocks away from here.

Resisting the urge to lean down and ask Derek if he’s looking for company, Stiles just opens the door and slides into the front seat.

“Sorry, I was expecting another car. I figured you’d want a drink,” he rambles, while buckling in.

“I have a very frustrating Boston trip ahead of me. I should probably save my whiskey ration until then.”

Stiles looks at him then, for the first time since he got into the car. Derek looks great. He always does. However, Stiles loves light grey on him. It makes his eyes almost look preternatural. He can’t determine if Derek is sarcastic or not, but considering that business seems to be a never-ending frustration, it’s probably the truth.

“That sounds horrible.”

Shrugging, Derek pulls away from the curb and Stiles’ stomach tingles weirdly at the sound of the engine. “It can’t be fun all the time.”

“Is it fun any of the time?” Stiles asks him carefully.

Smiling, Derek glances at him briefly before turning his attention back to the road. “Definitely.”

The event is more relaxed than the last one. There’s no red carpet, and the overall atmosphere is more friendly. Still, Stiles is grateful for Derek putting a hand on his back as they go inside. He feels less lost like this.

The product is a new type of headphones. When Stiles gets to try them on, they feel so light on his head, like he’s not wearing any at all. He’s surprised, because he expected some new software to create weapons of mass destruction or a flying car. Derek smirks like he knows exactly what Stiles is thinking.

“Did your company invest in headphones?” Stiles asks, as soon as they have a moment to themselves. Derek seems to be constantly surrounded by people who want to talk business.

“Do they not look like headphones?”

“I just expected something—” Stiles gestures with his hands.
“–something more extravagant?” Derek offers.

“I guess.”

“My company invests in a lot of things. This might not be the most impressive invention.” Derek cocks his head to the side. “But things like these, that everyday people use in their everyday lives, tend to give us a lot of revenue.”

Stiles looks at him for a moment, unsure if he’s able to hide his fascination. “That makes a lot of sense.”

“Did you think I got to where I am just because my mother founded the company?”

Stiles is just about to say no, when he notices the glint in Derek’s eyes. “A little bit, actually.”

Derek laughs, just as an older man comes up to shake his hand. About fifty percent of the time, Stiles is treated like he doesn’t exist by the people wanting to talk to Derek. This is one of those times. Instead he focuses on the toothpicks with olives, wondering what kind of marinade is on them, because he could eat the entire tray.

As he looks around, he notices others that he’s sure are here because they’re hired, too. There’s a young girl in a very tight dress, hanging onto the arm of an old dude. Further away, there’s a guy Stiles’ age, with his arm around a middle-aged woman’s waist. They’re just the most obvious ones. There are probably several more. He’s not sure exactly what it is that gives them away. The age difference isn’t it – a lot of successful people are dating someone much younger. Money can buy youth, in all senses.

Stiles wonders if they can tell when it comes to him, too. If the obviousness goes both ways.

He watches them for a while. How the guy is a little inappropriate, and the girl insecure. How the middle-aged lady seems to be all into her date, and how the older man seems to only have his company as an accessory. Stiles wonders what he looks like next to Derek. Before he’s able to finish that thought, Derek nudges him.

“Stiles, meet Kira Yukimura. She’s the creator of the headphones.”

Feeling his face heat up, Stiles turns his gaze from the other guests and to the woman in front of him. She smiles, and she can’t be that much older than he is.


Her smile grows wider, and she shakes his hand. “It’s nice to meet you. Thank you for coming.”

“Oh no.” Shaking his head, Stiles tries to remember anything that resembles manners. “Thanks for having me. The headphones are really awesome.”

She opens her mouth to say something, when someone else comes up to them, stealing her attention.

“You were somewhere else,” Derek says, as he hands Stiles a glass of champagne from a passing tray being carried by a waiter.

“Sorry.” Stiles grimaces. “Got sort of caught up in...spotting my likes.”

Derek frowns, apparently not following. Looking around, Stiles makes sure that there isn’t anyone close enough to overhear their conversation. He doesn’t know how acceptable it is in this crowd, but
he doesn’t want to get Derek in trouble.

“Well, there are others also being paid to be here.” He clears his throat. “And some are easier to spot than others.”

Derek’s gaze darts around the room, before reconnecting with Stiles’. “I can’t tell.”

Snorting, Stiles nods towards the old man and the young girl when they’re looking the other way. “There’s one, for sure. Also the guy who likes grabbing that middle-aged lady’s ass.”

Derek seems to have enough experience from people-watching that he takes several minutes to move around enough to spot the guy and that lady Stiles mentioned last.

“Oh,” he says. “Now when you’ve pointed it out, it’s quite obvious.”

“You’ll never be able to unsee it now.”

Smirking, Derek looks at him for a moment. “I was aware that it happens. That it isn’t even uncommon, but I did think more would value conversation over public displays of affection.”

“Are you telling me that you don’t want me to grope you in public?” It’s already out there before Stiles can stop it. It’s clearly a joke, of course, but he doesn’t know how Derek will take it.

But Derek laughs, making the pinch of worry in Stiles’ gut go away as quickly as it arrived. Then, someone new comes up to them to talk to Derek. At least Stiles gets to shake hands this time.

“Ready to go?” Derek asks him a couple of hours later.

Stiles is worn out even though Derek has been the one doing almost all of the talking. The constant buzz of conversation around him makes his head tired.

“Is it over?” As he looks around, the crowd seems a little thinner, but there are still a lot of people here.

“We’ve been here long enough.” Derek puts a hand on his lower back, and guides him towards the doors. Just as they’re about to leave, a girl with a headset and a ponytail hands them both a colourful paper bag each.

“What’s this?” Stiles stage whispers as soon as they’re out of earshot.

“A gift for coming.” Derek holds the car door open for him after unlocking. “I’m sure you’ll find something you like in there.”

“You get things for going to these?” The bag contains the very same headphones that the event was for, and a whole bunch products that Stiles can’t even pronounce the name of.

“Yes, it’s a marketing event for them as well. You wearing the headphones in the library while studying and whatnot will make others notice them.”

Stiles’ fingertips tingle. “You should have them. You brought me.”

“It’s not like I paid for them.” Derek glances at him, before turning his attention back to the road. “Actually, I have a pair already. Perhaps you can give my bag to Scott.”

Stiles stares at him. Give Scott the other bag? Stiles is pretty sure that Scott would be thrilled, but it’s Derek’s.
“But it’s yours.”

Shrugging, Derek stops at a red light. “I usually give those away. After a while you realise that you have more than you need.”

Stiles looks at him for a moment, thinking that Derek looks a bit tired, too. “Are you sure?”

“Hundred percent.”

Smiling to himself, unsure of why, Stiles peeks into the second bag. The content is almost exactly the same.

“What’s Boston gonna be about?” he asks, picking a different topic as the traffic lights turn green.

“There’s a product we might want to invest in, but the people behind it are getting on my nerves.”

“How so?”

“There’s something off.” Derek shrugs. “At every meeting they want more funding, or they have changed something with their product that we haven’t been briefed on. This trip is us going there to put some pressure on them. We’ll either invest or choose not to after this trip.”

“Oh.” Stiles had no idea this sort of thing could be so...dramatic. “Why do you even consider this if they’re not straight with what they want and what they’re doing?”

Derek smiles at that. “When it comes to people who invent things, I’ve quickly learned that while they are often capable of coming up with the most fantastic ideas, they don’t always have a sense for business. Which is why we exist. If they can earn my company a lot of money, I don’t care if they know how to treat business relationships with their investors. All I want is an idea that no one’s seen before and everyone needs.”

Stiles’ stomach tightens. There’s something with Derek that changes when he starts talking business. He’s sharper, somehow. There’s an edge to his gaze that is quite intimidating. Stiles wouldn’t want to negotiate for his salary with him, that’s for sure.

“I don’t know why everything sounds so logical once you say it out loud.”

Derek laughs, and the intense air around him disappears in a second. “I grew up with this mindset. It’s in my backbone.”

Humming, Stiles pokes around in the paper bags again, trying to concentrate on something he can identify.

“How’s school?” Derek asks suddenly.

“It’s okay. Lots to do, as always.”

“How’s the new roommate, then?”

“All good.” Stiles hesitates. “I mean, he’s all good. But there are downsides with him being great, you know?”

“How so?”

“Before, no one cared where I was or what I did. I could study for hours and there was no one questioning it. Now, I get asked if I want dinner, or if I want to watch a movie or play a game.”
“Sounds terrible,” Derek says dryly.

Rolling his eyes, Stiles resists the urge to elbow him in the ribs. “I take my grades super seriously and I’m sort of getting a little sidetracked. I try to study in the library, but those chairs are killing my ass.”

Derek snorts. “Try telling Scott that you need some time to study for yourself.”

“I wish I could, but he’s too nice.”

Shaking his head, Derek smiles. “You only have yourself to blame, then.”

“Is that some other rule in business?”

“Should be.”

When Derek stops outside Stiles’ building, he turns in his seat. “Send my apologies to Scott for not coming up with you, and make sure that you get enough time for studying.”

Stiles is torn between saying: oh my god it’s not like I even thought you would come up with me, and what are you? My mom? So he says neither, just nods and somehow manages to tumble out of the car with all limbs still intact.

“Have fun in Boston,” he says instead of goodbye. “Um, also, see you next week?”

“Thanks. I’ll let you know when I’m back and we can decide on a time.”

Nodding, Stiles waves awkwardly at the car as it disappears down the street. The apartment is empty when he gets inside, and for a moment he’s confused, because it’s Saturday. Then, he remembers that Scott’s girlfriend is here, and they’re probably away doing cute stuff together. Stiles puts the paper bag on the kitchen table and puts a Post-It on it. For you, is all he writes on it at first, but then he figures that he might need to make things awkward to be a good friend. And don’t let me see or hear anything! He underlines the last word four times.

It’s not even six p.m., he realises when he checks his phone, and he’s starving. As delicious as those olives were, they’re not a pizza. After ordering one with cheese crust, he decides to do the quiz that’s due the next day for his management class. They’re always super easy, because the professor only asks questions about the information in the little yellow boxes in the textbook. Stiles thinks he might be the only one who’s figured it out, though, because everyone else is complaining.

Just as his pizza arrives, he gets a text from Derek.

> Thank you for today.

Rolling his eyes, Stiles wipes his forefinger on his sweats before typing out a reply. It takes forever, because he only has one finger to use.

< Thanks for bringing me. It was actually really cool. Also Scott isn’t home so I haven’t told him your apologies or given him the bag yet

> I’m glad you enjoyed it. I’m sure Scott has a lot better things to do on a Saturday evening.

< Definitely, his girlfriend is here

> That explains it.
Stiles grins.

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Allison turns out to be the sweetest person Stiles has ever met. It’s pretty clear that she and Scott belong together. Stiles can’t help but feel like the third wheel when the two of them don’t have eyes for anyone but each other during dinner on Sunday. Not that it’s strange – long-distance relationships must be pretty hard on anyone. They’re probably making up for the time they spend apart.

“Scott tells me you’re with someone as well?” Allison asks him suddenly, and Stiles blinks back to reality.

“It’s complicated,” he replies truthfully. Derek is probably already in Boston by now.

She smiles warmly. Her dimples are unfair. “Scott told me that too.”

“Well, I think he wanted to come, but he’s on a business trip for a few days now.”

Perhaps Allison can sense that he doesn’t want to talk about Derek, or maybe she was just asking to be polite, because they go back to safe subjects after that. Such as the finals of doom that are rapidly closing in on them.

“Are you going home for Thanksgiving?” she asks.

“Probably not.” Shaking his head, Stiles reaches for his Coke. “It’s just around finals and I need all the study time I can get. Mine are early this year.”

“That means longer Christmas break, though,” Scott interjects, always the positive one.

Truth is, Stiles didn’t plan on going home for Thanksgiving because he isn’t sure his dad can afford it. The ticket home for Christmas was bought ages ago, when they were still cheap. Stiles probably could still go home for Thanksgiving, because of the money Derek’s been paying him, but that might make his dad suspicious.

“I have fewer Friday classes from now on, which means I’ll probably be around more.” Allison smiles like she’s just delivered the best news yet.

It probably is – for Scott. Stiles woke up three times last night, just from them laughing. He’s a bit worried if he’ll get enough peace to study at home. He can’t be annoyed with them, though. Allison made him perfect coffee this morning, and Scott is apparently a toast expert.

Scott beams. “That’s awesome.”

“Definitely,” Stiles agrees, because anything that makes Scott look like that is a good thing.

He’s never met two people like them before, who look at each other as though they’re the only ones in the entire world. Scott has told him that they’ve been together since high school, and it doesn’t seem like they’re growing tired of each other any time soon.

Ignoring the pinch of envy in his gut, Stiles concentrates on his dessert as Scott kisses Allison.

The tickets to all the movies they wanted to see are sold out, but Stiles declines when Scott and Allison invite him to watch a movie with him on the couch when they get home. Instead he spends his evening studying with music in his ears, effectively shutting out most of their laughter and noises he pretends not to hear.
The following days are quite slow. He spends most of his time in the school library or studying at home. Classes are an endless, terrible lead up to finals. Suddenly the classrooms are almost as full as they were the first couple of weeks at the beginning of the semester. In a couple of weeks, they’re going to be echoingly empty, because everyone will be studying on their own somewhere else. Skipping class to study is more rule than exception by the end of the semester.

It’s during Finstock’s class that he decides to send a text to Derek, even though Derek promised to contact him when he was back in NYC.

< How’s Boston business going? Assuming you’re closing that deal

He fiddles around on Facebook after that, already knowing the stuff Finstock is talking about, and remembers that he never did see if he could find Derek.

There are a few results for Derek Hale. Five without a profile picture or any other information. None of the Derek Hales with a profile picture are the right one, making Stiles assume that Derek either doesn’t have Facebook, or that he doesn’t have a profile picture. Just as he closes the app, after rolling his eyes over yet another engagement in his news feed, he gets a reply from Derek.

> Testing my patience, for sure. I’m closing the deal, however. Expecting to be back late on Thurs evening. How was dinner and the movie?

Stiles is surprised by the question at the end. Derek tends to be short in texts.

< Never felt so much as the third wheel as I did then

Finstock manages to talk about another four slides in his power point presentation before Derek replies again.

> That’s a shame. How’s school?

< Dreading finals. There’s a few weeks left, but since I was blessed enough to only have one midterm, I’m expecting to spend the upcoming month in study hell

> I’ll keep that in mind.

It takes a moment before Stiles understands what Derek’s getting at.

< I’ll make time for events, don’t worry

> I’m not worried.

Rolling his eyes, Stiles puts his phone back in his pocket.

He doesn’t hear from Derek again until Thursday, much like Derek mentioned in his texts.

> I hope studying is going well. Pick you up at 3 on Saturday?

< Sounds great! See you then

Stiles spends Friday bent over his books. Allison is here again, and he really likes her, but it’s hard to concentrate when she and Scott are trying so hard not to make him the third wheel. It’s meals and snacks, and quick pop-ins to see how his studying is going.

He doesn’t want to be rude. At any other time of the semester, he’d probably be incredibly grateful
for getting something else to do with his time. Now, though, he’s sweating over his grades. He needs to maintain his GPA to keep his scholarship. Without the scholarship he won’t be able to go next semester, and that means no degree. After busting his ass for years now, lying to his dad and doing things that might have put him in permanent need for therapy, he just wants it all to end.

His finals are more important than anything else, right now. No chocolate cupcakes can change that.

He spends the evening in his room with his new headphones, effectively shutting out all the noise from Scott and Allison’s movie night. And other activities. He really needs to find a way to tell Scott that his bedroom isn’t soundproof.

He’s sleep-deprived and grumpy the next morning, as he eats breakfast alone in the kitchen. Scott and Allison are still asleep, considering that it’s only seven. Stiles would rather sleep, too, but he really wants to squeeze in a few hours of study time before he needs to go.

Around two, he starts getting ready, putting on the clothes Derek got him just as Scott knocks on the door. Stiles already recognises his knock. It’s ridiculous.

“Come in.”

Scott looks a little hesitant as he opens. He’s probably noticed that Stiles isn’t thrilled with life at the moment.

“Oh, you look nice,” he says, nodding to Stiles’ clothes.

“Thanks.” Grimacing, Stiles tucks his button-up into his pants. “I feel like a dress-up doll.”

“One of those collector’s edition ones, in that case.” Scott’s smile effectively eliminates all of Stiles’ previous annoyance.

“It’s not really me.”

“But it’s Derek?” Scott guesses.

Nodding, Stiles fiddles with the hem of the ridiculously soft cashmere cardigan. “The dress-up thing is kind of necessary for what he does.”

Cocking his head to the side, Scott looks at him for a moment. “Is he worth it, though?”

Stiles knows that Scott is talking about being in love with someone, finding some level of discomfort worth it to be with them. However, for Stiles, it’s a job. The money he gets every month is definitely worth strutting around in fancy fabrics for a few hours here and there. He’s dressed in worse for less, so to speak.

“Definitely.”

Scott beams then. Stiles suspects that he’s a hopeless romantic. “Can you let him know that the headphones are awesome, and that I really appreciate them?”

Stiles blinks, having completely forgotten about Derek giving Scott his goodie bag last week, with all the studying. “Sure. He’s probably just happy that someone has use for them.”

He goes over a couple of definitions again before heading outside. It’s chilly, but he doesn’t think any of the jackets he owns would be okay to wear. By the time Derek’s car pulls up, he’s shivering.

“Don’t you own a coat?” Derek asks as a greeting.
He looks...perfect. Stiles already knows that grey is a great colour on Derek, but the dark grey slacks, light blue button-up and navy jacket is just too much.

“None that fit,” Stiles mutters. He’s cold and already stressing, because as he buckles in, he realises he’s forgotten a quiz that’s due today.

*Be professional*, he tells himself, plastering a smile to his lips.

“You look like you’re in pain,” Derek comments, glancing at him for a second before turning his attention back to the road as he pulls away from the curb.

“Sorry,” Stiles sighs.

“Do you need to be home and study?”

There’s something about Derek today. He seems to be on edge, too. Maybe Boston was more stressful than he wanted to let on in his texts.

Shaking his head, Stiles scratches his cheek. “No. I mean, yes, but that’s a constant state before finals.”

“We can turn around.”

“No.” Shaking his head again, Stiles clasps his hands together in his lap. “I said I would go with you, so I’m going.”

As Derek slows at a red light, he feels a bit itchy, much like when his dad asks too many questions.

“Stressing over finals is one thing, but it seems like something else is bothering you as well.”

He shouldn’t say anything. It’s unprofessional. He’s *working*, not hanging out with a friend. Oh well. “I’m annoyed, because Scott’s girlfriend is here again, and I can’t get enough peace to study.”

“What about the library?”

“It’s disgustingly crowded. *Everyone* is there this time of year. And I’m usually there between my classes anyway, so I’m sort of sick of it.”

Humming, Derek shifts gear as the lights turn green. “Did you talk to Scott about it?”

“No. He’s too happy with his girlfriend. I don’t wanna ruin it.”

“I’m sure he’ll understand if you explain it like it’s about finals, not him.”

Stiles looks at Derek for a moment, the sharp lines of his face, and serious set of his features. He rarely looks happy, but there’s *something*.

“Maybe. What’s up with you?”

Derek gives him a quick glance. “What do you mean?”

“Well, there’s clearly something bothering you.”

“Here I was, thinking I’ve mastered my poker face.”

Snorting, Stiles resists the urge to poke him, because one: they’re not friends, and two: Derek’s
driving – they could die. Derek doesn’t say anything after that. Curiosity has gotten Stiles in big trouble before, but he steels himself from asking. It’s not his place.

The event is for some advanced robot thingy that is apparently great in the car industry. Stiles tries not to think about how many workers will lose their jobs because of this invention. That’s not his place, either. Instead, he sticks close to Derek, who is uncharacteristically reserved tonight. A few weeks ago, Stiles wouldn’t have been able to tell the difference, because Derek is still smiling and shaking hands. Maybe it’s the way he doesn’t engage in conversation the way he usually does. He just responds.

Things aren’t exactly better when part of the event is outside the actual building, and Stiles really regrets his decision not to bring a jacket. His fingers feel numb, and he’s shivering again when he accidentally bumps his hand against Derek’s as he makes room for yet another person to ignore him in favour of shaking Derek’s hand.

He wishes that he could put his hands in his pockets, but he knows it comes off as rude, and the pants are a little too tight for him to do that comfortably anyway. Derek only talks with the man for a moment, and Stiles notices again how he keeps the conversation to a minimum.

“Let’s go inside,” Derek tells him as soon as the man has disappeared. “You’re going to get sick.”

“Cold doesn’t make you sick,” Stiles mutters, but his entire body seems to sigh when Derek places a warm hand on the small of his back, guiding him towards the building.

“If your body spends all its energy on keeping you warm, you’re more prone to catch a virus.”

Clearly, Derek isn’t having a discussion about this, and Stiles is honestly grateful for the warmth indoors. Especially since it isn’t nearly as crowded in here. He gets caught up in watching the server hand out funny-looking food creations from a silver tray and doesn’t realise that Derek’s taken his suit jacket off until it’s placed over his shoulders. They’re almost the same height, but Derek is definitely broader than him.

“You don’t have to do that,” Stiles protests immediately. It’s a little too intimate. A little too much date. He tries to ignore the way Derek looks in just his button-up and the slacks.

“You’re the same temperature as the champagne over there.” Derek nods towards a bottle standing in a bucket of ice.

Stiles snorts, but when Derek takes both of his hands between both of his own, Stiles swallows his protests. Derek’s hands feel as though they’re boiling around his. Looking down, Stiles notices that Derek’s palms are much wider than his. Compared to Stiles’ own skinny, veiny hands, Derek’s look stronger. His fingers are shorter, though.

Derek doesn’t rub his hands. He just holds them between his, making Stiles grimace as the numbness starts wearing off, causing his skin to prickle. When he looks up, feeling uncomfortable in the silence, Derek is looking at him. He’s got this puzzled look on his face that Stiles doesn’t understand.

“Let’s get you home,” Derek says, before Stiles has a chance to apologise for being stupid enough not to bring a jacket.

“We’ve only been here for three hours.”

“That’s long enough.”

Derek lets go of his hands, guiding him outside with the usual steady pressure against the small of his
back. They manage to escape the goodie bags this time.

“Scott says thank you, by the way,” he says as they wait for the valet to bring the car.

“For what?” Derek asks, checking his phone.

“For the headphones last week. He likes them a lot.”

It feels like a reward when Derek looks up, smiling briefly. There really is something off with him today. Something heavy sets in his stomach. Maybe he wants to break their contract. “I’m glad to hear that.”

Derek doesn’t start the car immediately once they get in, making Stiles fiddle in his seat. “Tell me how you’re really doing.”

Surprised, Stiles looks up, finding Derek staring out the window. “What do you mean?”

With a barely-there sigh, Derek turns towards him slightly, meeting his gaze. It’s rare for today. “You were stressed when I picked you up. You didn’t bring a coat, even though it’s clearly fall outside. You look like you haven’t slept since last time I saw you, and I think you’ve lost some weight, too.”

Swallowing, Stiles looks down at his thighs. They’re about as skinny as they’ve always been. The weeks before finals and midterms, he always forgets to eat, and until this year he never had a lot of money for food either, since he’d put working aside in favour of studying. Scott has been feeding him, but it’s happened that he’s lied about having already eaten just to get an hour more with his books.

“Is there something I should know?”

“What do you mean?” Stiles asks, partially to buy himself more time, partially because he really isn’t sure what Derek’s saying.

Derek hesitates. “Do you have enough money to get by?”

Stiles can’t help but stare, because if there’s anything he has right now, it’s money. “Yeah, definitely. You transferred the money at the date we agreed on and everything.”

“So what is it, then?”

“It’s just finals,” Stiles says, after thinking about it for a moment. But really, there’s nothing other than finals bothering him right now. “Naturally, that’s pretty huge, since I need to maintain my average and stuff. But no money problems. No, I’m still not doing any drugs.”

Derek almost-smiles. “I didn’t think you were.”

“It’s just frustrating to feel like I don’t have a good place to study. I really like having Scott as my roommate, but I don’t want to be rude. I end up studying when he’s sleeping instead, to get some peace of mind.”

Derek nods, looking thoughtful. “Nothing else?”

“Nah.” Shaking his head, Stiles looks down at his hands briefly again. “I mean, being stuck here over Thanksgiving when my dad’s in California really sucks, but I’m used to it. I need the time to study anyway.”
“I’m not going to California over Thanksgiving, either,” Derek tells him.

“Why not?” Flight tickets being too expensive is probably not the reason.

“My sister has her own family. I don’t, which means that I can work without anyone questioning it.”

“Pretty sure this isn’t why you’ve been weird since you picked me up, though.”

Sighing, Derek turns the ignition. “You’re right. It’s not.”

“Am I fired?”

Derek snorts at that, looking amused. “Of course not.”

Throwing out his professionalism and giving into his curiosity, Stiles turns in his seat. “Then what is it?”

“I didn’t close the Boston contract,” Derek says after a beat of silence.

That’s not at all what Stiles expected. Somehow, he just assumed that Derek is the kind of person who always gets what he wants. Considering his behaviour today, not closing the client was definitely not what he wanted.

“What happened?”

“Just as we were about to sign, something happened and they withdrew. I don’t know what. I’m guessing another company offering them more funds. I will find out, though.”

“You’re better off. They seem like assholes for doing that to you.”

Laughing, Derek slows to a stop in the traffic jams. “It’s business, not a marriage.”

“Well, it says a lot about their loyalty for not bringing it up with you first.” Stiles tries not to feel proud of himself for making Derek laugh.

When they finally reach Stiles’ building, Derek has laughed several more times, looking a lot more like himself.

“I need to go back to the office,” he says. “Apologise to Scott for me.”

Stiles frowns. “Why?”

“For yet again declining to come up and say hi.” Derek smirks, though, like he knows how badly Stiles wants to roll his eyes.

“I think he’ll live.” Stiles hesitates before he gets out. “When’s the next event?”

Shrugging, Derek glances in the rearview mirror, before looking at him. “Not sure. I’ll get back to you.”

Stiles suspects that there are several events, but that Derek doesn’t want to take his time from studying. Stiles won’t accept his money for doing nothing. This deal is too generous as it is.

“For every week without an event, I’ll refund some money.”

Derek looks as though he’s resisting a smile. “I’ll get back to you,” he repeats.
Stiles doesn’t realise that he’s still wearing Derek’s suit jacket, until he’s already inside and Derek is long gone.

Scott and Allison are cuddling on the couch, but Stiles declines another movie night. He needs to do that quiz before he forgets again.

Just as he finishes, relieved to see that he got 100%, he receives a text from Derek. It’s the usual one.

> Thank you for tonight. I had a good time.

< 2nd rule in business: be a good liar. I accidentally stole your suit jacket btw, I’ll give it back next time I see you

> Touché. It’s fine. I don’t wear it for work anyway.

< It was nice of you to lend it to me though

> I didn’t exactly want you freezing to death on my conscience.

Stiles snorts. He should probably buy himself a coat. There are cheap ones that still look somewhat decent. Heating up some leftover soup, Stiles spends the next few hours studying and making flash cards. He notices another message from Derek well past midnight, when he’s about to go to bed.

> If you need some peace and quiet, feel free to use my place to study. As you already know, I’m at the office most of my day, meaning you wouldn’t be disturbed.

Stiles stills. Derek’s place must mean his condo. The one in the flashy building. With the king-size bed Stiles got a picture of some time ago. Derek’s offering him, knowing that he’s a college kid without money, to study there?

< Why?

> School is important.

Stiles almost bangs his head against the bedside table in frustration, because that’s the answer Derek always gives him. Before he has the chance to type out a reply, he gets another text.

> Seeing you stressed and sleep-deprived worried me. If peace and quiet is what you need, I’ll be happy to offer a solution.

Stiles wants to say no. He’s going to say no up until Scott and Allison laugh in the living room. It’s not something that normally bothers him. It’s just now, when he can’t get a moment to himself.

< I was going to say no, but I’m too desperate to

> Come by the office if you have time tomorrow, and I’ll set you up with a key.

< I’m going to assume that you know better by now than to still be at work and not at home

> I guess I better get going, then.

Stiles is almost asleep, when he’s jerked awake by a text. Cursing the fact that he forgot to mute the phone, he squints at the too-bright screen. A second later, his irritation dies down, as he sees the picture of a familiar bed.
Without thinking twice, he takes a selfie, typing out: **goodnight :)**

◊

Scott knocks on his door at seven-thirty, asking if he wants waffles for breakfast. Stiles *loves* waffles. That’s not the issue. The issue is that he fell asleep really late, and he’s still stressed as hell.

He accepts waffles, though, knowing that he’s going to need some energy today. Allison looks like she comes straight from a romantic movie, dressed in one of Scott’s t-shirts, with hair that’s on the right side of messy. She smiles to Stiles, and he can’t dislike anyone with dimples like that. Especially not someone as sweet as Allison.

However, when Scott starts talking about having a movie night and cooking together, the stress over finals creeps up Stiles’ spine like prickling cold.

“I can’t,” he says, finishing his last waffle. Clearly Scott is some kind of waffle prodigy. “I’m going to study all day. Not sure when I’ll be home.”

“Maybe tomorrow?” Scott tries.

Stiles doesn’t have the heart to say: *let’s bring this up again after finals*, so he goes with: “Maybe!” And disappears into his room, after washing his plate.

He thinks about calling Derek and checking if he’s changed his mind, but if he knows anything about Derek, it’s that he doesn’t go back on his decisions.

< **When do you have time today?**

He’s on the subway, already halfway to Derek’s office, when he gets a reply.

> **My assistant is informed. Drop by whenever you want. I’m in meetings most of the day.**

Stiles isn’t really that keen on talking to Derek’s assistant about needing Derek’s key to have somewhere to study, and especially not now, when he’s wearing khakis, a washed-out t-shirt, and too much plaid. His jacket is a bit short in the sleeves, but it isn’t that noticeable if he has his hands in his pockets.

For some reason he feels nervous and like he’s going to be judged, as he sidesteps a lady in a fur coat outside Derek’s office building.

The same man is working in the lobby today, as the last time Stiles was here. Naturally, he has no clue who Stiles is. He must greet hundreds of people every day.

“I’m here to see Derek,” Stiles says, shuffling where he stands, as people-possibly-robots pass him in a rush of fancy suits and briefcases. “Mr. Hale,” he corrects as soon as he realises his mistake.

The man’s nametag says *George Matthews*.

“Your ID, sir,” Mr. Matthews requests pleasantly and holds out his hand expectantly. He squints at it just like last time, when Stiles hands it over to him, and then smiles. “Now I remember you, Mr. Stilinski.”

“I haven’t been here in forever.”

“Can’t forget a name like yours,” Mr. Matthews grins and Stiles can’t dislike him. It’s not possible.
He looks too freaking kind.

“Well, uh, guess you should blame my grandpa for that.”

“Mr. Hale is awaiting you, sir,” Mr. Matthews smiles. “Floor sixty-five.”

The elevator is more crowded this time around. By the time the elevator reaches the sixty-fifth floor, two other people leave the elevator with him. He’s forgotten how impressive this place is. All glass, marble and sleek, impersonal desks.

From what Stiles can see, there aren’t that many offices on this floor: Derek’s and two, maybe three more. Derek’s in a meeting, Stiles notices as he looks around after exiting the elevator. He’s sitting at that huge table, fingertips resting together, and frowning at the handful of other people around the table.

“Stiles?” someone asks to his left, and he blinks back to reality.

It’s the guy Derek was at the restaurant with, when Stiles had had that horrible dinner with Deucalion. He’s very tall, with bright blue eyes and ridiculously defined cheekbones. It looks like he’s tried to tame his mop of blonde curls into submission, but only half-succeeded. His name tag says Isaac Lahey.

“Yep,” he confirms, and is just about to reach out and shake hands, when the guy gestures towards a desk to the side. Lydia Martin is talking on the phone outside Derek’s office, looking super important and busy, Stiles notices. He had just assumed that she was Derek’s assistant.

“Derek is in a meeting right now,” Isaac explains and picks up an envelope from his desk. It says Stiles on it.

“Yeah, I can tell,” Stiles says, nodding towards Derek’s office. The walls are made of freaking glass, for christ’s sake.

“He told me to give you this.” Isaac hands him the envelope. “Apparently the doorman has been informed. There’s a car ready to take you right now, if you wish.”

Stiles silently accepts the envelope. It’s quite heavy in his palm. He wants to decline the car, but it would be better than having to take the subway, and trying to remember which stop to get off for Derek’s neighbourhood.

“Yeah, okay, thanks.”

Isaac eyes him for a moment. “Did you want to wait for his meeting to finish?”

Glancing towards Derek’s office, Stiles doesn’t think he’ll be done anytime soon. “No, it’s fine.”

“Let me walk you to your car.” Isaac smiles, but Stiles suspects that he’s got a lot of questions he’d like to ask. Perhaps what Derek’s doing with a guy in ill-fitting pants and a jacket with too-short sleeves. He doesn’t ask, though, and he stays quiet for the elevator ride down to the lobby again.

There is, indeed, a car waiting outside.

“He knows where to take you. Here’s my number.” Isaac sticks a business card into Stiles’ hand. “I’m Derek’s assistant and I’ve been instructed to take your calls if Derek’s in a meeting.”

“I thought Lydia Martin was his assistant.”
Isaac actually snorts at that. “Lydia Martin is a genius. She’s no assistant.”

Stiles is in the car, the door shutting after him, before he has the chance to reply.

It doesn’t take long for Stiles to reach Derek’s building. It probably would’ve gone a lot faster if it wasn’t for the usual traffic. It’s terrifyingly impressive up close like this. Just like Isaac promised, the doorman smiles at him as soon as Stiles gets out of the car. It makes him wonder if Derek’s snapped a picture of him and shown people.

“Mr. Stiles?” the doorman asks, giving Stiles a semi-déjà vu from the office.

“That would be me.”

“It’s the top floor. Mr. Hale wants to make it clear that you can help yourself to anything.”

Stiles has no idea how to react to that, so he just smiles and nods, and is instantly relieved when the doorman lets him in, pushing the elevator button for him.

“You need to turn the key,” he informs, when the doors don’t close, even after he steps out.

For a moment, Stiles doesn’t get what he’s talking about, until he realises that Derek lives in a freaking penthouse and that the elevator probably opens straight into his place.

“Oh, sorry.” He fumbles with the envelope. There’s a key there, indeed.

The doorman smiles politely, waiting for him to turn the key, before he retreats. “Just call for me if you need any help, Mr. Stiles.”

His heart is in his throat the entire ride up, and he has no clue why. Derek’s offering him a place to study, not for Stiles to do all sorts of repulsive things with him in exchange for money. Still, Derek is rich and powerful. His condo is probably like stepping into a different world.

When the elevator stops and the door opens, Stiles’ suspicions are confirmed. It really is like a different world, he concludes, as he steps out into Derek’s spacious hallway. There are huge windows everywhere. But it’s so bare. So impersonal. Like no one really lives here.

He finds himself looking around for surveillance cameras, but there aren’t any. At least no visible ones. Derek’s place is absolutely huge. Especially for one person. Stiles tells himself as he walks around, opening every door he comes across, that it’s because he can’t find the kitchen or living room. In reality, he’s way too curious about Derek.

Several of the rooms are empty. There’s a couch in the living room, when Stiles finally finds it, and a very big dining table. There’s an entire wall made of glass, and Stiles aches a little bit, as he steps closer and realises that all of Central Park is just down there.

He finds Derek’s bedroom behind the last door he opens. It’s strange seeing the bed he recognises so well standing there in front of him. It’s even more massive in person, and he wonders if it won’t feel lonely to sleep there alone. On the other hand, Stiles has no clue if Derek actually sleeps there all by himself. He’s pretty sure that Derek has indirectly confirmed that he’s single in one of their text conversations, but that doesn’t mean that he isn’t seeing anyone.

All in all, Derek’s entire home makes him sad. There’s a toothbrush in the bathroom. Vitamins on the kitchen counter. Car keys in the bowl inside the door. But there are no photos. No books laying around. No stray sock beside the bed. No dirty plates in the sink. No nothing. If this had been a character’s home in a movie, Stiles would’ve written a long-ass review somewhere on the internet,
saying that it made the movie flat. No person lives like that.

Except Derek.

He likes the living room the most, suspecting that Derek actually watches the TV on occasion. It feels like less of an intrusion, somehow.

< Is it okay if I study at your dining room table in the living room?

Just to be sure. He doesn’t want Derek to come home and freak over Stiles sitting there to study. He hovers until he gets a reply, several minutes later.

> Of course. Did you get there all right?

< Yes, Isaac got me a car and your doorman was very nice. Also nice view

> Glad to hear it. I have to go back to my meeting. Good luck studying.

The quiet makes it easy to concentrate. He goes over his notes and the slides from the lectures. He doesn’t ask Derek for the WiFi password until he really has to, in an attempt to avoid unnecessary distractions. A few hours later, he’s finally managed to get the hang of a couple of things that he’s been struggling with.

Sighing to himself, Stiles leans back in the chair and stretches his back. He’s starting to get hungry and his mouth feels dry, but it’s just past eleven a.m. and he didn’t think of bringing food with him. Derek’s fridge is out of the question. Stiles suspects that Derek wouldn’t mind if Stiles asked, but he’s doubts that there is actually anything edible in there, considering how much time Derek spends at work. He probably eats all his meals there, too.

A glass of water should be fine, though, he decides and gets up. The parquet floor is hard and almost slippery under his bare feet, so different from the carpet at home. He sticks his hands in his pockets, somehow feeling that he shouldn’t touch anything if he doesn’t have to, and heads for the kitchen.

The kitchen cabinets are almost empty, he notes as he opens them one by one in the search of a glass. There are a couple of plates, a few wine glasses, and three bowls, but no serving plates, no baking equipment or anything that even indicates that Derek does more than reheat leftovers in his microwave. He finds the glasses in the cabinet furthest from the sink, rolling his eyes at the person who decided to put them there.

He looks through the drawers for a coaster, not wanting to leave water stains on Derek’s dining table, but doesn’t find any and resolves to using yesterday’s paper still lying on the counter. There’s a text from Derek waiting for him as he gets back to his books.

> Need to grab a few things for a meeting this afternoon. Isaac told me that you didn’t seem to have brought lunch with you. What would you like?

Frowning, Stiles chews his lips. That Isaac dude is definitely a spy of some sort. On the other hand, he’ll have to leave earlier than he wants because he’ll be starving in a few hours. Derek bringing him lunch will enable him to study longer, and he needs it.

< Only if you don’t mind?

> I need to drop by anyway, and eat lunch myself. I don’t mind.
Rolling his eyes without really knowing why, Stiles decides that he can’t be too picky.

< I’ll take whatever you’re having.

> Allergies?

< None.

He waits a few minutes after that, but Derek doesn’t get back to him. Stiles has no clue when Derek will drop by, so he returns to his books. The silence makes it easier to get into that zone where he has no clue how much time that passes, since his brain is too busy processing all the information he’s feeding it.

The sound of the front doors sliding open jerks him back to reality, and there’s a rush of panic as he looks around for something he should feel guilty of, like he’s intruding. Just as his gaze falls on the half-empty glass on the paper, Derek shows up in the doorway. He looks oddly right in this setting, with the sparse but sleek furniture and the view, to his pressed suit and immaculate hair.

He’s carrying a paper bag in one hand and a leather folder in the other.

“I apologise for interrupting your studying,” Derek says after a moment of silence. Maybe it’s just as weird for him to have Stiles in his home.

“That’s fine.” Stiles shrugs. “I forgot to bring lunch, so I’d have to take a break anyway.”

Derek approaches then, as though Stiles talking has given him some kind of permission to move closer. He puts the paper bag on the table, and his gaze falls on the glass.

“Um,” Stiles begins, and his palms prickle. “I was thirsty and I didn’t find a coaster.”

Derek looks up at him and quirks an eyebrow. “I don’t think I have any.”

“It’s yesterday’s paper. I hope it’s okay.”

“It’s a paper,” Derek says, as though that answers everything. And then, as an afterthought, “Feel free to use anything.”

Stiles looks away, and his gaze finds the paper bag. “Thanks for lunch. How much do I owe you?”

“Nothing.” Derek’s attention is diverted to the leather folder in his hand, and he’s leafing through the papers there. “I had Isaac get it.”

“That doesn’t mean it’s free,” Stiles argues.

“It means my company is paying.” Derek glances up at him. “I have to head back to the office. I just need to grab a couple of things.”

Just as he turns around to exit the room, Stiles remembers that he has no clue what to do with the key.

“Do I drop the key off at your office when I’m done?”

Derek looks at him for a moment. “If you’re done studying, sure. It did sound like you might need a quiet place for more than a day, however.”

“I don’t want to intrude.”
“I offered.” The corners of Derek’s mouth quirk upwards. “And you’ve said it yourself: I’m at work most of my waking time.”

Stiles thinks about protesting, but he really does need to study. Considering the fact that Derek only seems to be home to get a few hours of sleep, it won’t be like Stiles is in his hair.

“Thanks.” He digs his fingers into his thigh. “Just let me know when you’re leaving the office, and I’ll be gone before you’re home.”

Derek looks as though he’s about to say something, but then he nods. “Sure.”

Stiles watches him leave the room, and then returns to staring into his textbook. He listens to Derek shuffling around in the bedroom, probably looking for whatever he needs for that meeting. A moment later, Derek is back in the doorway, clearing his throat.

“I’m heading back. Good luck with studying.”

Stiles looks up. “Thanks.”

“Don’t forget to eat,” Derek reminds him, before he disappears.

Stiles listens to the sound of the doors sliding open and then shut, and sighs in relief. Derek makes him nervous, and he never seems to realise until afterwards. It’s not the same nervousness as some of his other clients, where he isn’t sure if he’s safe or not.

With Derek it’s different.

Stiles knows that he’s kind behind that stoic and cold businessman exterior. If he wasn’t, Stiles wouldn’t be here. But he can’t figure Derek out. There’s a tension in the room whenever Derek is there, putting him on edge. He’s waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Looking around the room, Stiles chews his bottom lip. Being in Derek’s home makes him feel like an equal and not like an employee. It should terrify him, but it doesn’t.

In the paper bag, Stiles finds a burger and fries. He snorts to himself, because he’s about a thousand percent sure that Derek doesn’t eat burgers for lunch. He’s grateful, though, suspecting that Derek eats something that’s less of a calorie bomb and Stiles has never grasped the concept of salad.

It’s almost nine p.m. when he packs up his books. There’s still no text from Derek, but Stiles wants to be out of here before he comes back. He washes and puts the glass back in the cabinet, puts yesterday’s paper on the counter where he took it, and makes sure that there are no flashcards or notes left. Like he’s never been here.

His footsteps echo in the lobby when he leaves the elevator.

“Goodnight, Mr. Stiles.”

Swirling around, Stiles had completely forgotten about Derek having a freaking doorman. “Uh, goodnight…” he trails off, realising that he has no clue what the doorman’s name actually is.

“Bernard,” he says helpfully, still smiling.

“Goodnight, Bernard.”

“Will I see you tomorrow, Mr. Stiles?”
Stiles doesn’t even bother with pretending to himself that he hasn’t already decided to come back.
“For sure.”

“I’ll see you then, Mr. Stiles.”

The air is cold outside, and sort of damp like it always is during fall. He pulls the sleeves of his jacket as far down as he can, and hoists the bag up further on his shoulder. Just as he reaches the subway station, his phone dings with a new text.

> About to leave the office.

He waits until he’s on the train before he replies.

< I hope you had a good day at work. I got a lot done today. Thanks for letting me use your place

> Coming back tomorrow?

< Yeah if that’s still okay. I’ll remember to bring lunch this time around

> Of course. Let me know if you forget. I will be in meetings all day tomorrow, and having a business lunch. Might be difficult to get a hold of me.

Derek seems to be in meetings every day.

< I’ll do my best not to burn the place down

> It’s a skyscraper. I doubt you’ll succeed even if you try.

Snorting a laugh into his sleeve, pretending like he’s coughing so that the other people on the subway won’t look at him weird, Stiles puts his phone back in his pocket.

Back home, Scott is still awake on the couch, watching something on TV. Allison is nowhere to be found. Maybe she’s left already. Stiles has no clue when she was heading back.

“Hey,” he greets, and kicks off his shoes.

“Hey!” Scott brightens considerably. “Where have you been, dude?”

“Studying at Derek’s.” Stiles shrugs, trying to shake the guilt settling in his belly. “The library was too crowded. Did Allison leave?”

“Yeah.” Scott pouts, looking like a kicked puppy. “She had to head back, you know, for classes and some study dates with her friends.”

“That sucks.”

Scott nods in agreement, and then shrugs. “Yeah, but I need to study too, and it’s probably the best way for us both to get some stuff done.”

“Sorry for being gone all day.”

“Dude, I’ve been going over so many lectures this afternoon that I don’t have to study this weekend if I keep this up.”
Stiles can’t help but smile. “That’s really awesome.”

Nodding again, Scott straightens up where he’s sitting, as though remembering something. “Especially since Allison and I are going away Friday to Sunday.”

Stiles hates to admit that he’s a bit relieved. He really likes Scott, and having to decline every offer to spend time together makes him feel rude. Especially since he really wants to hang out with Scott. It’s just that studying for finals isn’t the best time for that kind of thing for Stiles in general.

“Nice,” Stiles comments. “Going anywhere in particular?”

“Jersey Shore.” Scott shrugs. “Just a hotel weekend, lots of hotel breakfast and quality time.”

Sex, Stiles concludes, and sits down on the armrest of the couch to chat for a while before he heads to bed. Scott probably thinks that Stiles has been having sex on the regular with Derek. If he only knew.

Naturally, after closing his deal with Derek, sex with clients hasn’t happened. Sex with anyone else hasn’t happened either. Until now, Stiles hasn’t been interested. When he was working, the interest for sex disappeared. He doesn’t remember the last time he jerked off for any other reason than stress relief. It’s been years since he had sex with anyone because he wanted to. Because he wanted them.

Tonight, the memory of Derek in his suit as he came home during lunch really does something to him. When he goes to bed, slowly stroking himself in a way he hasn’t done in so long, he tries to push the images of Derek away. It isn’t okay. There’s a big, red line and Stiles is about to cross it. But as he gets more frantic, pressure building low in his belly, Stiles gives up on pushing Derek away. Instead, he gives in to idea of Derek’s hands on him, and the sudden urge Stiles has to undo every button in his suit, just to see what’s underneath.

For the first time in a while, he sleeps soundly that night.

Derek is already gone when Stiles reaches his place the next morning. No surprise there. Stiles is relieved all the same, feeling guilty of his own fantasies.

Over the next few days, they create an odd pattern of avoiding each other, and still staying in touch. Stiles doesn’t remember the last time he felt so prepared for finals, and so relieved not having to meet Derek face to face. It’s like he opened Pandora’s box when he let himself think of Derek in that way. Every night since, he’s jerked off to various scenarios of Derek in a suit. He needs to get a grip.

On Wednesday, he’s barely out the door when Derek sends him the text about his departure from the office. On Thursday, he’s pulled from his books by it, and forced to leave them behind as he heads home. Derek tells him that he doesn’t mind, when Stiles apologises and explains in a text.

So, naturally, on Friday, he’s pulled from his world of transformative leadership by the sound of someone clearing their throat. For a second, Stiles frowns and blinks away from the endless rows of information and back to reality. Then, a rush of panic soars through him, as his gaze snaps up and finds the doorway. Yes, there’s Derek, holding two paper bags in his hands, and looking like he waltzed straight out of last night’s really bad ideas. Stiles swallows heavily, with the sound of his heartbeat in his ears, and glances down at his phone. Traitor.

“Calm down,” Derek says, and steps closer to the paper bags on the table. “Are you hungry?”

Stiles stares at him for a moment. “Hungry?” he echoes, not grasping what that means.

Derek smiles, then. “I don’t mind that you’re still here. Stop panicking.”
Taking a breath, Stiles flexes his fingers and diverts his gaze from the dark grey of Derek’s suit, the sleek fabric of his tie and the golden squares of his cufflinks.

“I’m really sorry,” he begins. “I must’ve been completely in the zone.”

“I figured.” Derek holds up one of the bags, forcing Stiles to look at it. “Are you hungry?” he asks again.

“You mean staying for dinner?” Stiles asks, just to make sure.

“Yes, unless you’d rather take it with you home. It will most likely be cold by the time you get there.”

Stiles knows that he should say no. The line to their professional relationship is already blurry, especially on his part, and having a casual dinner that isn’t part of a job is a bad idea. But he’s the one who broke the rules first by not leaving on time, and he hasn’t seen Derek in so long. And he is hungry.

“Okay.”

He gets a small smile in reward. Derek looks his actual age when he smiles. “Grab whatever you want to drink from the fridge.”

When Derek begins to shrug out of his suit jacket, Stiles has to look away and leave for the kitchen. There’s a line that he really shouldn’t cross, he reminds himself.

Now that he has permission, he opens Derek’s fridge with curiosity. It’s, as he suspected, not that crowded. Most of the content consists of bottles with varying percentages of alcohol. He decides on a Coke for himself, unsure of how he’ll react to alcohol after studying all day.

“What do you want to drink?” he calls over his shoulder.

“I’ll take whatever you’re having.”

He has trouble seeing Derek drinking Coke, but that’s his decision. Shrugging to himself, Stiles grabs another bottle and reaches for the glasses with his other hand. Back in the living room, Derek is unpacking the bags. Thai food. Stiles loves Thai food.

It’s odd seeing Derek without his suit jacket, and not in the way Stiles has imagined the last few nights. He looks more vulnerable this way, as though he’s stripped off his armor. He’s rolling up his sleeves, the cufflinks lying on the table in front of him next to his watch, and Stiles stalls in the doorway.

“How was work?” Stiles asks, just to have something to say.

Derek looks up and immediately reaches out to take the glasses from Stiles’ hand, not batting an eye at the Coke bottles. “The usual,” he says, like that means anything to Stiles. “How did studying go?”

“Better than it ever has,” Stiles confesses. “I feel pretty prepared for my first final on Monday.”

Nodding, Derek looks pleased as he hands Stiles a fork. “I’m glad to hear that.”

“What are your plans for the weekend?” Stiles asks as he sits down. He’s suddenly so freaking hungry.

“I’m going away on a business trip tomorrow morning until Monday.”
He hasn’t told Stiles about this. “Is it about that Boston company again?”

“No, it’s a business conference in California.”

“Will you be seeing your family?”

Nodding, Derek twirls his noodles around the chopsticks. “My sister will be at the conference, yes.”

Stiles wants to ask, because he doesn’t think being at the same conference is the same thing as spending time with your family, but it’s not his place. “I see.”

“What’s your final on Monday?”

“Foundations of leadership.” Stiles shrugs. “The subject itself isn’t that difficult. A lot of my previous courses have touched leadership, so nothing’s completely new, but the professor is super vague and I don’t know what to focus on.”

Derek hums, pinning him with his gaze across the table. “What’s your strategy?”

This must be what Derek’s clients feel like. “I’ve picked the topics that we focused on in class, as well as the ones the book focuses on.”

“That sounds like the best way to go about it.”

Derek is the only person Stiles has met that can eat noodles and still manage to look proper. He looks relaxed where he’s sitting, slightly leaned back in the chair, turned a little to the side. His shoulders look amazing in that pale blue shirt.

“So, when’s the next event?” Stiles asks, because Derek hasn’t mentioned one in a while, and he needs to concentrate on something other than the peek of chest hair visible where Derek has unbuttoned his shirt at the collar.

“Next weekend.” Derek ignores his glass, and takes a swig straight from the bottle. “You didn’t tell me.”

“I figured that you’ll be busy studying.”

“After Friday, I’ll only have two finals left.” Stiles shifts in his seat. Derek shouldn’t take his finals into consideration. It’s Stiles’ job.

Derek eyes him for a long moment, and Stiles straightens in his seat.

“Meaning I can come with you,” he adds.

After a dragging silence, Derek nods. “Okay. I’ll text you the time. You need to pick up a suit beforehand.”

“Oh, it’s a fancy one?” Crap. Stiles is regretting this already.

“It’s a dinner.”

Suppressing a groan in frustration, Stiles just nods. “Okay. Should I drop by Suit&Tie?”

“Yes. I’ll let them know. I might have a hard time getting away and keeping you company this week.”
This is getting worse by the second. “It’s okay. I know the way and they know what they’re doing.”

He leaves not too long after that. It’s late, way past ten, and Derek must be tired after such a long week. It’s too weird for him to hang out with Derek as some kind of friend, because that’s not what they are. It’s odd coming home to an empty apartment, but there are four cupcakes in a box in the fridge and a note on the counter waiting for him. *I made cupcakes! Don’t starve to death! /Scott*

Snorting to himself, Stiles opens the lid and drags a finger through the frosting before he closes it again. It tastes *heavenly*. Getting Scott as his roomie really was a catch.

The weekend is frustratingly boring. He’s so on top of his finals that all he has to do is review his notes and flashcards a few times a day. He spends the rest of his time on Scott’s zombie game, having to pause every so often to keep himself from getting a heart attack, and having too much time with his brain. He thinks about Derek a lot, of what he does when he’s alone. If there’s someone he sleeps with, even though he told Stiles that this would be an exclusive arrangement. Most of all, he just misses their regular texting. On Sunday evening, just after Scott has come back home, looking like he’s had the best weekend in the universe, Stiles cracks.

*< I hope that your conference trip is going well. Just wanted to say thanks for letting me use your place for studying. I think my finals tomorrow will go really well>

The reply is almost instant. Maybe Derek has had an equally boring weekend.

*> The trip is going as expected. Glad to hear that you’re prepared for tomorrow. Good luck!*

Stiles wants to stop there, to not reply and be fine with it. Honestly, though, he kind of misses the days where they had long, awkward conversations like this. So he gives in.

*< I always have trouble sleeping before a big test. How’s your night?>

His gaze falls on a navy fabric on his desk chair. Frowning, Stiles gets to his feet, and grabs it. It’s Derek’s suit jacket, and Stiles has completely forgotten to give it back, like promised. Derek must think that he has stolen it. Folding it carefully, Stiles puts it in a tote bag, wondering if doing this is some kind of fashion crime. Something that expensive should probably not be carried around in an Avengers-themed fabric bag.

*< I just realised that I haven’t returned your suit jacket yet. I’ll drop it off after my finals tomorrow>

* > I had forgotten about it. Will you be over tomorrow as well?*

< Can I?>

> Of course.

Stiles is pretty much on top of his game, but considering that Scott is back in town again, he might get distracted. Especially since he isn’t stressing as much as he usually is. He doesn’t want to take things for granted and stop going over his notes.

Taking a breath, Stiles weighs his phone in his hand for a moment.

*< Did you hang out with your sister?>

There’s a long pause in Derek’s replies. Stiles can see the little three dotted bubble showing up and
disappearing at the bottom left corner of the screen for several minutes. With a frown, Stiles decides to grab a snack from the kitchen and leaves the phone behind. Scott is watching TV, and gulping down the biggest sandwich Stiles has ever seen. It’s like a live version of Scooby Doo.

“Sup?” Scott asks immediately.

Shrugging, Stiles looks through the cabinets for something edible. “Nervous about tomorrow.”

“You’ll be great,” Scott says, full of confidence.

“I hope so.” Stiles finds a bag of Doritos, and he leans against the counter for a while, feeling as though he should elaborate.

“Something up with you and Derek?” Scott must be a mindreader.

“Nah.” Stiles grimaces. “It’s the usual. He’s been away all weekend, and he works all the time.”

Which is good. It’s good that Stiles gets paid a lot, without actually having to hang out with Derek that much. Isn’t it? The dinner this weekend is definitely not something he looks forward to.

Scott’s face falls, like it’s his relationship they’re talking about. Stiles should feel a lot worse for lying to him. “You need to talk to him about this.”

“I probably should, yeah.” Stiles scratches his cheek. What he should do is stop jerking off to the idea of having sex with Derek. It’s corrupting his brain completely.

“Are you into him?” Scott asks, suddenly.

“Uh... yes.” It’s not even a lie. That’s the worst part. Finally admitting it out loud makes Stiles’ stomach drop like a hundred pounds of concrete. “I should go call him.”

He leaves the room before Scott has the chance to say anything. His palms are prickling, and the back of his neck is tingling. When he collapses on the bed with his bag of Doritos, he presses a thumb to the home button in his phone.

Derek has replied to his text, and it’s longer than it usually is.

> I wouldn’t say that we hung out. I talked to her. We went over the business plans for this quarter, as well as the budget. We sat at the same table at lunch. We aren’t close.

Stiles forgets all about his anxiety over finding Derek attractive, and the block of guilt in his belly turns into a churn of worry. Derek is never open with him when it comes to anything. This is surprisingly vulnerable.

< Are you okay?

> Yes.

Okay, so Derek doesn’t want to talk about it. Stiles can deal with that. He’ll just have to be a distraction instead.

< So, I’m currently eating Doritos that might be a month or two old. Will I die?

He sniffs one of them, before deciding that they smell just as artificial as they usually do.
I doubt it. I can’t imagine that there is anything in them organic enough to go bad.

Stiles smiles a little. That sounds like the Derek he knows.

< My death will be on you

> I’ll take my chances. How’s your evening?

Stiles looks around his room, as if hoping to discover that there’s a party in there he doesn’t know about.

< Just eating my death sentence and distracting myself from angusting about tomorrow by texting you. How’s yours?

As well as distracting Derek.

> Uneventful. I’m in my hotel room, waiting until I can go back home tomorrow.

< If you were here, I’d share some Doritos with you

> You’re trying to kill us both? How kind.

Stiles snorts out a laugh, licking his fingers clean before he types out a new message.

< You told me I’d survive!

He falls asleep sometime around midnight, with an alarm set for tomorrow and his phone still in his hand.

◊

His stomach is in knots outside the lecture hall. There’s a bunch of students there with him, all pale and sleep-deprived, and some are still going over notes.

“We need to get seriously drunk when all of this is over,” Danny tells him, just as he shows up next to Stiles outside the doors.

Nodding, Stiles tries not to think about the two weeks he needs to survive to get there. “You’re telling me.”

“I’m done with mine next week.”

“Same.” Stiles glances at him, envious of how Danny somehow always manages to look so good. “I will be grateful for having my finals early when they’re over.”

“Not so grateful right now, I take it?”

Stiles snorts, shaking his head. “Definitely not. I haven’t slept in so long.”

Danny’s dimpled smile makes him feel a bit better. “Did you bring extra clothes if you throw up?”

For a second, he doesn’t understand what Danny is referring to, but then he remembers the tote bag at his feet. “Nah, I’m returning a jacket to a friend.”

“A friend, huh?” Danny’s wink says everything, and Stiles glares at him to keep himself from blushing.
He’s grateful for the doors opening the next second, and then his mind is too occupied with stressing over the test, letting him forget all about Danny’s insinuation.

He’s itching all over until he’s allowed to turn the test over and scan the questions to determine if he has a shot, or if he should break down and cry. He reads the questions twice, and then sighs in relief. He can do this. He can totally do this.

Two hours later, he’s handed in his answers and for the first time in forever, he feels like he nailed it. There’s a text from Derek waiting for him, when he checks his phone.

> How did it go?

< Good I think. I’m just gonna grab something to eat and then I’ll return your jacket

> Unless you have other plans, swing by the office and I’ll treat you to lunch for a successful test. I can drop you off at Suit&Tie afterwards.

Oh right. Stiles had forgotten all about the event this weekend. The fact that he hasn’t seen Derek in forever is also weighing in on his reply.

< Okay I’ll see you in a bit

Derek’s office always makes him feel out of place. Today is no different. Mr. Matthews is smiling at him from behind the desk.

“Mr. Stilinski, welcome back,” he greets.

“I’m here to see Mr. Hale,” Stiles says, and hopes that the people in the tailored suits rushing past him don’t pay attention.

“Yes, I was informed.” Mr. Matthews hands him a visitor’s pass and lets him through. Stiles hasn’t ridden this elevator that many times, but it feels familiar now as he presses the button for Derek’s floor.

Isaac is behind his desk talking on the phone when Stiles steps out of the elevator. He nods at Stiles as he approaches and points towards Derek’s office. That probably means that Stiles is free to go in there.

Derek is behind his desk, going over something in a folder. He looks so much like power personified where he sits, leaning back in his chair with one ankle resting on his thigh and a concentrated frown on his face. He looks like he’s crossing things out in whatever he’s reading. Taking a breath, Stiles pushes away the sudden urge to mess up Derek’s hair or, you know, kiss him. Stupid.

He lifts his hand to knock, but feels dumb since the door is made out of glass. Instead, he pushes it open and gets an odd flashback from the first time he was here, and Derek spoke on the phone. It seems like forever has passed since that day.

The moment Derek looks up, is something Stiles will probably keep somewhere safe for a long time. At first, he looks annoyed, like he’s being disturbed while doing something important. Then, his gaze locks on Stiles, and his features soften. It’s not a smile. But it’s something.

“Hey,” Stiles says, clutching the straps to his tote bag a little tighter between his fingers. “Sorry for interrupting.”

“No need to apologise. Do you have time to wait a couple of minutes?” Derek points with his pen at
the folder in his hand.

Stiles shrugs. “Sure. I'll just snoop around in the meantime.”

At that, Derek presses his lips together, like he’s keeping himself from smiling and makes a gesture with his hand that translates as a go ahead. As soon as his attention is back to his task at hand, Stiles puts the tote bag on the nearest chair and walks over to the wall of windows. The view is breathtaking.

Stepping as close as he can without pressing his face against the glass, he looks down on the city beneath him. He can see so, so far across Manhattan. The odd combination of old buildings, shiny skyscrapers made of glass, and ancient churches has always fascinated him.

“Ready to go?” Derek asks him suddenly, and Stiles looks over his shoulder. The folder is gone, probably hidden away in a desk drawer, and Derek has turned towards him, still in his chair.

“Why would you want to turn your back on this?” Stiles gestures at the view, asking the very question he was thinking just moments ago. “I mean, look at it!”

When he doesn’t get an answer, he turns and finds Derek watching him with an odd little smile.

“What?” he asks.

“I’m terrified of heights,” Derek tells him.

Opening his mouth, Stiles blinks at him, and then snorts out a laugh before he can stop himself. “You’re afraid of heights?”

Derek quirks an eyebrow. “Yes.”

“You live in a penthouse and your office is on the billionth floor.”

With a shrug, Derek gets to his feet. “The standard is usually better the higher up you get.”

Stiles rolls his eyes. “There’s more status the higher up you get, you mean.”

Derek just shakes his head, smiling, as he buttons his suit jacket and motions for Stiles to get away from the windows. “Ready to go?” he asks again.

With a nod, Stiles goes over and grabs his tote bag from the chair. “I brought this.”

“A bag?” Derek gives him this look that makes Stiles’ fingers twitch, and his stomach start to flutter. “Did you think it would go well with my suit?”

Glaring, Stiles tosses the tote bag at Derek’s chest and he’s oddly pleased with himself, heart racing behind his ribs, when Derek immediately throws it back in his face. Playful Derek is something new.

“If you’re stopping by my place, you can put it back in my closet.”

“And if I’m not?” Stiles challenges.

“Then you can keep it until next time you stop by my place.”

“You’re so demanding,” Stiles grouses, failing completely at sounding annoyed. Derek looks so freaking pleased with himself as he puts a hand on the small of Stiles’ back and gives him a light push towards the glass doors.
“That’s how I got here, to the billionth floor.” Derek smirks. He leaves a bunch of papers on Isaac’s desk when they pass, and Stiles tries not to think about the fact that Derek’s hand is still on his back as they wait for the elevator to reach the bottom floor.

He wants to tug at his shirt and take a few slow breaths, because Derek smells really good and for some reason, Stiles can’t remember if he’s ever noticed this before.

“What would you like?”

Blinking, Stiles finds Derek’s gaze in the reflection in the elevator mirror.

“For lunch,” Derek clarifies.

“Dunno, anything I can eat with curly fries.”

He does catch Derek rolling his eyes, but it looks strangely pleased. “I’m sure they can make you curly fries around the corner if you ask nicely.”

*Around the corner* is apparently a fancy-ass restaurant, where Derek seems to know the owner. They get a table right away, and the waiter calls Derek *Mr. Hale*.

Much like Stiles has predicted, Derek orders seafood and salad, and he wants to sink through the floor when Derek asks if it would be possible for them to make curly fries for Stiles.

“I don’t mind eating salad,” he says, looking around the restaurant. Almost everyone is wearing a suit, and here he is, in a t-shirt and jeans.

“They don’t mind making curly fries for you,” Derek counters, just as his phone rings. Stiles expects him to excuse himself and answer, but Derek doesn’t even look at the screen before he declines the call and puts it back in his pocket. “Tell me about your test.”

Stiles doesn’t bother with saying that he doesn’t mind if Derek wants to take the call. By now, he knows that Derek would have done so if he had wanted to. “I was really nervous,” he confesses. “I was worried that maybe I felt more prepared than I actually was. But then I got the test, read all the questions and realised that I knew most of them for sure and had good guesses for the rest of them.”

Derek smiles. “I’m glad all your studying paid off.”

“One down, a billion to go, though,” Stiles sighs.

“Celebrate now, worry about the rest later.”

Stiles can totally do that. “Thanks for taking me out for lunch.”

“I figured that you would go right back to studying if I didn’t.”

“That’s probably true.” Stiles looks at him for a moment. “You didn’t cancel something important for this, did you?”

“Who says this isn’t important?” Derek counters immediately.

The way his stomach flutters and his chest swells takes him by surprise. Finding Derek attractive and...*sexable* is one thing, but Stiles doesn’t know what this is.

“Thanks,” he replies instead, grateful that their food arrives the next moment.
They’re quiet for most of the lunch, as though Stiles’ inability to handle Derek telling him that their lunch is important has made everything tense. He feels less horrible when Derek once again puts a hand on his back to guide him out the door a while later.

“Thanks for lunch,” Stiles says, threading his fingers through the straps on the tote bag. “I’ll take the subway to Suit&Tie.”

Derek looks like he’s going to argue, but then changes his mind. “You’re welcome. When is your next test?”

“Tomorrow.” Stiles grimaces. “Then I have another one on Wednesday, and then a break until next week.”

“You’ll do great,” Derek assures him. “Don’t stay too late.”

“Are you planning on getting home early?” Does he have a date? Derek never comes home early.

“No, but you need sleep.”

Stiles’ shoulders want to sag, but he keeps them straight. “I’ll see what I can do about that.”

Nodding, Derek gives him one of his tiny smiles and says goodbye. Stiles looks after him for a moment, watches as he picks up his phone from his pocket and immediately calls someone. Stiles looks after him until he disappears in the crowd, and then he turns to grab the nearest subway to get to Suit&Tie.

Jackson Whittemore is working today, and Stiles wants to leave again when he sees him behind the counter.

“Welcome back,” Jackson says, and even though he doesn’t look exactly happy to see Stiles again, he hides the stuck-up attitude better today.

“I need a suit,” Stiles tells him right away.

Jackson rolls his eyes. “I know. I have a couple of suggestions for you.”

He takes Stiles with him to another room, and if it wasn’t full of expensive-looking clothes, Stiles would have been worried about being murdered. No one wants to ruin all that fabric with blood splatters, though.

“Mr. Hale asked me to set you up. It’s the charity dinner on Saturday.” He says it in a way that makes Stiles suspect that he should know exactly what dinner this is. He doesn’t, except that he’s attending.

“Uh, sure,” he agrees.

Jackson heaves a sigh. “You’re the worst escort I’ve ever met.”

It takes a second before Stiles’ brain registers the words. His muscles tense up, and his heart starts hammering behind his ribs. How does he know? Whom has he told?

Jackson gives him a flat look. “Seriously? You think I can’t tell when there’s a rich guy coming in here with a dude who matches plaid with horrific t-shirts.”

There must be an emergency exit. Nausea is building in his gut, and Stiles is starting to feel a bit dizzy.
“You’re not the first one. You won’t be the last.”

“Don’t tell anyone,” Stiles manages.

Jackson snorts at that and holds up a suit jacket next to Stiles. “Who would I tell? No one cares.”

“I don’t think he wants people to know.”

Rolling his eyes, Jackson puts the jacket away. “I’m sure Mr. Hale is well aware that I know exactly what’s going on. That’s most likely why he picked this place.”

“Why exactly did he pick this place?”

“Discretion.”

There is a long pause as Stiles tries to find his breath, calm his heart and fight the urge to run out of there. Jackson scrutinises him in the meantime. He can do this. It doesn’t matter that Jackson knows. They can deny everything if the word gets out somehow. His dad’s in a different state. He will never know.

A little while later, Stiles is stripped out of his clothes and trying on pants and jackets and button-ups like his life depends on it. Jackson is rude, but apparently very focused on him looking good in his clothes. It has probably very little to do with him wanting *Stiles* to look good, and very much with him wanting to do a good job and get a nice payment from Derek. Stiles will take this over their last encounter any day, though.

“Are you prepared for this dinner?” Jackson asks as he compares two ties to the colour of Stiles’ suit jacket.

“No,” Stiles answers.

“You don’t even know what fork to use for what, do you?” Jackson snorts.

Stiles swallows down the mild panic that rises at his words. “Not really, no.”

To his surprise, Jackson drops the subject and continues with details like what cufflinks Stiles should use and how to fold the pocket square, which Stiles isn’t even sure that he’s going to remember on Saturday. It’s not until Stiles is back in his regular clothes, and Jackson is packing the rest, that he brings it up again.

“Use the cutlery from the outside in,” Jackson tells him suddenly, as he packs up Stiles’ new ties. “The ones furthest away from the plate are for the first course, and then work your way in. I’m sure Mr. Hale will give you a hint. Put the cutlery down while chewing. Don’t eat during speeches. Don’t raise your glass above your nose when toasting. Those are the things that people will notice, and the easiest to remember.”

Stiles stares at him. “Thanks. That’s actually really helpful.”

“Well, we’re making money off you buying your clothes here. If you mess up, you might not come back.”

Normally, Stiles would be heavily offended, but he doesn’t think that’s the *entire* truth. Either way, this dinner thing seems a lot less terrifying now, and he’s grateful for that.

“I’ll have Mr. Hale pick this up later,” Jackson tells him after giving Stiles’ tote bag and messenger
bag a disapproving look. “You look like you have your hands full.”

“Probably a good idea. I might get mugged on the train.”

The look Jackson gives him makes him suspect that taking the subway is some kind of fashion crime, too.

“Thanks again. I’ll let Derek know that you’ve been helpful.” With that, he leaves and heads to Derek’s place. It’s taken longer than he counted on, but it was necessary. With Jackson’s advice, he might save himself several hours of googling, too.

It’s weirdly intrusive to try and find Derek’s closet. It’s not that it’s difficult. Stiles assumes that it’s in direct link to his bedroom, and gets his suspicions confirmed when he peeks through one of the two doors in there. It’s that it’s private.

Unsurprisingly, it’s filled with suits. Rows upon rows of different shades of navy, grey and black. For a moment, he tries to figure out where this jacket is supposed to hang, but he’s afraid that he’ll mess up the meticulous order in here if he does. He grabs a hanger instead, and puts the jacket neatly on the door handle to the closet, with a Post-It he dug up from his messenger bag. Had no clue where this belongs, sorry!

He looks around Derek’s bedroom then. It looks much the same as when he peeked inside the first time he was here. For a moment he wonders what Derek looks like when he’s sleeping.

Shaking himself, he leaves the room and closes the door tightly behind him. He can’t go there, thinking about stuff like that. This is business only for Derek, and something he did because he felt sorry for Stiles. It’s definitely something that he’s grateful for, because it means that he’s stopped having sex with strangers he isn’t attracted to. And maybe he’s only attracted to Derek because he’s so great in comparison to the rest of them.

Deciding that that’s most likely the truth, Stiles goes back to studying.

It’s harder to get in the zone today. His mind keeps slipping, and he already knows everything he’s going over. After a few hours of trying to force himself to concentrate, he gives up and decides to grab a glass of water. He watches the water run for a while, pretending that all his conflicted feelings are washed down the drain with it, before he fills his glass. As he turns to look for another newspaper to use as a coaster, he halts in surprise with the glass halfway to his mouth. There are actual coasters on the counter. There is no note, but Stiles is sure that Derek got them for him.

Swallowing, Stiles grabs one and sinks down on a chair in the living room again. He is messed up, isn’t he? He’s interpreting this as some kind of token of affection, and not for what it probably is: Derek realising that he doesn’t own any coasters and deciding to get some.

He heads home earlier than planned that night, but he’s exhausted and there’s another test waiting for him tomorrow.

Much like yesterday, there is a text from Derek waiting for him when he gets out of the classroom, asking him how the test went. They don’t have lunch together today, however; instead Stiles grabs take out on his way to Derek’s place.

On Wednesday, Stiles allows himself to sleep in, to feel rested for his last final of the week. He’s going to Derek’s afterwards, knowing that he will have several hours of study time because of Derek’s crazy habit of working late.

> Hope the test went well. Are you coming over today?
Stiles flexes his fingers and tries not to smile outside the lecture room he just left. Especially since there are people crying around him.

< I think it did. I’m coming over to study for a few hours, unless you’re planning on getting home early?

> I’m not. In fact, I might be later than usual. Crisis with a client. I’m glad the test went well.

< Crisis?

Stiles takes the subway to Derek’s place, and sighs in relief at the quiet in there. He’s exhausted. He hasn’t spent that much time on studying this week. He hasn’t had to, since he’s studied so well the weeks before. But the stress and the lack of sleep from that, and from taking the tests this week, has worn him out.

It’s just a week left, he tells himself. Another week, and then he’s free until after New Year’s.

He can’t wait to meet his dad, or Heather, who’s also coming home for Christmas. They barely stay in touch during the semesters, but hanging out during Christmas and summer has always been a given.

Grimacing, Stiles sits down on one of the chairs in the living room. It feels a lot less comfortable today than it did yesterday. He glances at Derek’s couch, and it looks a lot more inviting. Derek wouldn’t mind, he’s sure of that, and Stiles can combine business with pleasure. Grabbing his notebook and a pen, he sinks down on Derek’s couch, and god why hasn’t he done this until now? It’s probably the best couch Stiles has ever sat on. After a while, he stretches out and decides to do the rest of his repetitions lying down.

He has no clue when he falls asleep, but when he wakes up again it’s almost completely dark. Blinking, he fumbles with the blanket covering him and tries to remember where he is. Why didn’t Scott wake him?

A second later, he remembers studying in Derek’s living room. On his couch. Craning his neck, he finds his notebook and pen on the coffee table. Shit. He fell asleep, and Derek came home to find him drooling on the couch. With a wince, Stiles sits up. Except for the light from the moon outside the window, the place is dark. He tries to catch any indication of Derek being awake, but there is only silence.

Should he leave? Stiles pulls his phone from his pocket and presses the home button. It’s almost three a.m. and there are two texts from Derek waiting for him.

The first one was sent around midnight.

> I’m about to leave the office.

The second one is from half an hour later.

> Taking the subway in the middle of the night is a bad idea. I’ll drive you home before I head to the office in the morning. Go back to sleep.

Stiles wants to roll his eyes, but all he manages to do is smile stupidly. Having permission to stay, he settles on the couch again and pulls the blanket up. Just as he’s about to doze off, he hears footsteps in the hallway. Stiles wants to be discreet and only peek through his lashes, but once he’s caught sight of Derek he’s a lost cause. Stiles is torn between being grateful for the darkness so that Derek
won’t notice him being awake, and wishing for sunlight or a freaking lamp, because there’s Derek standing in the doorway. And he’s wearing nothing but boxer-briefs. Swallowing, Stiles squeezes his eyes shut again.

It’s only a second, but it feels like eternity, before Derek leaves. Perhaps he heard Stiles wake up, and wanted to make sure he didn’t give in to his stupid idea of leaving in the middle of the night. Maybe he forgot about Stiles being there and thought it was a burglar.

Either way, Stiles can’t really let go of the fact that he’s seen Derek in his underwear. Sort of. It doesn’t quite count, but it was still better than anything he ever came up with himself.

He wakes by Derek’s alarm clock the next morning. Blinking blearily, Stiles checks his own phone for the time. Five-thirty. How is Derek still alive?

A moment later, he can hear water running and he immediately wishes that he hadn’t slept in his clothes. He doesn’t feel particularly attractive right now. Not that that matters.

Rubbing his eyes, he gets up and eyes the coffee machine in the kitchen with suspicion. It looks super complicated. Stiles likes the ones where you put water and coffee in it, and then presses a button. Derek’s coffee machine has at least fifteen buttons.

“Regular coffee or espresso?”

Jumping, Stiles turns around and finds Derek standing just behind him. His hair is damp, and it looks a little like he didn’t wait long enough to put his shirt on after showering. Swallowing, Stiles tries not to stare and shrugs.

“Whichever.”

He watches as Derek grabs two glass mugs from a cabinet and presses the buttons without barely looking at them.

“You should’ve woken me up,” Stiles says.

“You looked like you needed sleep.”

Feeling vulnerable, Stiles puts his hands in his pockets and looks away. “I could’ve gone home to get it.”

There’s a moment of silence. “Of course,” Derek says then. “I should have driven you home right away. I apologise.”

Glancing up, Stiles finds Derek not-quite looking at him with squared shoulders. Guilty.

“I don’t mind that you didn’t,” Stiles hurriedly explains. “I’m just saying that if you mind, then I’m sorry for falling asleep.”

Derek shakes his head, like he barely understands what Stiles is saying, and hands him one of the mugs. “I don’t mind.”

Twenty minutes later, Derek drives him and the shopping bags he must have picked up yesterday home to an empty apartment. Stiles collapses on his own bed, staring at the ceiling for a while and considering the fact that he spent the night at Derek’s. On the couch, sure, but there was also Derek in his underwear. Shaking his head at himself, god he’s such an idiot, he decides to get another four hours of well-deserved sleep.
On Saturday, he gets dressed with his body buzzing. It’s because he’s nervous about the dinner. Definitely not because he’s been looking forward to seeing Derek again since Thursday morning. Swearing under his breath, Stiles fights with the tie, and starting over again. He’s found instructions for tying one on Google, but it’s definitely harder in real life than the instructions made it seem.

Five minutes before Derek is supposed to pick him up, he’s sweating and still hasn’t managed to tie it properly.

“Do you know how to tie this?!” he exclaims, voice desperate, as he finds Scott on the couch. The look of horror he gets in return says everything he needs to know.

“Goddamnit.”

“Dude, ask Derek to help. He can probably do it in his sleep.”

Which, yes that’s probably true, but Stiles suspects that he might explode if he gets that close to Derek tonight. He hasn’t been able to stop thinking about Derek before going to bed, or in the shower, or when trying to study. Still, it’s not like he can go to a fancy dinner without a tie.

“I guess I’ll have to,” he sighs and slides his phone and key into his pocket. “I don’t know when I’ll be back.”

Scott waves at him dismissively. “Don’t worry about it. I found this really awesome TV show on Netflix, and I’m only on episode four, and there are three seasons.”

Snorting, Stiles heads to the door. “I’m assuming you’ll still be up when I get home.”

“You bet!” Scott calls after him.

Just as he steps outside the building, a sleek limousine pulls up to the sidewalk, and Stiles’ pulse immediately quickens. He clutches the tie tighter in his hand, and reaches for the door just as it opens for him from inside.

“Hey,” he says, sliding in next to Derek, who looks… dear god. He’s wearing a dark suit and a waistcoat, with his hair pushed back. He hasn’t shaved, and it takes everything Stiles has to not rub his palms over the dark shade of stubble. The way he gives Stiles a slow once-over makes goosebumps break out all over his skin. Stiles swallows as Derek’s eyes lock on the tie in his hand. “Help?” he tries.

Expecting Derek to roll his eyes and just get it done, the smile that he gets instead takes his breath away. Derek shakes his head a little, still smiling, and takes the tie from Stiles’ hand.

“Turn towards me,” he says and Stiles twists in his seat before he’s able to think.

He wants to close his eyes as Derek folds up his collar, but instead he can’t help himself from watching Derek’s face as he reaches up to drape the tie around his neck. Or how dark his lashes are against the pale colour of his eyes. Yes, Derek clearly knows what he’s doing, because it only takes a moment of quiet concentration before he tightens the tie around Stiles’ neck. Stiles swallows heavily when Derek folds down his collar again, dragging a thumb against the skin of his throat. The way Derek meets his gaze when he does, makes it impossible for Stiles to convince himself that it’s
by accident.

“You look nice,” he says, just to break the suffocating silence.

“So do you.” Derek smooths the lapel to Stiles’ suit with his palm, before retracting his hand and creating some distance between them. “I’m glad that you wanted to come with me.”

And, naturally, Stiles has to ruin everything by letting his mouth try to lighten the mood without his brain’s permission. “Well, there’s free food, right?”

With a snort, Derek shakes his head and turns forward in his seat. “Of course.”

But something has changed, and yet everything is the same. Derek still keeps a hand on the small of his back, like he always does when they are attending an event. Tonight, however, his hand stays even as they get inside, and he’s so close to Stiles in a way that Stiles can’t remember him ever being before. It’s not like he minds. Quite the opposite, actually.

Despite the crazy crowd of people mingling before the dinner, Stiles feels relaxed and oddly at ease.
He even strikes up conversation on his own with a few people who approach them to shake Derek’s hand.

“It’s time to find our seats,” Derek tells him a while later.

Stiles lets him guide them both through the sea of people, and someone points them in the right direction. The room is softly lit, with decorations and white tablecloths, and there’s a stage, too.

“What’s that for?” Stiles asks, leaning close enough so that Derek will be able to hear him.

“Speeches and auctioning.” Derek nods towards a table close to the stage. “That’s us.”

They wait as everyone finds their seat before sitting down, and Stiles listens to Derek conversing with the others around their table. It’s mostly business, and Stiles can’t really participate. But then the man next to Stiles asks him what he does for a living. He thinks about lying for a second, but it’s not like he can pull off anything but the truth in a company like this. Well, a part of the truth. To his surprise, the man lights up when Stiles tells him his major, and it’s interesting enough to create conversation for fifteen minutes until someone squeezes his thigh under the table.

Looking up, Stiles finds Derek giving him a pointed glance. The next moment, he realises that there is a waiter holding two bottles beside him, with an expectant look on his face.

“Uh, sorry?”

“Would you like red or white wine, sir?” the waiter asks.

Stiles glances at Derek’s glass. “White, thank you.”

As soon as his glass is filled, and the waiter has moved on, Stiles turns to Derek with a grimace. “Sorry.”

“What for?”

“I got so caught up in conversation.”

“That happens to everyone. At least two people have already knocked their glasses over.”

Stiles doesn’t look to check, but he doubts that. “You’re just trying to make me feel better.”

“Yes,” Derek admits. “But I’m not lying.”

Stiles can’t help but smile, and just as he realises that Derek’s hand is still on his thigh, the appetisers arrive and he wants to hold a funeral when Derek has to pull his hand away.

Remembering Jackson’s advice, Stiles looks down at the cutlery. From the outside in. When he glances to his side after everyone’s been served, he notices Derek very deliberately picking up the smallest fork. Stiles shifts in his seat, to get rid of the pinch in his chest.

He forgets to put his cutlery down while chewing a couple of times, but he keeps himself from eating during speeches, at least. Considering that a man drops his entire plate on the floor, and a woman spills her wine all over her dress, Stiles feels like he’s made a pretty solid performance.

He leans close to Derek when a woman walks up on stage. Her dress makes him think of the Oscars. She’s definitely over-dressed compared to everyone else.

“What’s happening now?”
He doesn’t miss the fact that Derek scoots his chair closer to him.

“Auctions.”

“What can you bid on?”

Derek shrugs at that. “Anything.”

“Are you going to bid?”

“Yes, it’s for charity.” Derek says it like it’s a given. Well, it probably is for him.

Stiles somehow expected antique furniture, or a mirror old enough to summon ghosts, but all he gets is a cottage weekend trip to the mountains in Colorado, and stuff from someone’s jewelry collection that they have donated for the event. It’s a slow process, and after forty minutes, Stiles has taken to googling everything he sees on stage.

“Don’t bid on that,” Stiles whispers, when some TV chef’s knife collection is up for bidding.

Derek turns slightly towards him. “Why not?”

“Because I read the reviews online, and apparently they suck.”

Bringing his hand to his mouth, Derek conceals a laugh with a really fake cough. After that, Stiles can’t stop quoting reviews every time a new item is brought on stage, and at one point Derek has to hide his face in his hands to cover his grin.

The next item consists of five comic first editions. Stiles puts his phone in his pocket. Mainly because one of them is the very comic where Spider-Man makes his first appearance.

“No bad reviews for these?” Derek asks him.

Stiles scoffs. Like that would ever happen. “No.”

“Comic book fan?”

Nodding, Stiles mutely follows the bidding between two older men and wishes he had enough money to throw away on this. Clearly, the people here have no clue how much first edition comics of this kind are worth. The bids are ridiculously low.

His soul dies a little, when the auctioneer raises the club. “Going once, going twice…”

Out of the corner of his eye, he catches Derek raising his hand.

“What are you doing?” Stiles whispers.

“Bidding,” Derek tells him, and raises his hand again, when one of the men bids against him.

Stiles just watches with the odd sense of being in a different room, or even a different universe. The other man gives up quickly, and Stiles holds his breath as the auctioneer counts down and bangs the club against the stand.

“You won,” he whispers. “Do you even like comics?”

Derek turns towards him, and there’s a triumphant shine to his eyes that makes Stiles suspect that he’s a very competitive person. “No, but I got the impression that they would be worth bidding on.”
His stomach surges as that, and then he can’t stop himself from grinning. *Derek won.* Maybe Stiles can get a chance to look at them, before they’re sold off to a collector somewhere.

Derek bids on a few other things after that. It’s champagne and one of those cottage weekends, but to the Adirondacks this time. Stiles doesn’t really care. It’s not because of the comics, but because Derek’s hand is back on his thigh and Stiles really doesn’t want him to pull it away. Maybe it’s for show. But maybe it isn’t. Stiles can’t stop thinking about the way Derek touched him after helping him with the tie. No one was in the backseat with them. *That wasn’t for anyone but them.*

Taking a slow breath, Stiles glances at Derek. He’s concentrating on the lady speaking on stage, with that serious look on his face he gets whenever he’s focusing. Stiles looks at the sharp line of his jaw, the width of his shoulders, and the slight downward turn of his mouth. It’s deceiving. Stiles knows Derek’s smile by now. It’s rare, but it can light up an entire room and that small space between Stiles’ ribs. Stiles gets the impression that Derek doesn’t get to smile that often.

Before he can think too much about it, Stiles slides his hand down to graze his fingers over the back of Derek’s hand. He watches as Derek’s focus on the lady on stage immediately shatters, and he can’t help but smile when Derek turns to look at him.

It takes a moment, where Derek just meets his gaze, before he smiles back and turns his attention back to the end speech.

Stiles wants him so bad.

“Let’s get you home,” Derek tells him an hour later, when they’re on their way to the car. His hand is on Stiles’ back again, but the pressure of it is more prominent now, rather than the barely-there touch it used to be.

Stiles’ heart is beating fast in his chest as he gets in the car. The tension between them is suffocating, and it seems to get even worse when Derek slides in beside him and closes the door. Stiles doesn’t want to go home. He wants to go with Derek, to spend another night at his place, not just sleeping and definitely not on the couch.

Feeling as though he should say something, his palms itching, Stiles turns a little in his seat and opens his mouth. He closes it again when he finds Derek looking at him.

“I know this isn’t something I should ask,” Derek begins and he sounds uncertain, despite the determination in his eyes. “But I would really like–”

“–Yes,” Stiles interrupts. He doesn’t care what it is.

“–to kiss you,” Derek finishes, mouth tugging upwards.

“Yes,” Stiles says again.

Derek is still looking at him, eyes smiling, when Stiles leans in and closes the few inches between them. Derek’s lips are surprisingly soft against his, and Stiles can’t remember ever being kissed like this. Derek is gentle, cupping his jaw with his hand, kissing him so slowly, like it’s worth all the time they have.

Stiles has been thinking about this for so long, but in his mind it would be something filled with need and maybe a little rough. Not with the care that Derek is kissing him with now, being gentle but sure. Not like Derek is determined to remember every second of it.

Not like this.
Stiles aches when Derek pulls away. He has no clue how long they have been kissing, or if his heart has collapsed on itself yet.

“This is you,” Derek tells him, and Stiles blinks as reality crashes in on them.

“Oh.” He scrambles to get control over his limbs and reaches for the door. “Thanks. For tonight and, uh, driving me home.”

He’s able to stumble out of the car, all body parts still intact, with the exception of his swollen lips.

“See you,” he says, just before he closes the car door. And maybe he should have said something more. Something more coherent, but he doesn’t realise that until he’s already halfway up the stairs to his apartment.

Scott is still on the couch when Stiles gets through the door. It looks like he hasn’t moved since Stiles left, except for the several empty bags of snacks and three bottles of Coke on the coffee table. It’s not that bad, considering he’s been gone for almost six hours.

“Sup?” Scott greets him, pausing the show. “How was the evening?”

“It was good,” Stiles tells him, and he’s not even lying and then his mouth speaks without permission again. “Especially the end.”

Scott grins. “You look like you had a fun night.”

“I did,” Stiles agrees, trying not to touch his lips to see if they’re as swollen as they feel.

“He should have come up with you. I would’ve totally continued to watch on the tiny screen on my phone in my room for you, dude.”

If that isn’t the most generous thing Stiles has ever heard.

“He needed to work,” Stiles says, because it’s probably true. “But I’ll let him know.”

Having Derek in his bed would be an amazing thing, he’s sure. Derek probably wouldn’t think the same thing about Stiles’ bed, though.

His phone buzzes with a text in his pocket, and Stiles’ chest swells a little with the suspicion of who it’s from and what it’s going to say.

“Don’t stay up too late,” he tells Scott, before going to his room.

“I just won’t go to bed!” Scott calls after him, and a moment later Stiles can hear the sounds from the show again. Stiles barely pays any attention to it as he pulls his phone from his pocket.

> Thank you for tonight.

< I had a good time!

Stiles doesn’t think good time covers it, exactly, but he is pretty sure that Derek gets it.

> So did I.

Digging his fingers into his thigh, Stiles grins to himself. He has no clue what to reply to that. There probably isn’t need of a reply, either. As he undresses, he thinks of Derek tonight. Not just the way he looked, but the way he looked at Stiles. Stiles isn’t sure anyone has ever looked at him like that.
Sucking in a breath, he slips under the covers, and sighs at how cool they feel against his skin. His heart speeds up every time he replays the kiss in his mind, and he can’t stop himself from pressing his face into a pillow and grin.

Derek kissed him. He kissed Derek. Because he wanted to.

The following morning, a sneaky voice of worry starts whispering in his ear. What if Derek regrets kissing him? What if he had more to drink than Stiles remembers, and wasn’t aware of what he was doing?

He spends most of the day studying. There’s no word from Derek. That’s nothing unusual, since Derek tends to text him after an event or to give him information about an upcoming one. Still, it bothers Stiles more than he likes to admit.

< Hey, how’s your Sunday?

He makes enough dinner for both him and Scott, and eats it, without getting a reply. He has another final tomorrow, and he really doesn’t want to have to worry about this.

“When are you heading to Beacon Hills for Christmas?” Scott asks him around a mouthful of spaghetti.

“Saturday afternoon.” Normally Stiles wouldn’t think travel day could come fast enough, but right now, it’s not nearly as appealing leaving New York behind when he hasn’t sorted things out with Derek. “You?”

“The evening after my last final.” Scott grimaces. “It’s gonna suck to stress from one thing to the other, but I really wanna see my mom.”

Nodding, Stiles ignores the heavy weight settling in his stomach. He shouldn’t be anything but happy about going home either.

He tries not to think about that too much as he cleans the dishes and puts them back in the cabinets after dinner. Scott is quiet on the couch, completely immersed in that TV show he’s watching.

“I’m going to bed,” he tells Scott a little while later, who’s halfway through season two. He suspects that Scott knows that something is up, because he’s left Stiles alone for most of the day without questions.

Scott looks up from the screen. “Crossing my fingers for you tomorrow.”

“Thanks. Only two left.”

Stiles tosses and turns for a while, before he’s able to find a comfortable position. Deciding that he doesn’t want to think about the fact that Derek still hasn’t replied, and that sleep is way more important, he closes his eyes and goes over the key points to diversity management again. Just as he’s about to drift off, his phone buzzes on the chair he uses as a bedside table, and just like that he’s wide awake again.

> Apologies for the late reply. There is still a crisis with a client. Good luck on your test tomorrow.

Stiles doesn’t quite buy the crisis explanation. He doesn’t doubt that there is one, but Derek is usually pretty great at making time for replying to Stiles’ texts. Heaving a sigh, Stiles decides to save replying until after his test tomorrow. He has other things to worry about. If Derek regrets the kiss,
Stiles can pretend like it never happened.

Since everything always seems to come crashing down at the same time, Stiles shouldn’t be surprised by the fact that there are two out of five questions that he isn’t even sure that he understands. He didn’t study enough. He got sidetracked. He never should have agreed to attend the dinner with Derek. He shouldn’t have offered.

He wants to run out of there, but he stays the entire time and writes down everything he can think of. When he finally hands his test in, and is allowed to leave, he wants to bury himself under the blankets in his bed and not talk to anyone for a year.

“How did it go?”

Stiles turns around as Danny catches up to him outside.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Stiles answers truthfully, and doesn’t feel the least bit better when Danny squeezes his shoulder.

“When’s your last one? Mine’s on Thursday and it sounds like we need to get a group together and get really drunk.”

“Tomorrow.” Stiles sighs. “Yeah, I’d like that.”

“How did it go?”

Danny points and...
around the house. On the other hand, taking the test tomorrow while hungover will not increase his chances.

He’s tired around nine, and decides to go to bed early after leaving a note for Scott with an apology for being a bad friend and information about the chocolate cake and cinnamon rolls.

When he’s about to set the alarm for tomorrow morning, he finds that his phone has died. Plugging in the charger, Stiles hates himself for allowing a tiny spark of hope to light. The moments he has to wait for his phone to come alive again tick by painfully slow. He prepares himself for the worst: no texts or voice messages, no nothing. Then, his phone lights up again and Stiles holds his breath as it starts connecting to the real world. Just as he is about to give up, it buzzes with incoming text messages. Two, in fact.

The first one is from Scott, and it’s sent around lunch, letting him know that he will be home late because of group studies. The second one is from Derek. A part of him is relieved just because there is a text. The other part of him is disappointed, because it was sent to him three hours ago. Meaning Derek hasn’t had, or made time to get back to him all day.

> **Did you really flunk, or are you just stressing over it not going as planned?**

He doesn’t know what to think. Either the crisis at Derek’s work really is a crisis, or he’s avoiding Stiles. It could possibly be a combination of both. Maybe Derek remembered that Stiles is a prostitute, and what the hell would a guy like him want a prostitute for? Stiles pretends like it doesn’t hurt to think of himself in that way. He needs a reality check. Either way, this can’t go on. He will give Derek another couple of days to see if things change, and then he will have to say something. He will have to ask.

It makes him feel better to have a plan of action, and he feels less despondent and more determined as he sets the alarm for tomorrow.

The test goes游泳. Stiles feels like he’s going to exceed all expectations, considering that his knowledge about the subject is more in depth than the course itself. And maybe his good mood has spread to the rest of the universe, because when he exits the room, he has a text from Derek waiting for him.

> **Hoping today’s test went better than yesterday’s.**

There’s not much Stiles can reply to. He is used to being the one pushing the conversation when they’re texting, but he isn’t exactly feeling like it today. It’s possible that he’s feeling a little hurt over the fact that Derek doesn’t seem to be as into him now as he was on Saturday. It’s not very mature.

< **It did, thanks**

At least there’s a really happy and grateful note from Scott on the kitchen counter waiting for him as he gets home. Apparently the cake and cinnamon rolls were a hit, because there is barely anything left of them. Stiles rewards himself with a slice of cake and a roll, just to celebrate that his finals are done.

Blinking, Stiles lets that sink in. He’s done. This semester is over. Finally. Even if he flunked one of the tests, he made it through and there is always hope, isn’t there? In a week and a half, he’ll be home with his dad. He hasn’t spoken to his dad in forever, he realises. A couple of texts here and there, and a short phone call.

Suddenly, his chest aches with how much he misses his dad, and Stiles decides to call him.
“Hey,” he says quietly, voice small, when his dad answers the call. “It’s me.”

There is a beat of silence. “What’s wrong?”

Swallowing fiercely, Stiles kind of wants to explain everything, but he knows that he can’t. “I just finished my finals, and I think I flunked one.”

It’s true, and to be fair, that is one of his bigger concerns right now.

He can hear his dad take a breath on the other end. “Are you sure, or is this your brain getting the best of you again?”

Hugging his knees to his chest, Stiles chews his lip. “I’m not sure. It didn’t go as well as I thought it would.”

“Depending on how well you thought it would go, that doesn’t necessarily mean that you flunked it,” his dad points out, and a sense of calm slowly sinks through him. It’s this weird super power that his dad has always had. Being reasonable and calming where Stiles sometimes riles himself up over the smallest things.

“That’s true,” he admits.

“So, how well had you counted on this test going?”

“I thought I was going to ace it.”

His dad hums thoughtfully. “And how did it actually go?”

“Well, I don’t know about two of the questions. The others I’m kind of confident in.”

“And how many questions were there in total?”

“Five.”

“Well,” his dad says. “That means that you should at least have about sixty percent. Knowing you, it’s most likely a lot more than that. Don’t stress over this, son. There’s nothing you can do to change it now anyway.”

That’s true, Stiles thinks. “I miss you,” he says instead of replying.

“You’ll be home in no time, kiddo. The flight’s on Saturday, right?” There is a beat of silence. “I miss you too.”

They talk until his dad has to head to work. Working, even though it’s still just part-time, is good for him. Even though his injury is still affecting him, Stiles tells himself that his dad is getting better day by day just from feeling important at work. Hopefully he will be back to working full-time again sooner rather than later.

Stiles sleeps well that night, despite not having heard from Derek. He spends the next day and a half doing absolutely nothing, except for eating junk food and watching TV shows he hasn’t had time to catch up on.

Around four p.m. on Thursday, Stiles remembers promising Danny to have a drink and that he was supposed to ask Scott if he wanted to come with them. He’s not in the mood for getting drunk, but he knows that he’s risking feeling really sorry for himself tonight. Especially if there is still no word from Derek.
Sighing, Stiles sends a text to Scott encouraging him to meet up with them at the bar at seven. Then, he goes to his closet to find something to wear. There are two sections: his clothes, and the ones Derek has bought him. He considers wearing slacks and a nice shirt from the bunch of clothes he’s worn to events, but it’s not him, and he doesn’t want to feel like he’s working. Instead, he goes for a pair of his better jeans and a simple t-shirt. He wants to be himself tonight.

Scott replies when Stiles is on the subway, letting him know that he will be there, but an hour late, because of an evening class final. Danny is already there, when Stiles arrives. There are two other people from class with him. Stiles doesn’t know them, but he thinks their names are Mason and Liam. They always sit together in class and somehow manage to end up in the same groups.

“You made it!” Danny exclaims. He must have had a few beers already.

“Wouldn’t want to miss this,” Stiles assures him. “I’ve been looking forward to this since Tuesday.”

“This round is on me.” Mason grins and leaves them. And for the first time, maybe ever, Stiles isn’t anxious when it’s his time to buy the rounds.

“We need to set rules,” Liam states when Mason comes back. “No talk about finals or anything else that will give me a mental breakdown.”

“Cheers to that,” Stiles snorts and raises his glass, and Danny smiles so wide that his dimples show.

“I don’t remember the last time you came out with us,” he says, and Stiles thinks that that means that he’s happy that Stiles is here today.

“I’ve been so busy with trying to puzzle my life together, you know,” he says honestly. “Work and school, and stuff.”

“I feel you on that,” Liam mutters. “I have two jobs.”

Stiles remembers what that was like, running from one coffee shop to a fast food place, and then somehow managing to get studying into the picture. Right now, though, he thinks that that might still be easier than this weird thing he’s doing with Derek. Pushing the thought of Derek away, Stiles downs the last of his beer.

It doesn’t take him long to get buzzed. He shouldn’t be surprised, considering how long it’s been since he drank for the sake of drinking. He’s grateful for the way the alcohol makes him forget everything he has been thinking about lately, and how the thing with Derek doesn’t seem as important now as it did earlier today. He’s laughing so much that his stomach aches, and when Scott shows up looking kind of tired, he’s having the time of his life.

“Sorry I’m late,” Scott tells them, after shaking hands and introducing himself. “I got caught up. Allison called.”

“How is she doing?” Stiles asks, only now realising that he hasn’t seen her in a while.

“She’s good. Stressing over finals and stuff, obviously, but she has her last one tomorrow.” Scott gets them a new round, and makes Stiles come with him to help him carry the glasses.

“How’s Derek?” he asks, and Stiles knows that he’s trying to be nice and considerate, but he really doesn’t want to open that box tonight.

“Uh,” he says, alcohol making his brain too slow to come up with something. “It’s weird.”
“Aw no, why?” Scott looks like it’s *his* relationship that’s being completely messed up. As far as Scott knows, Stiles and Derek are *something*. “You were so happy after that dinner you guys went to on Saturday.”

Stiles grimaces. It’s true. Tonight he’s laughing and having a really great time, but Saturday was the first time in so long that he felt so *alive*. “He tells me that he’s having a crisis at work, but I don’t think that’s reason enough to not talk to me.”

“He’s not talking to you?”

“I mean, he is. He replies to my texts and stuff, it’s just that it now takes him six hours instead of twenty minutes, like it used to before.” Sighing, Stiles grabs two beers when the bartender hands them over.

“Have you talked to him?”

“No.” He will, though. He said he would give Derek a few more days to see if things change, but they haven’t. “I should, shouldn’t I?”

“Yeah, dude, he needs to get a grip,” Scott says, as they reach the table.

Stiles smiles despite himself. “I’ll tell him that.”

“Tell who what?” Danny asks.

Stiles is just about to brush it off, when Scott pipes up. “Stiles is seeing this guy who spends too much time at work and not enough time with him.”

“Why didn’t I know about you seeing someone?” Danny is way too curious for his own good.

“It’s kind of new.”

“It’s not,” Scott argues. “It was new when I moved in. It’s not *new*.”

“Fine.” Stiles sips his glass. “We don’t really...know what we are, yet.”

“Why’s that?” Mason asks, because *of course* everyone needs to be involved in this conversation.

“He works a lot. We don’t get to see each other that much.” *He’s paying me for my company and I really want to sleep with him.*

Danny shakes his head in disapproval. “Where is he now?”


“You’re not sure?” Liam asks.

“I’m assuming. He’s been working late—” He corrects himself when Scott scoffs at that. “—*later* than usual this past week.”

“Call him,” Mason suggests. “Tell him that you guys need to talk about it.”

“Yes,” Liam agrees. “This obviously isn’t working for you.”

“I probably will later.” Stiles tries to end the topic, but they keep insisting.
“You should do it right away, or you’ll start telling yourself that you’re imagining things, and that it’s not as bad as you think it is.” Mason has this look on his face that makes Stiles suspect that he’s speaking from experience.

Pulling his phone out of his pocket, Stiles notices that he has a text from Derek waiting for him. It was sent hours ago.

> I hope that you’re enjoying your days without having to think about school.

It’s the weirdest text, Stiles decides. Or maybe that’s the beer deciding for him.

< We need to talk, is all he sends.

To his surprise, he gets a reply with his phone still in his hand, and that makes him even more annoyed. Apparently Derek isn’t too busy now.

> About what?

< You know about what

When Stiles looks up, he finds that the rest of them have moved on to a different conversation. When he looks down at his phone again, he finds the bubble with the three dots in the bottom left corner. He is oddly pleased with himself, for making Derek pay him attention.

> Okay. Let’s talk over lunch next week.

< Why not now?

Because why not now? Stiles knows himself. If he gets too much time to think about this, he will either back out and just leave for California and not talk to Derek ever again, or he will make this into a much bigger thing than it has to be. He just wants some answers.

> Now is not a good time. I am very busy at work.

< You’re always busy with work

> I did tell you about the crisis with a client.

< Well, you clearly have time to reply to me now

> You seem upset.

< I’m not upset. I’m super confused and I think I have the right to be

Stiles wants to glare, but there isn’t anyone here he can direct his annoyance towards.

“You don’t look too happy. What did he say?” Scott asks.

“He says that he doesn’t have time to talk about it, because there’s a crisis at work.”

“That’s bullshit,” Liam states.

Stiles knows that it isn’t bullshit. Derek has a demanding job. It’s just that it seems a little too convenient that there is a crisis with a client preventing him from having much contact with Stiles after what happened on Saturday. Stiles just wants to get some answers, and most of all, he wants to
kiss Derek again.

“Is he working now?” Danny asks, looking down on his wrist watch with a frown. “It’s eleven.”

“Yeah.” Stiles nods, sighing. “Eleven isn’t that unusual for him. I don’t know how he’s still alive, because he gets up at five-thirty.”

Mason sits up straight in his seat, suddenly. “Go there.”

“Where?”

“To where he works. Sometimes you just need to talk to people face to face. Sometimes it’s for the best, even though it’s a hard thing to do.”

Stiles shakes his head. “I can’t do that. That’s not okay.”

Danny cocks his head to the side. “Maybe tell him that you’re coming to his office to talk right now. If he doesn’t want to do it, he’ll have time to leave or tell you so. Maybe he just needs a push.”

“He definitely needs a push,” Scott agrees.

Stiles wants to argue. No, Stiles knows he should argue, but he doesn’t want to. “Okay.”

He fishes his phone from his pocket again, while the rest of them toasts, and sends a new text.

< I’m heading to your office because we need to talk. If you don’t want to you should either leave or let me know now

Then he gathers his things, and climbs over Scott in their booth. “Sorry for leaving early.”

“It’s fine,” Danny tells him. “We’ll do this again sometime soon, and maybe you won’t have so much to think about then.”

Scott reaches out to squeeze his arm. “Good luck. Let me know how it goes.”

Stiles hails a cab outside, with his heart in his throat and his phone in a tight grip. He needs to know if Derek replies. Staring out the window, Stiles is barely able to make out the full moon through the clouds. It’s cold outside, being early December and all, and he’s shivering in his jacket as he gets out of the cab outside Derek’s office building. For a moment, he thinks that he won’t be able to get in, but much to his surprise, George is standing behind the counter.

“Good evening, Mr. Stilinski,” he greets. “Here to see Mr. Hale?”

“Can I?” Stiles asks, because it’s not like he’s going to jump the barrier.

George nods. “Certainly. He let me know that you were on your way.”

His chest seizes at that. Derek is waiting for him. He stalls. “Are you working twenty-four-seven?”

“Night shift today, Mr. Stilinski. Next week, I work the day shift.”

“Maybe they should close this place up after ten p.m.,” Stiles suggests.

“Mr. Hale never leaves before then, unless he has a meeting.”

Or unless he has an event with Stiles. “Does he work weekends, too?”
“Almost always,” George tells him.

“I see.” Stiles clears his throat. “Well, I guess I better go see him, then.”

“Enjoy your night, Mr. Stilinski.”

When George lets him through, Stiles gets this nervous itch under his skin. Derek waiting for him is a good thing, because that means that he is okay with Stiles coming here. Derek waiting for him also means that Stiles doesn’t have any advantage, and he’s still slightly buzzed and after studying so much, his brain is fried.

He hums to himself in the elevator to keep his mind from derailing completely; otherwise, he’ll press the emergency stop button and go all the way down again. Derek’s floor is oddly empty. Stiles has only been here during the day when it’s filled with people. Tonight, the only light on is in Derek’s office and one further down the corridor.

He drags a hand along Isaac’s desk as he walks towards Derek’s office. His heartbeat is loud in his ears, and he’s worried that he will forget how to breathe.

A sense of calm comes over him as he reaches the glass door and sees Derek on the other side. His suit jacket is hanging over the back of his chair, and he has gotten rid of his tie. The sleeves to his button-up are rolled up, and he looks like he hasn’t slept since Stiles last saw him. His beard has grown a little longer, as though he’s forgotten to shave, or maybe hasn’t had the time, and he is reading something that is putting a frown on his face.

He looks up and spots Stiles, before Stiles even puts a hand on the handle. Leaning back in his chair, Derek motions for him to enter, and Stiles swallows before he pushes the door open.

“Hey,” he says and the piles of papers on Derek’s desk makes him suspect that this client crisis thing really does exist. Like full scale.

“Hi,” Derek replies. For once, he comes off as wary and a little closed off, and Stiles stops a few steps inside the door.

“This was a bad idea,” is all Stiles can come up with and shoves his hands in his pockets.

“Why’s that?”

“Because you’re busy.”

“You already knew that,” Derek tells him.

“I thought you were avoiding me.” He just puts it out there.

“Why would I avoid you?”

Stiles can’t help but roll his eyes at that.

“Have you been drinking?” Derek asks him next, changing the subject completely.

Shrugging non-committedly, Stiles shuffles his feet. “A little. Actually quite a bit, but it’s mostly worn off.”

He doesn’t look at Derek, instead he approaches the wall of windows on the other side of the room, behind where Derek is sitting. It makes him feel less exposed, somehow, to stand with his back against Derek and looking down on the street below. It’s different now, when it’s dark outside, and
with all the city lights.

“I thought you wanted to talk,” Derek says, and Stiles blinks back to reality.

“I did.” He locks his gaze on the flashing lights from a police car, and follows it for as long as he can. Not talking to Derek isn’t an option now. He can’t barge into Derek’s office and take up his time, and then not say anything. “I thought you were avoiding me,” he says again.

“And why would I do that?”

Taking a slow breath, Stiles tries to sort out his thoughts. “So, clearly you’ve been super busy and this crisis thing isn’t just something you told me to have an excuse not to talk to me as much.” He fiddles with a coin he finds in his pocket. “But I think we both know that you could have been more present if you had wanted to.”

The silence that follows is so long that Stiles has to fight the urge to just walk out of there and leave.

“You can’t just tell me that you want to kiss me, and then change your mind,” he whispers, when Derek doesn’t seem to have anything to say. When he hears Derek get up from his chair, a shiver runs down his spine.

“I didn’t change my mind,” he says, voice soft.

Stiles presses his fingertips against the cold surface of the glass and tries to stop his heart from escaping his chest. “Okay.”

Derek steps closer then, and when he places a hand on Stiles’ waist, his entire abdomen contracts so hard that he can’t remember how to breathe.

“I’m sorry for being absent. I’m sorry for not asking more about your tests.” There’s a moment of silence. “Thank you for coming here now, to talk to me.”

Stiles closes his eyes when Derek’s hand on his waist tightens as he steps closer. “Okay. Just don’t do it again.”

“Okay,” Derek echoes, and when he nudges Stiles to turn around, he goes willingly.

As he opens his eyes, he finds Derek so close to him, and even though he still looks exhausted, there’s a fire in his eyes.

“Can I kiss you again?” he asks.

“Yeah.” Stiles breathes.

This time, it’s more like Stiles imagined their first kiss to be. It’s a little rough from the start. Derek pulls him closer by the waist, and Stiles grips the soft fabric of Derek’s shirt with one hand and tangles the other in the hair at the nape of Derek’s neck. It’s like Stiles’ body lets out a breath he didn’t know he was holding.

Derek’s lips are borderline harsh against his, and that’s exactly what Stiles wants right now. What he needs. Stiles can barely comprehend the fact that he’s touching Derek. Really touching him. And his hair is soft beneath his fingers, such a contrast to the way his stubble grazes Stiles’ chin.

It’s not going to end with just making out.

Stiles grabs the front of Derek’s shirt, pulling him closer, and groans when Derek’s hand slides from
his waist to his ass, pressing their bodies together.

“Oh god,” he breathes, as Derek’s lips leave his mouth for his jaw, and then the soft spot just below his ear.

Derek is hard against him. Stiles can feel it through their clothes, and he’s sure that Derek can feel him being just as into this. He’s leaking, and has lost sense of time. He has no clue if it has been two minutes, or twenty. Considering the force of his heartbeat, it might be closer to the latter, but with the way Derek’s teeth graze his skin, Stiles can’t really tell.

Sliding a hand down Derek’s chest and stomach, Stiles cups him through his pants. When Derek stops, Stiles’ heart does, too. His hand is still between them when Derek pulls back enough to look him in the eye. He’s out of breath, lips swollen and hair completely in disarray. He has never been more attractive to Stiles than he is now.

“Are you sure about this?” Derek asks him.

Stiles’ heart remembers how to beat again. “Yes.”

“Are you feeling the alcohol?”

Licking his lips, Stiles shakes his head. “No. Sobered up pretty quickly on the way here.”

“Okay.” Derek inches closer again, pressing into Stiles’ hand. “Take your jacket off.”

Stiles has a difficult time complying, because he has one hand caught between them, and Derek is kissing his throat again.

“You’re making that pretty difficult,” he breathes, and bites his lip when he can feel Derek twitch in his pants. Much to his disappointment, Derek takes a step back, and watches him with an intense look in his eyes, when Stiles shrugs out of his jacket as fast as he can.

“That’s better.” He kisses Stiles hard for a long, long moment. Just as Stiles starts thinking that he might come in his pants from this alone, Derek pushes him lightly backwards with his hands on Stiles’ waist.

Sucking in a breath, Stiles shivers from the feeling of cold glass against his back, suddenly grateful that he’s still wearing his shirt. In the next moment, he forgets all about being cold, as Derek sinks to his knees in front of him.

He stares, body thrumming, as Derek leans in to press his mouth over the outline of Stiles’ dick through his jeans. Stiles gasps, feeling like he suddenly can't get enough oxygen. There’s something about the image of Derek, the way he radiates success and power, being on his knees in front of him, unbuttoning Stiles' pants with a greedy look in his eyes.

When Derek pushes his jeans and underwear down his thighs, Stiles fumbles against the glass behind him for something to hold onto, and finds nothing. Stiles’ body jerks as his bare ass makes contact with the cold glass behind him, and then he has to slap a hand over his mouth to keep quiet, because Derek swallows him down like he’s been waiting for too long.

Stiles squeezes his eyes shut, biting his knuckles and tries not to think about the fact that there might still be other people working late. He’s too close to coming already, even without the risk of getting caught.

“Fuck,” he groans, thumping back against the glass, when Derek pulls back and sucks on the head of
his dick, before sliding his tongue down the length to mouth at his balls. Stiles thinks he might be dripping, but all he can think about is where Derek’s mouth is on him, how his stubble grazes the sensitive skin at the inside of his thighs, and how he can’t spread his legs further because of his pants. His vision whites out for a moment when Derek takes him into his mouth again. The pressure in his belly is building so quickly that Stiles almost trips over the edge before he can pull himself back, and he blindly pushes at Derek’s shoulder.

“Derek,” he manages, and sucks in a breath of relief, when Derek pulls back. “I’m gonna come if you don’t stop.”

“Go ahead,” Derek says, voice rough in a way that makes Stiles shudder.

Stiles pushes him away when he leans in to take Stiles’ dick in his mouth again. For a moment, he has no idea what to say, but his body aches and he doesn’t remember the last time he wanted someone this bad. If ever.

“I need you to fuck me,” he breathes finally, and the way Derek stills at his words makes him close his eyes.

He trembles slightly when Derek gets to his feet in front of him, and then kisses him hard.

“Turn around,” Derek says finally.

Stiles has no clue how he manages to turn around without killing either of them, but the next second, he’s resting his forehead against the cold glass, watching the fog of his quick breathing dance across the surface. He blinks, trying to pull himself together, when he catches the reflection of Derek opening a drawer in his desk.

“Do you always keep lube and condoms in your office?” Stiles asks, ignoring the sting between his ribs when he recognises the items Derek is placing on the desk.

“Not exactly,” Derek says, his voice low, as he steps closer and kisses Stiles’ neck. “Only since Saturday.”

Stiles shudders when Derek’s hand slips down to caress his ass, slowly sliding a couple of fingers between the cheeks, and then down, down. Stiles squeezes his eyes shut, biting his lip, as Derek presses the pads of his fingers against his hole, not pushing in, but just keeping them there. Stiles presses his hands against the glass to keep himself from arching his back and pushing back against them.

“Derek,” he whispers, whines. “Come on.”

He expects Derek to tease him, hold out on him, make him beg for it, but Derek pulls his hand back almost immediately. Stiles watches his somewhat foggy reflection as he grabs the lube. There’s a part of him that knows that he should feel exposed from standing here, with his pants down his thighs in Derek’s office, leaning against a window. If he weren’t on the sixty-fifth floor, anyone would be able to see him. He shivers as he remembers that there might still be other people here, and then because Derek presses up against him again. Covering his neck in slow, gentle kisses, and all Stiles can think of is how much he wants him. How he aches.

Arching his back, he watches Derek’s face in the reflection, loving the way his gaze instantly locks on Stiles’ ass and the way he swallows. This time, Derek’s fingers are slick with lube when they slowly rub over his hole. And Stiles’ body is on fire.

He loses track of time, then. All he knows is Derek’s fingers: first one, then two, and that he needs to
beg twice to get a third. He’s sweating, legs shaking, but Derek’s hand on his waist keeps him safe and steady.

“Derek,” he groans, pressing back against Derek’s fingers. He wants to stroke himself so badly, but he’s going to come if he does. “Fuck me.”

He can feel the exhale of Derek’s breath against the back of his neck, and just barely catches the little sound he lets out, over the pounding of his own heartbeat. He winces when Derek pulls his fingers out, but catching Derek unzipping his pants in the reflection makes him forget about feeling empty.

Derek doesn’t push his pants down. He just tugs the front of his underwear down enough to free his dick, and Stiles is so caught up in admiring the sight of it, that he forgets all about asking Derek to use a condom, until Derek rips a packet open with his teeth.

Derek presses up against his back then, and Stiles twists his neck, craving a kiss, as Derek’s dick presses against his ass. The kiss is so soft, taking Stiles by surprise, and in that moment he’s fine just where he is. As soon as Derek breaks the kiss, however, the burning need is back.

“Ready?” Derek asks him, lips grazing the shell of his ear.

Nodding, Stiles closes his eyes, steeling himself for the pain he knows is about to come, as he feels the press of Derek’s dick.

“Arch a little for me,” Derek murmurs between pressing kisses to Stiles’ neck and shoulder. One of his hands is gently guiding Stiles’ hips back when he complies, the other is slowly stroking up and down his side beneath his t-shirt. “There you go.”

Derek presses his face against Stiles’s shoulder as he slowly pushes in, and where he has always known pain before, there is just a slight burn that makes his body crawl in anticipation.

“Shit,” Stiles breathes, and then Derek pulls out slightly, only to push in again just as slowly as before. And Stiles can’t think about anything but the way he’s on fire. He presses back as Derek pushes into him, fingers splayed over the cold surface of the glass, instantly missing the feel of Derek inside him when he pulls back again.

“Stiles,” Derek groans, forcing Stiles to open his eyes to watch Derek’s reflection. He’s sweating, his hair a mess, and there’s a look on his face that makes Stiles’ body arch into him, like he’s been starving for this. He goes slow and deep, and it doesn’t take long before Stiles can’t keep quiet anymore.

“Come on,” he begs, reaching back and grabbing at Derek’s thigh in an attempt to make him go faster. “Please.”

A rush of excitement runs down his spine, when Derek puts a hand on the window, and the grip around Stiles’ hip tightens. A second later, Stiles loses all comprehension, and all he can think of is how Derek picks up the pace and ruthlessly drives him towards the edge. The sounds Derek lets out every time he pushes back in makes Stiles bite his lip and arch his back further. He forces his eyes open, and for a disoriented second, Derek’s eyes look red from the streetlights outside. The next moment, Derek gets the angle just right, and Stiles can’t hold back anymore.

He reaches down, stroking himself once, twice and then his entire body seizes, as he comes against the window. Shaking, he barely even registers when Derek comes, but the low, desperate sound he lets out makes Stiles wish he could come again.
“Oh my god,” he whispers, when he’s finally able to open his eyes again. Derek is still pressed against his back, panting heavily. “I really hope that you’re the only one left on this floor.”

Derek makes a noise that sounds like a laugh. “If I wasn’t before, I probably am now.”

Hiding his face, Stiles groans, feeling his cheeks heat. He winces when Derek pulls out, and reaches down to pull his underwear and jeans back up.

“I can never come back here.”

“At least you’re not their boss,” Derek snorts, and Stiles looks up to see him toss the condom in the trash can.

“You can’t throw away that here,” he protests. “Whoever cleans this place will know what you do at
work.”

Smirking, Derek nods towards the window. “And you don’t think they will when they see that?”

Stiles wants to die when he sees the mess he’s left on the glass, and then grabs a handful of napkins from the box on Derek’s desk to wipe the worst off. There’s no way he’s able to remove the obvious hand prints, though.

Derek just smiles at him, shaking his head, when Stiles tries to hide the condom under the napkins in the trash can. When he straightens again, watching as Derek puts his suit jacket on and tying his tie around his neck, he feels lost. Now what?

As if Derek can sense his building anxiety, he grabs his phone from the desk. “I’ll get us a car.”

“To where?” The thought of his bed is so tempting, but he is also worried about tomorrow being a repetition of the last few days, where he isn’t sure if Derek is regretting this or not. He also wants to avoid Scott’s inevitable questions for as long as he can.

“Do you want to go home?” Derek asks.

“No,” Stiles says truthfully. “Can I come with you?”

He expects a plain yes in reply, not an almost-smile and: “I’d like that.”

The driver doesn’t comment on their appearance, but Stiles knows that it’s obvious. He saw himself in the mirrors in the elevator. He also caught George pointedly looking away when they left the building. He doesn’t care.

Bernard isn’t working tonight when they reach Derek’s building. He’s grateful for that, because despite the fact that he’s folded up the collar of his jacket, there are still obvious marks on his neck after Derek’s teeth. They will have faded in the morning, and Stiles really doesn’t mind them there, he just doesn’t want someone calling him Mr. Stiles to see him like this.

It’s strange entering Derek’s home together with him. It’s even more strange to get his mind around the fact that he is going to spend his night here, and that it won’t be by accident.

“Aren’t you cold?” Derek asks him, nodding at Stiles’ jacket.

It’s too thin for this time of year, he knows that, but he hasn’t had the time to go buy himself a new one because of finals.

“I haven’t really had enough brain capacity to think about it.” Stiles shrugs out of his jacket, and hangs it up on the clothes rack.

“I can relate to that,” Derek tells him and gets his phone from his pocket. “I need to make a few calls, and go over a few papers–”

Stiles’ heart sinks.

“–but feel free to take a shower and borrow clothes.”

“It’s the middle of the night.” Stiles tries his best not to sound hurt. He thinks he succeeds quite well. “Who’s going to answer when you call?”

“Most of my employees,” Derek says, as he tugs his tie over his head. “I’m not the only one who’s been working late this week.”
Right, crisis with a client. An actual crisis. “Yeah, that makes sense.”

Stiles tries to tell himself that he isn’t bothered by this, as he heads towards the en suite bathroom after watching Derek disappear into the study. To be fair, Derek was fine with him coming to the office to talk just a little more than an hour ago. Not that they talked that much, but since Derek apologised for being absent, Stiles probably shouldn’t hold this against him.

It’s nice to shower. His body is tired, soaking under the spray of hot water. He likes the feeling of his muscles straining as he moves, and how at peace he is now. He allows himself to enjoy the fact that he’s had sex with Derek, and that it was the best sex he can remember ever having.

After drying himself off with a towel, he hunts down a t-shirt and boxer briefs in Derek’s closet. He stands in Derek’s bedroom, eyeing the impressive size of his bed. It hits him that he has no idea if him staying here included staying in Derek’s bed, or just sleeping on the couch again.

Just as he’s about to grab a pillow and head for the couch, Derek comes in. He’s still talking on the phone, but when he sees Stiles hovering he says:

“Just a second,” to whomever he’s talking to, and then turns towards Stiles. “Go to bed. I’ll be with you as soon as I’ve had a shower.”

He disappears into the bathroom, and Stiles decides to do as he says. He pushes down the bedspread to the foot of the bed and runs a hand over the smooth fabric of the duvet. Just as he’s about to get in, he remembers Scott and the fact that he probably should let him know that things are okay.

After retrieving his phone from his jacket pocket, Stiles notices that there are several texts waiting for him. They are all from Scott, sent over the span of the last hour and a half.

> You can do this!!

> We’re all rooting for you!

> Hope things are going well! I’m assuming that you’re talking since you’re not back with us

> We’re leaving the bar jsyk! Let me know how things go!

Smiling, Stiles types out a quick reply.

< It went well! Thanks for making me go. I’m staying at Derek’s tonight but I’ll see you tomorrow

He puts his phone down on the bedside table and slides under the covers. He can hear the sound of water running in the bathroom, so Derek has probably finished talking on the phone.

It’s weird waiting for Derek. He isn’t even sure if he should stay awake, considering that he has no clue what they would talk about before going to sleep. Before he has the chance to get anxious about the whole thing, Derek exits the bathroom. He is wearing nothing but boxer briefs, and Stiles’ mouth goes dry. Derek’s body looks strong, with toned muscles and broad shoulders. Stiles’ fingers itch to touch the hair on his chest, and the trail disappearing into his underwear.

“Sorry,” Derek says, seemingly oblivious to Stiles’ staring. “I had to brief a few people before the morning meeting.”

“You have a meeting in the morning?”
“With the client,” Derek explains, as he puts his phone on the other bedside table. “Hopefully this will all be over tomorrow.”

Stiles watches him as he turns the lights out. Thanks to the huge windows and the full moon outside, the room doesn’t go fully dark. Stiles can still see him clearly, but it’s all in grayscale now.

A pinch of guilt tugs at him, as Derek looks really tired again.

“I’m sorry for not believing you with the crisis thing.”

The mattress dips a little as Derek gets under the covers. “Can’t exactly blame you. The timing was terrible.”

“What’s the crisis about, then?” he asks, unable to push away his curiosity.

“It’s confidential,” Derek says, but to Stiles’ surprise, he continues. “I’m sure you remember that Boston company we had some trouble with before.”

“The ones who tried to change the deal all the time?”

“Exactly.” Derek sighs heavily. “They’re now trying to sue us for breach of contract.”

“What?”

“It’s ridiculous. Our lawyers are meeting tomorrow, and I will be there. I just wanted to make sure that I have everything we need to make this go away.”

Stiles turns towards him, reaching out to graze his fingertips against Derek’s arm. “It will be okay,” he promises. “They’re the ones who didn’t cooperate to begin with. You even went there to make the deal with them, and they didn’t want to.”

With a sigh, Derek nods. “You’re right. By noon tomorrow, we’ll know.”

“It will be okay,” Stiles says again. “Either way, you should probably leave work after that meeting tomorrow and sleep for a week or so.”

“I have barely slept since last week,” Derek confesses.

“Yeah, I can tell.”

Derek snorts at that. “Thanks.”

Grinning, Stiles pokes him gently. “You should try and sleep.”

“I don’t think that will be a problem.” Derek turns towards him, propping an arm under his pillow. “Tell me about that test.”

“Which one?” Stiles shuffles under the covers.

“The one you claim to have failed.”

Sighing, Stiles scratches his cheek. He isn’t sure if he wants to talk about it, but the way Derek looks at him, like his finals are as important as this crisis he’s having with a client, makes him give in.

“It was my second to last one. I thought I was really prepared for it, but it didn’t go nearly as well as the others did.”
Derek nods, eyebrows drawn together. “How come?”

“I don’t know. There were two out of five questions that I’m not sure I even understood correctly,” Stiles says, pulling at the neck of the t-shirt he’s wearing.

“Perhaps you didn’t get the full score,” Derek tells him, eyeing him carefully. “But I’m confident that you did well. In comparison to your other tests, that all went really well as far as I understand, this might seem like a failure. Anything can be a failure in comparison to something else.”

Stiles diverts his gaze for a moment, allowing himself to think about Derek’s words. “I guess you’re right.”

“The most important point of it all is that there is no way for you to retake the test now, which means that you did your best.”

Stiles looks at him, then. Derek looks tired, sure, but his eyes are alert. “Is this how you talk to your employees?” he asks.

Derek shakes his head, smiling a little. “No, this is how I talk to you.”

Pulling at the neckline again, Stiles tries not to think about the fact that Derek’s statement is implying that he doesn’t see Stiles as his employee. He’s abruptly pulled from that line of thought, when Derek’s fingers trace the line of his neck.

“I’m sorry about these.”

“About what?” Stiles asks immediately.

“Leaving marks.”

Swallowing, Stiles touches the skin on his neck with his fingers, his hand brushing against Derek’s. The skin there feels no different than it usually does. “I don’t mind.”

He doesn’t know what’s more surprising: the fact that Derek leans in to kiss him then, or that it’s just that – a kiss, and nothing else. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight,” Stiles whispers.

He doesn’t think that he’s ever been kissed goodnight before.

◊

The following morning – Stiles isn’t even sure if this counts as morning, because his phone tells him it’s almost five-thirty – he wakes before Derek does. It takes him a while to realise where he is, and why he isn’t in his own bed, but then the memories of last night come back and he is suddenly wide awake.

Derek is on the other side of the bed, fast asleep on his stomach. He looks much younger when sleeping, with all the usual seriousness gone from his face. Something swells behind his ribs, and Stiles allows himself to watch him for a while. The fact that he is in a bed with Derek, that they had sex last night, and that Derek kissed him goodnight, is really too weird. A good weird.

A second later, Derek’s alarm goes off, and he jerks awake. The serious set of his eyebrows is back in an instant, but Stiles will probably never let go of the moment after Derek has turned off his alarm, and he turns to find Stiles there. At first, there is confusion, like he doesn’t remember why Stiles is
there, but then his features soften and he almost-smiles.

“Good morning,” he says, voice sleep-rough.

“It’s not morning,” Stiles huffs, and there is a tickle in the pit of his stomach when Derek pushes a pillow in his face.

After smacking it away, Stiles sucks in a breath as he finds Derek much closer. His eyes are incredible, Stiles thinks, and watches as Derek’s gaze falls to his lips. Closing the last few inches between them, Stiles is the one to kiss him first, and his hand fits so well against the planes of Derek’s chest and stomach. It’s a slow kiss, and Derek is so gentle that Stiles kind of wants to pull at his hair.

Just as he’s about to deepen the kiss, Derek pulls back, eyes warm. “I don’t have time.”

If it wasn’t for the way he seems to barely be able to move away, Stiles might have been a little hurt. Now, he pouts, pleased with himself as he watches Derek adjust himself through his underwear.

“I might as well go back to sleep, then.”

When Derek turns in the doorway to the bathroom, he expects to be told that he has to leave when Derek does, but Derek somehow always manages to surprise him. “Or you could have breakfast with me and go back to bed after that.”

“Tempting,” Stiles tells him and adds, as though he hasn’t already made up his mind, “I’ll think about it while you shower.”

Derek snorts. “You do that.”

Stiles gets up as soon as the water starts running in the bathroom. He’s definitely still tired, but it’s the kind where his body craves more sleep and his brain is already wide awake. Having breakfast with Derek also sounds like a good idea, considering Stiles has kind of missed him lately. He looks around Derek’s kitchen and finds milk in the fridge, and a box of cereal in a cabinet. He has no clue what Derek actually eats for breakfast, but these are the only edible items in the kitchen, except for beer and a container of yoghurt three weeks past the expiration date. Stiles tosses it in the trash.

Just as Stiles puts the bowls down on the counter, listening to the coffee machine fill the second mug, Derek exits the bedroom. He looks...formal, even compared to how he usually looks. It’s something with the way his tie is so tight around his neck, and the cufflinks he’s chosen. It’s all business. Derek is dressed as though he has already gotten what he wanted from the meeting he’s about to have.

“You don’t really have anything that’s breakfast suitable,” Stiles tells him and points with a spoon towards the cereal.

“I mostly just need coffee.” Derek sits down at one of the high stools at the counter, pouring cereal into a bowl and accepting the mug when Stiles offers it to him. “Thanks.”

He’s tense, and Stiles hesitates for a moment, before he puts a hand on Derek’s shoulder, squeezing. “You’ve got this, and you know it,” he says.

“Arrogance precedes downfall,” Derek replies, making Stiles snort out a laugh with how much of a prophet of doom he sounds like.

“Jeez, Dr. Gloom, there’s a difference between arrogance and confidence. You will pull this off, and then you’ll come back home.”
“I do have a job to do even after this meeting is done.” But Derek is beginning to smile.

“Nothing that can’t wait ‘til tomorrow. You haven’t slept in a week.”

“I have,” Derek disagrees. “You were there when I woke up.”

Stiles makes a face. “It doesn’t count. It was less than four hours.”

Just as he has filled his own bowl, Derek has put his empty one in the dishwasher. Stiles has no idea how he has been able to down cereal and coffee in only a few minutes.

“I’ll text you after the meeting,” Derek tells him as he pulls his suit jacket on. “Feel free to go back to bed.”

“All right.” Stiles watches him put his phone in his pocket, and collect his keys, while sipping his coffee. “Good luck.”

Derek gives him a tight-lipped smile, all focused business again, before he leaves. Humming under his breath, Stiles stirs his cereal, to make it all equally soft, and takes the bowl with him to the windows in the living room. It’s an extraordinary day. The sky is pale, but clear, making him suspect that it’s cold outside. He eats his breakfast while watching the traffic below, and then goes back to bed after putting his dishes in the dishwasher.

There are no texts from Scott waiting for him, but it’s barely past six in the morning. Deciding to allow himself a few more hours of sleep – he really doesn’t have a reason not to – he moves over to Derek’s side of the bed. The sheets are still a bit warm there, and smell familiar to him, as he presses his face into Derek’s pillow.

He’s brought back to reality by someone gently stroking the hair from his face, and caressing his neck. Stiles smiles to himself, and slowly blinks against the daylight filling the bedroom.

The first thing he notices is Derek leaning over him. The second thing is that it’s still light outside, meaning Derek is home early. Really early.

“So I went back to bed,” Stiles tells him, reaching out from beneath the warmth of the covers to touch Derek’s thigh.

“I can see that.”

“What time is it?”

“A little past eleven.”

Stiles shifts around, rolling over on his back as he squints up at Derek’s face. The serious look from this morning is long gone. He looks warm, somehow, soft around the edges and harsh lines of his frown have disappeared.

“How did it go?” Stiles expects to grow a little wary and defensive. For his walls to creep back up and keep Derek at a safe distance. It’s stupid, maybe, considering that they had sex last night. Much to his own surprise, it doesn’t happen. Right now, all he feels is comfortable and at peace, and Derek is right here, even though it’s not even lunchtime yet.

“It went well.” Derek’s chest puffs a little with pride, and Stiles has to swallow a few times to remember how to breathe. He looks so young. “Our lawyers are settling the rest.”
“Congratulations,” Stiles says quietly, reaching up to tug at Derek’s tie to pull him down towards him. “I knew you would be great.”

He kisses Derek then, ignoring the burn in his chest, as he threads his fingers into the soft strands of Derek’s hair.

“Thank you,” Derek murmurs against his lips, before he leans in again.

“Are you going back after lunch?” Stiles asks, as Derek gently brushes their noses together before pulling away.

“No. I heard I needed to take the rest of the day off.”

There’s no way to stop the huge smile spreading across Stiles’ face now. “That must be a really smart person.”

“Indeed,” Derek agrees, and shrugs out of his suit jacket.

Warmth spreads in Stiles’ belly as he watches Derek undress through half-lidded eyes, and holds the duvet open for Derek to get underneath when he’s left in nothing but his underwear.

Stiles has never had morning sex with anyone like this before. Not with anyone who covers every inch of his skin with his lips, like Derek does. Not with anyone who looks at him like he’s something incredible despite having just woken up. Or with anyone who can make him come this hard just by putting a hand around them both.

He dozes after that, but wakes when his phone buzzes. Carefully moving over the other side of the bed not to wake Derek, Stiles reaches for the bedside table and thumbs the home button. He has two texts from Scott.

> Glad it went well! You deserve all the good things!

> Also going to the movies tonight wanna join?

Stiles looks over at Derek, where he is still fast asleep on his stomach. If Stiles could, he would like to spend all day just where he is. Just as he contemplates declining to Scott’s offer, another text comes in.

> Derek can come too obviously

For a second, Stiles considers waking Derek just to ask, but he doesn’t have the heart to.

< Is it okay if I get back to you later on that?

> Sure!

He allows himself to watch Derek for another few minutes: the rise and fall of his ribcage as he breathes, the contrast of his black hair against the white pillowcase, and the soft curve of his ass where the duvet has been pushed down. Stiles reaches over to tug the covers up, and tucks Derek in before getting out of bed.

He stands in the shower for nearly half an hour before he grabs a clean pair of underwear and a t-shirt from Derek’s closet, and hunts down his own jeans. Eating another bowl of cereal for lunch, Stiles watches TV with the volume as low as he can get it while still being able to hear.
Sitting on the couch for almost three hours, Stiles expects to grow antsy and anxious as he always does, but there is a sense of calm in his body now. It doesn’t make sense to him, until the bedroom door opens and Derek steps out in the living room, the duvet wrapped around his waist.

His eyes dart around the room, until they lock on Stiles.

“Hey,” Stiles says, muting the TV. “Did I wake you?”

Shaking his head, Derek crosses the room, and sinks down on the couch next to him. “No.”

“Did you sleep well?” Stiles asks and watches as Derek’s eyes find the screen. He’s got that distant look of barely-awake in them, and Stiles reaches up to rub away the tightness in his own ribcage.

“I did.” It takes a second before Derek looks over at him. “How long have you been up?”

“A while.” Stiles can’t help but smile a little. “You looked like you needed sleep.”

“I did,” Derek agrees. “What time is it?”

“Four.”

“Did you eat lunch?” Derek asks immediately.

“I did. Cereal.” He adds the last part, when Derek gives him a suspicious look.

“That’s not food.”

“You had it for breakfast,” Stiles points out.

“I’ll order in. What do you want?”

“Pizza.”

“Pizza?” Derek pauses after getting up from the couch again. “Are you kidding?”

Stiles pulls a face. “I never joke about pizza.”

“Pizza,” Derek mutters under his breath, as he disappears into the bedroom, probably to find his phone. When he comes back, several minutes later, he’s wearing soft-looking pants and a t-shirt.

Stiles opens his mouth before he has the chance to think. “Do you want to go to the movies with me and Scott?”

Halting, Derek looks at him for a long moment. “When?”

“Tonight. It’s Friday,” he tries.

“What movie are you going to see?”

Stiles’ heart beats a little faster. That’s not a no. “Not sure. We haven’t decided.”

“Ohay,” Derek says, as though Stiles didn’t just give him the most vague answer in the history of universe. “I’ll join you.”

The next few hours are nothing of what Stiles expected. Derek really has ordered pizza, and they eat it in front of the TV, watching some new reality show that neither of them have seen before. Like this, Derek feels attainable, as though he isn’t worlds away from Stiles. And… maybe he isn’t
As they head for the movies, Stiles is trying to get over the image of Derek looking casual for once. He can’t remember him wearing anything but suits since that first time they met. Now, he’s wearing tight jeans, a sweater and a leather jacket, despite the cold. Stiles kind of wishes that they wouldn’t be stuck in a movie theater for the next couple of hours with Scott.

They are waiting outside for Scott to arrive, standing close together without really touching. Three minutes late, Scott rounds the corner and Stiles throws up a hand to catch his attention. Grinning, Scott jogs a few steps, before abruptly slowing. His eyes are trained on Derek now, and his smile looks a little plastered on his face.

“Scott, this is Derek,” Stiles says, when Scott is close enough to hear. “Derek, this is Scott.”

Glancing to his side, he finds Derek standing there rigid. And the next second, it’s all gone, as Scott widens his smile and offers his hand.

“Derek, hey, nice to meet you finally!”

“Nice to meet you,” Derek echoes, shaking his hand.

Stiles has no clue what the hell that just happened, but he’s starting to think that he imagined it all, as Scott starts asking Derek all these questions about the latest Marvel movie. Derek gives Stiles a helpless look, like this might as well have been neuroscience, and Stiles just shakes his head, grinning. He’s on his own.

Derek’s hand rests on his thigh once they’re safe in the movie theater darkness. Stiles doesn’t pay much attention to what’s happening on screen, because Derek is rubbing patterns on his jeans. Stiles feels like his touch is burning through his clothes, leaving marks on his skin. After a long while, he finally gathers enough courage to reach down and take Derek’s hand. When he notices Derek stiffening in his seat slightly, out of the corner of his eye, Stiles has a second of panic. Then, Derek’s fingers tighten around his.

They have had sex. Why does holding hands in a movie theater where no one can see feel like him possibly overstepping?

“So,” Scott says once they’re out in the cool winter air again. “You’re coming with us, right, Derek? Staying over?”

Stiles wants to glare at Scott for doing this. He knows why. Before he has a chance to make up some excuse for why Derek can’t, Derek has put a hand on his back and nodded.

“Sure.”

“Don’t I get a say in this?” Stiles protests, just out of habit. Also, because he has no clue what the state of his room is.

“Of course. I’m sorry.” Derek looks so freaking guilty that Stiles probably wouldn’t have the conscience to say no, even if he had wanted to. As it happens, however, there’s nothing he wants more.

“No, you can stay over,” he says quickly. “If you want.”

Scott snorts, rolling his eyes, and heads towards the traffic. “I’ll hail a cab.”
“Don’t feel pressured,” Stiles tells Derek as soon as Scott is out of earshot.

Derek smiles slightly. “I’m not.”

“My bed is super uncomfortable.”

“That’s okay.”

“I haven’t cleaned my room in three weeks.”

“I don’t mind.”

“There’s probably dirty laundry on the floor.”

“Do you feel pressured?” Derek asks, voice a little sharp, as though he’s possibly a little worried.

“No.” Stiles looks at him, chewing his lip. “It’s just… not to your usual standard.”

“I used to live in a dorm once,” Derek snorts.

“When was that? In the 1940s?”

“Funny.” Derek almost succeeds in glaring at him, but Stiles can tell that he’s fighting a smile.

The thought of Derek in his room, in his bed, makes him nervous. However, parting ways now is out of the question. Not after last night, and Derek coming home right after the meeting this morning.

“Alright, you can come with,” Stiles says, as Scott is finally able to get a cab for them. “Just don’t expect anything extraordinary.”

Stepping into their apartment, Derek seems unfazed, as though this is exactly what he expected. Stiles immediately notices the empty beer bottles on the coffee table, and pizza boxes on the kitchen counter.

“Uh, so this is it,” he says, gesturing vaguely around the combined kitchen and living room.

“Where’s your room?” Derek asks after a second of looking around. He seems curious, and much younger suddenly. Maybe it’s the clothes, making him look less strict. Maybe it’s the fact that he’s in a crappy apartment and not his sleek condo.

“Through that door.” Stiles points towards his bedroom, ignoring the incredibly smug look on Scott’s face. Stiles is going to kill him tomorrow, after Derek has left. “Can I just do some damage control, before you go in there?”

At that, Derek rolls his eyes, but he nods anyway. “Sure.”

It feels risky leaving Derek and Scott alone for too long, but Stiles would rather not have his floor covered in dirty laundry if Derek is going to go in there. Shoving the few t-shirts and underwear he finds on the floor into the laundry basket in his closet and hastily checking his sheets, he looks around for anything that would make him want to die if Derek saw it.

Noticing nothing, he goes back into the next room, finding that Derek and Scott are in the middle of a discussion.

“No, he doesn’t,” Derek says, voice sounding a little stern. He looks up then, finding Stiles in the doorway, and almost-smiles.
“He doesn’t what?”

“You don’t eat properly,” Scott explains.

“Did he tell you about the cereal? Because let me explain, Derek didn’t have anything else that was edible at home.” Stiles wants to sigh, but he should probably be grateful for them being concerned for him. He does eat, though, he just really didn’t want to leave Derek’s place after last night. Or this morning.

Swallowing, he looks over at Derek, who looks weirdly comfortable leaning against the kitchen counter. He looks freaking edible, too.

“So, I’m going to bed,” Scott says, clearing his throat. “See you tomorrow. Nice to meet you, Derek.”

“You too,” Derek tells him, and straightens, when Scott disappears into his room. His gaze turns to Stiles the same moment Scott’s door closes behind him. “Is your room still off limits?”

“No, I hid all the evidence,” Stiles tells him, but his heart’s still beating hard behind his ribs, as he steps aside to let Derek walk past him.

Seeing Derek in his room is even stranger than seeing him in the apartment. It’s a small space, smaller than Derek’s closet even, and there are mismatched sheets on the bed, and printed PowerPoint slides and course literature on the desk in the corner. His NYU shirt is hanging over the back of the desk chair. Overall it’s so very college in a way that Derek definitely isn’t. Yet, here he is, looking around with interest.

Stiles glances at the bed. It’s not even close to Derek’s own when it comes to size. He has no clue how they’re both going to fit, considering that Derek is used to a much larger bed.

He watches as Derek shrugs out of his jacket, hanging it across the back of Stiles’ desk chair.

“Are you really staying over?” Stiles asks, just to be sure. It sounds too good to be true.

“Is that okay?” Derek takes a step closer, and Stiles forces himself to meet his gaze. He has no clue why he is this nervous, because they slept in the same bed just last night.

“Yeah.” Nodding, Stiles points at his bed. “It’s not as big as yours, though.”

Shrugging, Derek sits down on the edge and takes off his shoes. Of course he doesn’t just toe them off, like Stiles usually does. He even unties them first. “That’s okay with me, unless you mind?”

Stiles swallows again. Does he mind? That would be crazy. The idea of having Derek in his own bed is giving him a headrush. He definitely does not mind. At all.

“No, I don’t mind.” He swallows as Derek pulls his shirt over his head. “Did you want to borrow anything to sleep in?”

Derek shakes his head at that. “Thanks, but I don’t think that’s necessary.”

Stiles has seen him without clothes before, of course, but it’s different like this. He watches shamelessly as Derek undresses, and takes in the ridges of his stomach and chest. Without thinking, Stiles reaches out for the fly of Derek’s pants before Derek has the chance to. His face grows hot under Derek’s gaze, but he works the button open and slides down the zipper all the same.
The waistband of Derek’s underwear comes into view, and Stiles sweeps his thumbs over the edge of the elastic and the soft hairs on Derek’s stomach. Sinking to his knees, Stiles looks up at Derek briefly, finding that his gaze is locked on Stiles’ face, and then leans in, grazing his lips against Derek’s bellybutton.

Derek sucks in a breath, and Stiles can feel his muscles contract under his mouth. He’s done this so many times before, but this is the first time in so long – if ever – that he can remember longing to get his hands on someone else.

“This okay?” he asks, slipping his fingers down inside the open front of Derek’s pants, stroking the fabric of his underwear.

“Yes,” Derek says, and he sounds a little breathless.

Stiles closes his eyes and presses open-mouthed kisses to Derek’s stomach, and then mouths the outline of his hardening dick through his underwear. He resists a groan when Derek twitches under his lips.

Pushing Derek’s pants down, Stiles strokes the strong muscles of his thighs, and he’s a little lightheaded just from realising that he’s going to have Derek’s dick in his mouth in a moment. Usually he insists on condoms for this, but he trusts Derek, and Stiles is aching to know what he tastes like.

He’s hard, leaking into his own underwear, as he licks the wet spot on Derek’s briefs. Unable to stop himself, Stiles drags his lips along the outline of Derek’s dick, before he pulls back.

“I can blow you, right?” he asks, just to make sure. Looking up again, he finds Derek staring down at him, eyes dark, and Stiles shivers under his gaze.

“Yes.”

He watches as Derek pushes his underwear down and sits on the bed. Moving between his legs, Stiles wraps his hand around Derek’s dick, swallowing heavily at the sight of it. The head is wet with precome, and Stiles leans in to drag the flat of his tongue down the vein on the underside, and then up again. He closes his eyes, ignoring the way his own dick presses uncomfortably against his jeans, and slowly takes as much as he can into his mouth.

Derek lets out a low groan, and Stiles presses down a little further just to make him do it again. Humming around Derek’s dick, he finds a rhythm. It’s kind of slow and deeper than he normally goes, but Derek gasps every time Stiles sucks him back in, and it’s worth the dull ache in his jaw.

When Derek’s hand finds his hair, Stiles can’t help but groan, pushing into his touch. Looking up, he finds Derek watching him, eyes half-lidded and mouth slightly open. Stiles groans again, when Derek tightens the hold of his hair, gently first, but when Stiles’ eyes flutter closed, it grows more firm.

And oh, Stiles normally doesn’t like this at all. But this time it doesn’t make him feel trapped. Derek doesn’t force his head down, but just holds his hair like a lifeline. Like Stiles is taking him apart.

“Stiles,” Derek rasps, when Stiles takes him even further into his mouth this time. “Don’t make me come yet.”

Pulling off, Stiles licks the head of Derek’s dick, his lips feeling swollen and his voice is hoarse. “Why not?”
Derek’s leg twitches, and his eyes close when Stiles licks down the underside of his dick and laps at his balls. Then, when he opens them again, the look in them makes Stiles’ stomach contract.

“Because I want to fuck you.”

And just like that, Stiles is suddenly aware of the way he’s achingly hard in his jeans, and how he can’t wait to have Derek inside him again.

“Yeah, okay, yeah.” He scrambles to his feet, almost tripping before Derek steadies him.

He’s grateful for how swiftly Derek undresses him and pushes him down on the bed, grabbing the lube from Stiles’ nightstand like he’s been waiting for this all along.

“Come on,” he begs, pulling his legs up and lets out a shaky breath when Derek rubs a slick finger over his hole. Things get hazy after that. He keens when Derek pushes the first finger in, and he doesn’t dare put his hands anywhere near his dick for fear of coming, as Derek slowly starts opening him up. He’s pretty sure he’s full on begging by the time Derek pulls three fingers out of him and rips a condom open.

“Ready?” Derek asks, leaning down to kiss him.

Stiles can barely get his mouth to cooperate, but he nods, hooking his legs over Derek’s shoulders as Derek pushes into him.

“Oh fuck,” he whispers, grabbing a hold of the sheets as Derek steadily fills him inch by inch. “Oh fuck.”

Derek murmurs nonsense into his skin, but Stiles can’t make out what he’s saying over the rushing sounds in his ears. It feels like his body is on fire, and when Derek pulls out, only to slowly push in again – a little deeper this time – Stiles loses track of everything but that.

And then, Derek gets the angle just right and Stiles has to bite his hand to stop himself from screaming. He’s leaking steadily over his stomach, balls tightly drawn up, and he thinks he might come at any moment now.

He doesn’t know when his eyes fall shut, but when he opens them again, Derek seems lost too. His hair a complete mess, curling at the temples from sweat.

“Harder,” he groans, as his legs fall open wider, slipping down to rest at the bend of Derek’s elbows. “Please, fuck me harder.”

The sound Derek lets out makes him arch and push back, and then all he can think about is that he’s going to come. He’s so close, and every time Derek drives into him Stiles can’t stop himself from tumbling closer to the edge. The sounds coming out of his mouth keeps growing louder, more desperate.

“I’m gonna–” he whimpers when Derek pushes in just right, losing track of his thoughts for a moment, and riding the edge in a way that makes his entire body feel weightless. And then, it slowly tightens deep in his belly, and he grabs the sheets again, desperate for something to hold onto.

And when he comes, Stiles is pretty sure that it’s loud, because Derek muffles it with a kiss, and then comes, too, letting out a sound that makes Stiles’ toes curl.

For a while, all he can hear is the sound of his own heartbeat in his ears, and all he can feel is Derek’s ragged breath against his throat. He’s sore, and his body is aching in the best of ways.
“Oh god,” he whispers, before he opens his eyes. Staring at the ceiling, he’s still trying to catch his breath, as Derek strokes the sweaty hair from his face, and kisses him.

Looking over at him, Stiles can’t help but smile. Derek’s hair is mussed from where Stiles has pulled at it, and his mouth is a little swollen. Stiles doesn’t want to think about the way he looks right now. He’s imagines he’s a flushed, sweaty mess. But the way Derek looks right now makes Stiles' stomach twist itself to knots in the best of ways. If that’s even possible.

“Did I die?” Stiles asks, flopping a hand out to keep them touching, as Derek rolls over on his back, tossing the condom in the trash. Stiles doesn’t think he’d have that kind of aim this soon after coming.

“I hope not,” Derek snorts.

A breathless laugh escapes him before Stiles can stop it. “Do you want to shower?”

“I’m not sure if I have energy left for that.”

“We could share,” Stiles offers. Right now, he just wants to keep being close to Derek. This weird, fluffy glow around them right now seems fragile to him, like his brain is going to start overthinking things if Derek gets too far away from him. He’s leaving for California tomorrow, and he hasn’t told Derek about it. A part of him assumes that Derek doesn’t care that much, but that makes Stiles even more adamant on keeping the illusion for just a little bit longer.

“Oh okay.”

Stiles makes them both put on underwear before leaving his room. He doesn’t want Scott to see more than he bargained for if he happens to want something from the fridge. For a moment, he’s embarrassed about having been so loud, but then he shrugs it off. There have been times where Stiles has listened to music very loudly when Allison has spent the weekend. Scott will live.

The shower is quick, but Stiles presses close to Derek under the spray all the same, and the warm feeling in his stomach stays.

Back under the covers, Derek turns towards him much like he did the night before when he told Stiles about the client crisis. Tonight, he looks a lot less haunted and tired, and Stiles would never pick him for a super serious, ridiculously successful businessman.

“Are you heading home over Christmas?” Derek asks him, voice soft.

Swallowing down his guilt, Stiles nods. “Yeah. My flight is tomorrow.”

Derek pauses for a second, and Stiles thinks he’s messed up. But the next moment Derek’s fingers graze his arm. “What time?”

“Three-something.” He should probably look that up first thing in the morning. “Why?”

“Want me to drive you to the airport?”

Somewhere, Stiles knows he should say no. They’re already crossing all the lines for what’s professional and whatever this is, and Derek driving him to the airport is definitely something that wasn’t part of their original deal. On the other hand, Stiles has never been fond of taking a cab there.

“That would be great, if you have the time?”
“Sure.”

Stiles doesn’t think that Derek has the time, even though tomorrow is a Saturday, since he works twenty-four-seven, but him taking a break from all the business stuff to do this could be a good thing.

“Are you staying here over Christmas?” he asks then, remembering that Derek has a sister somewhere in California.

“Yes.” Derek’s tone isn’t angry or annoyed by any means, but there’s a shortness to it that lets Stiles know that it’s not something he wants questions about. As though he knows exactly what Stiles was thinking.

“What are you going to do?”

Derek arches an eyebrow. “What do you mean?”

“All by yourself. I won’t be here until after New Year’s.” He can’t help but grin, feeling his stomach flip-flop as Derek pulls him closer by the hip.

“I guess I’ll work a lot,” Derek says, clearly knowing exactly how much Stiles won’t approve of that. “And not sleep enough.”

“Do I need to call you every day to make sure you leave work?” he asks.

“You might.” Derek smiles slightly, and he’s starting to look as sleepy as Stiles feels.

“Are you working tomorrow?” Stiles knows that it’s a Saturday, but it’s not like that’s ever stopped Derek before.

“Yes, I’m doing some paperwork from home, but I can save that for after I’ve dropped you off.”

“We need to get to your place to get your car anyway,” Stiles points out, because they took a cab here from the theater.

“Leave that to me.”

Derek falls asleep before Stiles does, and maybe he fights to stay awake just for this moment. Leaving New York for a short stay at home with his dad has always been the relief he’s been looking forward to every semester. Right now, as much as he misses his dad, it also kind of sucks to leave both Scott and Derek behind.

He barely finishes that thought when he remembers that what he has with Derek is still just a business deal – he’s getting paid for this. Going away for a bit is probably what he needs right now, to get himself de-attached, if that’s even a thing.

The next morning, despite them waking up in the same bed, there’s more distance between them. He wakes up to Derek answering a business call, and from there, it just keeps on spinning.

In the moment, Stiles finds it relieving, because the Derek taking absent notes on the notebook Stiles hands to him is a lot easier to leave behind than the Derek who came home from work early yesterday just because Stiles asked him to.

“Have you packed?” Derek asks around eleven, and Stiles points at his suitcase from where he’s sitting on the couch, watching TV. “When do you want to leave?”

“Whenever, I’m just going to say goodbye to Scott.”
“I’ll call for a car, and we’ll drop by my place to pick up a few things before I take you to the airport.”

Stiles looks up at him. Derek is dressed in last night’s clothes, and even though it’s jeans and a sweater, he looks a lot more official like this than he did at the movies last night. It’s weird. Stiles shouldn’t find it disappointing.

“You don’t have to drive me if you’re busy.”

“I told you I would. I’ll get the things I need from home when we get my car, and I’ll head to the office after I’ve dropped you off.”

Stiles knows better than to argue with Derek about work and priorities right now. He knocks on Scott’s door, leaving Derek to yet another business call. Scott is dressed in sweats and a school sweatshirt, and he looks a little like he’s been awake for a while but preferred to watch TV shows in bed over making himself breakfast.

“So, I’m leaving for Christmas break,” he says.

“Oh right, I had forgotten.” Scott looks like a sad puppy in an instant. “When will you be back?”

“After New Year’s.” Stiles never really experienced the whole hype, because there are no real New Year’s parties to attend in Beacon Hills. However, he’s chosen more time with his dad over getting drunk with people he doesn’t quite know and spending money he doesn’t have on drinks. This year is the first time he probably could go out and not have to deal with an anxiety attack the following morning.

Scott hugs him tightly for a while, and then pushes him away, scrutinizing him from an arm’s length. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says, mustering a smile. “As soon as I see my dad, leaving will feel a lot easier.”

“You know, maybe we can meet up. There’s just an hour drive or so between us. I’m leaving on Monday.”

Oh right. Scott is actually from a small town pretty close to Beacon Hills. He had forgotten all about it. That makes everything a lot better in an instant.

“Yeah, text me when you get some time off? I’ll be available whenever, basically.”

Scott squeezes him again. “Deal. See you in no time.”

To Stiles’ surprise, Derek is waiting for him, holding Stiles’ suitcase while scrolling through something on his phone – probably an e-mail. He looks up and puts the phone away as soon as Stiles shoves his feet into his shoes.

“Do you need anything else?” Derek asks.

“Nope. All set,” Stiles says, mentally checking off his packing list. He’s got his driver’s license and laptop in his messenger bag. “You don’t have to carry my bag for me.”

“Can’t let you carry everything,” Derek tells him, and it looks ridiculously effortless when he takes Stiles’ suitcase down the stairs. Like it doesn’t weigh a lot more than it should for such a short stay. There’s a black car waiting for them outside, and Stiles sighs to himself, as Derek’s phone rings in
the car again. He got a day and a half. That’s probably pretty big for Derek. Either way, it’s better like this, and Stiles just needs some space to get back into dealing with them just being a business arrangement.

He resists the urge to fiddle with his phone during the ride to Derek’s place. Instead he listens shamelessly to Derek talking business to people. If Stiles didn’t know him better – how softly he can smile, and how gentle his touch can be – he’d probably be more than a little intimidated. Unlike some of Stiles’ previous bosses, however, Derek doesn’t seem to be a tyrant. He offers advice and sometimes he talks in a stern voice, but he never swears or uses derogatory language.

Derek’s still on the phone when they take the elevator to his penthouse, and Stiles uses the bathroom while Derek digs through things in his office and changes clothes. When he gets out of the bathroom, absently drying his hands on his jeans, his gaze shifts to Derek’s bed for a moment. Just two nights ago, they slept there together after having sex for the first time. Right now, Derek seems so distant and Stiles can’t pinpoint why. Maybe it’s because Derek is all business again, like these two days of spending time together on the couch, and in bed – they even went to see a movie together – never really happened.

When he gets out in the hallway, Derek is in a suit and checking the zipper to Stiles’ suitcase, before lifting it up again. “Ready?” he asks.

Nodding, Stiles clutches the strap to his messenger bag and tries not to think too much about the weird tightness in his throat.

He expects Derek to drop him off at the terminal and leave it at that, but to his surprise Derek heads for the short-term parking and gets out of the car when Stiles does, grabbing his suitcase again. He doesn’t give Stiles much room to protest, putting a hand at the small of his back and pushing him towards the terminal.

“You didn’t have to come with me,” Stiles says once they’re inside. He squints at the monitors, looking for his flight.

“It’s fine.”

There’s something to Derek’s tone that makes him pull his gaze away from the endless rows of flight numbers on the screen. He knows Derek to look serious – it’s more or less his default expression - but right now there’s something in his eyes that Stiles doesn’t recognise.

“Something wrong?” he asks before he’s able to stop himself.

That makes Derek smile, but not in a way that reaches his eyes. “I’ll see you when you get back?” he says, instead of answering Stiles’ question.

“Um, yeah.” Stiles had assumed that they would. And then it hits him – he’s leaving, and for the first time in years, he kind of doesn’t want to. “Don’t work too much, okay?”

The smile that Derek gives him this time looks happier, at least. “I’m not making any promises. Have a safe flight.”

“Thanks.” Stiles watches him, wondering if he should offer a hug, or maybe lean in for a kiss, despite this morning’s weirdness. However, Derek just hands his suitcase over and then squeezes his shoulder.

Stiles follows him with his gaze as he leaves, gripping the handle to his suitcase until his fingers feel numb and he’s no longer able see Derek through the crowd. He’d been hoping for a kiss, or at least
something that’s affectionate, but they barely do that thing behind closed doors, and definitely not in a crowded airport.
Chapter 4

The flight home is highly uneventful and he sleeps through most of it. When he steps out in the terminal, all thoughts of Derek and whatever it is between them are effectively pushed aside by his dad’s familiar face in the crowd.

He looks well, Stiles thinks in relief as he makes his way over. Less haggard and worn than the last time they saw each other. That’s a good sign.

His dad hugs him so tight that his bones ache, and Stiles allows himself to slump a little, breathing in the familiar scent of the sheriff’s jacket and home.

“Welcome home, kiddo,” his dad says, and his voice is a little unsteady.

“Missed you,” Stiles whispers against the collar of the coat. “Thanks for picking me up.”

◊

Stiles spends some time hanging out at the station as his dad finishes up some evening shift paperwork, before they grab dinner at this new diner Stiles has never been to. His dad picks chicken salad without being nagged about it, and that lessens his guilt for being on the other side of the country for most of the year.

He sends a text to Scott when he’s in bed later. It’s past midnight in New York, and when he doesn’t get a reply right away, he assumes Scott has already gone to bed. He hovers over Derek’s name, biting his lip. Derek hasn’t texted him, but it’s not like Stiles has sent him one either.

In the end he sticks to:

< Landed a while back. Hope you’re not still working

He’s surprised when the reply comes just a minute later.

> Left an hour ago. In bed now. Glad the trip went well.

Stiles can’t help but smile, even though he shouldn’t. He’s already too attached. Even so, the fact that Derek left work before midnight without Stiles badgering him about it is a step in the right direction.

For a second, he thinks about texting back, but then decides not to. It takes all of his willpower to put his phone away. He suspects the way Derek acted around him this morning was his way of letting Stiles know that the thing that happened between them wasn’t a good idea. If it had been just Thursday evening, Stiles could definitely brush it off as a heat of the moment kind of thing. However, Derek coming home from work early, the morning hand job, the movie with Scott, and then staying the night...he can’t forget that as easily. So maybe Derek has put two and two together and figured out that Stiles’ feelings for him aren’t strictly professional anymore, and that’s why he’s trying to make sure that Stiles knows that it’s off the table.

Still, Stiles doesn’t think he can ever forget the way Derek kissed him, or touched him. Or fucked him.

Swallowing, Stiles glances over at his still-unpacked suitcase. Derek insisted on carrying it for him, but if he’s being honest with himself, it’s probably only because Derek is a lot stronger than him. At the time, it had felt like something more than that.
Curling himself into a ball under the covers, Stiles closes his eyes and effectively thinks of everything but Derek until he falls asleep.

◊

His dad is on duty Sunday and Stiles is so happy about the fact that he’s able to work almost full-time now that he doesn’t even complain. Instead, he texts Heather, asking if she’s around and wants to hang out.

“I’m pretty sure Cody is a douchebag,” she tells him over milkshakes two hours later. Cody is the guy she’s currently dating, apparently.

“Why’s that?”

“He refuses to meet my mom and he seems to think that I can put everything else in my life on hold whenever he wants to see me.”

Stiles grimaces. “Did you tell him that it bothers you?”

“No,” Heather says, sighing around the straw. “He should figure it out on his own.”

If there’s one thing Stiles has learned from the whole is Derek avoiding me or not thing, it’s that people don’t tend to figure things out on their own.

“He probably won’t. Call him.”

“When did you get so reasonable?” she groans, but she picks up her phone and types out a text. Stiles makes her do a couple of changes before she’s allowed to send it. It’s easier to focus on her boyfriend issues than his own mess with Derek.

Later that night, he eats dinner in front of the TV with his dad. Maybe it’s weird how these are the things he usually misses the most when he’s in New York. He tries to enjoy it now, and the way his dad tends to strike up conversation with a question out of nowhere.

“How was Heather?”

“Good,” Stiles says, balancing his plate on his folded legs. “How was work?”

“Busy.”

When his dad says busy, it’s generally a positive thing.

“How’s rehab?” Stiles asks.

“Almost finished,” his dad says, and Stiles tries to ignore the sting of his guilt for not asking more often. He’s been so caught up in school, and well, Derek, for most of this semester.

“Are you feeling good about it?”

“They think I’ll be back to full mobility.”

Stiles swallows fiercely a few times and glances over. His dad looks relieved, like maybe he was worried too.

“That’s amazing, Dad.”
When Stiles looks through his suitcase for clean underwear that night, his fingers bump against something unfamiliar. Frowning, he pulls out a box in gift wrap and a note on it that says *Do not open until Christmas*. It’s not Scott’s handwriting, and it’s definitely not his dad’s. That leaves only one person who’s had access to his suitcase.

< Did you put a gift in my suitcase?

Derek’s reply is almost instant.

> Don’t open until Christmas.

< Duh I saw the note

> Good.

That offers absolutely no explanation whatsoever.

< When did you put it in there?

> When you were in the bathroom.

Stiles can’t help but smile to himself.

< I didn’t get you anything

> It was a spur of the moment kind of thing.

Knowing Derek, Stiles is pretty sure that there’s nothing like *spur of the moment* for him.

< Thank you

> Don’t thank me before you’ve opened it.

< You’re not here, maybe I’ve already opened it

Stiles promised himself that he wouldn’t get more involved, but it’s so easy texting with Derek. He misses Derek. It’s a problem, but he’s going to ignore it for now. If he sticks to it long enough, it might go away on its own.

> I’d know if you’d opened it.

Cocky. Stiles’ fingers itch with the urge to rip the present open, but it’s only a few days before Christmas and he can wait. He totally can.

< Why do I have to wait?

> Because it’s not Christmas yet.

Rolling his eyes, Stiles puts the gift back in his suitcase and puts it under a shirt he doesn’t wear that often. If he won’t have to see it all the time, it’s going to be easier to stay away from it.

He spends most of his days up until Christmas with Heather, since his dad is working. It’s nice, catching up with her and focusing on everything other than school for a while. At least until Danny texts him to say that the results are up from Stiles’ last final. Over the years, he’s created the habit of waiting until the results from all his finals are posted before checking any of them. If he doesn’t, he
gives himself more anxiety by calculating and angsting. This way, it’s like ripping off a band-aid – if he’s made the average he needs, he’ll know right away.

Right now, though, his scalp is prickling from anxiety as he types in the username and password his school provided him with years ago. Holding his breath, he clicks on the results page and closes his eyes as it loads.

Then, when he’s finally mustered enough courage, he slowly scrolls through the courses. The first two went well, just as he expected – eighty-eight and eighty-seven respectively. Stiles can’t really be happy about that just yet, though, because the next course is the one he thinks he flunked the finals for and he pauses his scrolling.

“Please, just be over seventy. Please just be over seventy,” he mutters under his breath, knowing all too well how much he needs to keep his scholarship, and thumbs the screen to scroll down further.

*Seventy-two.*

He sinks down on the bed, stuck somewhere between crying and laughing from relief. *He made it.* Checking the result of his last final is less terrifying, considering that it’s the first-year course. He isn’t too surprised to find a ninety-eight, but it still feels good.

A tension he hasn’t been aware of until now bleeds from his shoulders, and he sags against the pillows. Just one semester left, and then he can graduate. He just needs to survive a few more months, and then he’s free.

He texts his dad, Scott, and Derek with the news of his successful finals. When Derek is the first to reply, Stiles can’t help but smile to himself. It’s just a simple congratulations, but the fact that it took Derek less than a minute to reply makes it so much better.

His phone blows up shortly after that with texts from Scott, full of emojis and then a few really smiley selfies. Scott ends his texting marathon with:

> **Wanna hang out the 27th?**

< **YES**

If it wasn’t for Derek’s mystery present, Stiles would opt to skip past Christmas altogether to see Scott sooner. He does miss the easiness that comes with being around Scott, and how overwhelmingly caring he is all the time. It’s new to him. When he lived with Matt, he was usually happy to escape him during Christmas break, as well as forget about his work. This year, everything is so different.

Christmas Eve is filled with their usual traditions, which mostly consist of not doing much at all, and Stiles likes spending hours on the couch without guilt. There’s nothing he has to do, and his dad is right here. They’ve never talked a lot, but Stiles likes the fact that they can just hang out without forcing conversation.

As he stares blankly at the TV from his horizontal position on the couch, he comes to think of Derek. He’s been doing that a lot lately, and maybe it’s okay if he doesn’t tell anyone. It’s not like Derek is a horrible choice of thought occupation – he’s kind, and definitely hot. While Stiles knows that it’s a terrible idea for other reasons, he tells himself that he can stop whenever he wants to.

But it’s Christmas Eve and Stiles knows that Derek isn’t around family. Despite the fact that Derek has always brushed off any conversation regarding the topic, Stiles figures that he must be lonely.
Derek doesn’t seem to have a very good relationship with his family, but most people spend time with their relatives at Christmas, and that would at least make Stiles feel like he was the last person on Earth.

< Hey :) how’s your evening?

Glancing up from his phone, Stiles is relieved to find that his dad is watching *Love Actually* and isn’t paying attention to him. Much to his surprise, Derek has already replied when he looks back down.

> It’s full of paperwork. How is yours?

That definitely means that Derek is working.

< Are you still at the office?

> Yes.

> It’s like 10 pm on Christmas Eve! Which means that it’s past midnight for you and that’s officially CHRISTMAS DAY

< I have a couple of things to go over.

He translates that to Derek not having anything better to do with his time than spending it at work.

< Are you alone?

What he really wants to ask is: *are you lonely?*

> Yes, I sent my employees home early today.

Stiles’ stomach sinks, and he hates that it does. But it’s freaking tragic that Derek sends his employees home so that they can spend time with their families, and then works late himself.

< If you want, I can call you in an hour?

> Aren’t you with your family?

That’s not a no, and Stiles can’t help but smile to himself. Something he’s been trying to push down since he got here ignites again, warming his chest.

< My dad’s old. He’ll be in bed by then

> Okay, that would be nice.

Biting his lip, Stiles glances up at his dad again. He’s still watching TV. Derek saying that it would be nice if Stiles would call him is more than he had hoped for in response. That probably also means that Derek is far more lonely than Stiles anticipated.

< Only if you’re home though. I’m not calling some dude at work

> Fine.

Stiles migrates upstairs forty minutes later, and makes sure to brush his teeth and get ready for bed. There are no new texts from Derek, but Stiles didn’t expect there to be. Pulling the covers to his waist, he leans back against the headboard and calls Derek.
It’s not until the second ring that Stiles realises that they haven’t spoken on the phone since that very awkward call before they really knew each other. It doesn’t count. And just like that, his hands become all sweaty as his pulse picks up.

Derek answers on the sixth ring.

“Hi,” he says and Stiles aches a little with how tired he sounds.

“Hey.” Shuffling his feet against the mattress, Stiles tries to come up with something to say. “So, are you home?”

“Yes. Half an hour ago.”

Stiles can’t help but smile. “Good. You shouldn’t be at work this late. Especially not on Christmas Eve.”

“Whatever’s on TV is usually terrible, so I might as well make use of myself.”

“You could’ve caught up on sleep,” Stiles protests. He can hear the rustling of sheets on the other end, so at least Derek is getting into bed now. Better late than never.

“I’m planning on doing that tomorrow.”

“What are your other plans?” Stiles asks, and then immediately wishes that he hadn’t, because the silence that follows is a little too long, and a little too telling.

“Ordering Chinese,” Derek finally replies.

Stiles always thought this his Christmases were lonely after his mom passed away. It’s just him and his dad, and her death is always more prominent during the holidays. However, if Derek’s plans are sleeping and ordering Chinese, Stiles is definitely better off.


Derek snorts at that. “What are you planning on doing?”

“Probably hang out with my dad. Eat too much. Open presents. You know, the usual stuff.”

Derek hums. “Is it just you and your dad?”

It takes a moment for Stiles to realise that he’s never actually told Derek about his mom being dead, or his dad’s injury. In fact, he hasn’t told Derek a lot of personal things whatsoever. He ignores the sinking sensation in his chest as he reminds himself of that he knows next to nothing about Derek as well.

“Yes,” he says, feeling like he should be generous here, since Derek’s the one spending Christmas alone. “My mom died years ago. It’s just the two of us.”

“I’m sorry to hear about your mom,” Derek says, voice quiet.

Stiles swallows, wishing he hadn’t said anything. “Well, it’s been years.”

It’s the phrase he usually uses when he doesn’t want people to keep asking. It’s not like the years have made it any easier, but it’s a little less hard, somehow.

They’re both quiet for a while, but it gives him room to breathe and find his footing again. This is
about Derek being alone for Christmas.

“How has your stay been so far?” Derek asks suddenly, pulling Stiles’ attention away from the sound of his breathing over the phone.

“Pretty good. I’ve been hanging out with a friend from kindergarten and not doing a whole lot.”

“Sounds like a great Christmas break to me.”

“What about you? Have you worked day and night since I left?” It’s meant mostly as a joke, but Derek sounds a little awkward when he replies:

“More or less.”

Sighing, Stiles chews on the side of his thumb and tries to find something to say that won’t make him sound like he’s Derek’s parent. Instead, his gaze lands on his suitcase and he remembers the gift Derek sneaked in there.

“So,” he says, changing the subject completely. “Normally you get to open one gift on Christmas Eve, right?”

“Is that so?” There’s a smile in Derek’s voice now that tells Stiles he knows exactly what Stiles is thinking.

“I figured since we’re talking on the phone, I should open it.”

“Okay.”

“Yeah?” Stiles scrambles out of bed and almost drops his phone as he stumbles over a couple of books.

“It’s Christmas Day here, and Christmas Eve there. Why not?”

Stiles finds the box almost right away, and after he climbs back into bed, he puts it in front of him.

“What is it?” he asks, thumbing at the edges in the wrapping.

“I think that’s the whole point of opening it.”

“Fine, be like that, see if I care,” Stiles mutters, fighting back the weird nervousness as he unwraps the box. Frowning, he finds that it’s just a plain cardboard one. “You gave me a box?”

He can almost hear Derek rolling his eyes on the other end. “Yes.”

Stiles finds the opening a second later, and peeks into the box. He had no idea what he was expecting, but it was definitely not this. Carefully covered in protective plastic, Stiles finds the very same comic books that Derek won in that stupid auction.

“These are just bad copies, right?” he breathes, unable to breathe properly, already knowing that they’re not.

“No.”

“Are you insane?”

“I figured they should belong to someone who appreciates them.”
Stiles doesn’t think he’s imagining Derek sounding a bit embarrassed.

“Derek,” he whispers, touching the first comic book with his fingertip and then instantly pulling his hand away. Shouldn’t he wear gloves or something? “I can’t accept these.”

“Why not?”

“It’s too much.” He clears his throat and closes the box again, somehow hoping that it’ll make him think straight. “And I didn’t get you anything.”

“You made me go home from work.” Derek says it like it’s something Stiles should be proud of.

Stiles is about ninety-nine percent sure that there’s no way he’s going to be able to make Derek take the comic books back, so he’s just going to have to make an effort in other ways. And also buy a really expensive safe to put them in. “I’m gonna call you every night for the rest of my stay here to make you go home from work.”

Derek laughs and Stiles feels like he’s poured hot chocolate down his throat. “Alright.”

“And you have to pick up,” he warns.

“It’s a deal.” Derek yawns, and Stiles smiles to himself.

He puts the box back into his suitcase. It’s not something he can deal with right now, and he definitely doesn’t want questions from his dad about them. He was there when Derek bid on them, and he knows how much they went for. It’s a lot of money for Derek to just give away. But, on the other hand, it’s pretty much what Derek has been doing for months now.

Stiles doesn’t want to feel all gooey about it, but he does.

“Do you wanna sleep?” he asks, hoping that Derek doesn’t catch how soft his voice sounds.

“Not yet.”

“What do you want to talk about?” Stiles slips back under the covers. There’s more rustling of sheets, and then Derek says, voice warm in a way that makes Stiles miss his smile:

“Tell me about your day.”

So, Stiles does. Every stupid detail from what he had for breakfast, to petting the neighbour’s cat around three, and mistaking the salt for sugar and completely ruining his afternoon coffee. He’s pretty sure that Derek is asleep somewhere before Stiles can tell him about dinner, but he keeps talking anyway, until he feels heavy and sleepy, too.

“Goodnight,” he says quietly, waiting a second to listen to Derek’s even breathing on the other end before he ends the call.

He doesn’t fight the thoughts of Derek tonight.

◊

True to his promise, Stiles really does call Derek every night. He usually gives Derek forty minutes notice, and every time he calls, Derek is already home. Sometimes he’s even in bed. He hangs out with Scott on the twenty-seventh and gets invited to a New Year’s bash that he can actually attend for the first time in years. It’s easier to say yes when he finds out that his dad is going to be working.
“So,” Stiles tells Derek on the phone the night before New Year’s Eve. “I’m going to a thing tomorrow, so I can’t call you to make sure that you’re home at a decent hour.”

“I’m sure I can get myself home before midnight,” Derek says dryly.

“Sure, because that’s worked so well in the past,” Stiles snorts and ignores the way his stomach twists when Derek huffs out a laugh.

“I’ll set a reminder on my phone if it makes you feel better.”

“Yes.” Because it does.

New Year’s Eve isn’t exactly what Stiles thought it would be. For one, he’s a lot more drunk than he anticipated that he would be at ten-thirty. Two, he misses Derek a lot more than he anticipated as well. Three, the fact that he can’t seem to stop complaining about either of those things to Scott is a big problem.

“What if he doesn’t go home?” he sighs, nursing the bottle of water that Scott gave him twenty minutes ago.

“He’ll sleep at the office.” Scott says it like it’s no big deal.

“That’s stupid. I can’t let him do that.”

“Stiles,” Scott sighs. “Why don’t you just call him to check in?”

“Because I told him I wouldn’t call,” Stiles protests. He doesn’t want to be clingy.

“People do all kinds of weird stuff when they’re drunk. I’m pretty sure calling their boyfriend isn’t one of them.”

“Oh my god,” Stiles whispers. Thankfully, he isn’t so drunk that he thinks it would be a good idea to tell Scott about the whole Derek thing. Instead, he decides that he’s drunk enough to blame the phone call on that and not the fact that he misses Derek, even though they spoke last night.

Derek picks up on the second ring.

“Hello,” Stiles whispers as he makes his way to the front porch.

“I thought you weren’t going to call me today,” Derek points out and Stiles freezes with one foot outside the front door, like a deer caught in headlights, before he decides that it doesn’t matter, because Derek can’t see him anyway.

“Um, well, I am?”

“I can tell. Are you drunk?”

“Yes,” Stiles sighs and closes the front door behind him. It’s chilly out, but it makes him feel more sober. “Sorry.”

“No need to apologise. Are you having fun?”

“I guess? Sorta.” Leaning against the banister, Stiles looks out over the lawn. “Are you?”

“Having fun? No, I just came home.”
Stiles’ heart trips. “You’re already home?”

“Yes.”

“Wow.”

Derek laughs. “Did you just call me to make sure I’ve left work?”

“No,” Stiles confesses and blames the alcohol for what slips out next. “I just miss you.”

Derek’s quiet for a long moment, but it’s like Stiles is too buzzed for his anxiety to kick in. “I’ll see you in a couple of days.”

“I know,” Stiles whispers. “My flight lands at eight on Tuesday.”

“Want me to pick you up?” Derek asks.

“Yeah, if I can stay the night.”

◊

Stiles doesn’t actually expect Derek to pick him up from the airport. He’s hoping, which is why he hasn’t asked anyone else to do it. But when he reaches baggage claim, his gaze finds Derek’s face in the crowd almost immediately, and he can’t stop the huge smile on his face.

“Hey,” he says, when he stops in front of Derek.

“What’s going on?” Derek smiles too, and Stiles wishes that it would be okay to hug him in public like this. Before he has a chance to say anything else, Derek grabs his suitcase and heads towards the doors. He has actually parked this time, and Stiles wonders how long he’s been waiting.

“How was the flight?” Derek asks him once they’re in the car.

“It was okay. Kinda long and, you know, flight-y.”

Derek snorts. “Sounds decent, then.”

Stiles isn’t sure what to expect, but Derek does take him back to the condo and not to Stiles’ apartment. Since he carries Stiles’ suitcase to the elevator and doesn’t just leave it in the car, Stiles assumes that this really does mean that he’s staying the night. Oh god. He isn’t sure if he’s angry or grateful to his drunk self.

“How can I take a shower?” he asks as they step inside and hang up their coats, hoping that it’ll help wash away some of the awkwardness he’s sporting right now.

“Sure. Are you hungry? I can order in.”

“Yes. I’ll have anything.”

To his surprise, he does feel a lot better after the shower. Maybe it’s because he’s suddenly so tired, or because Derek is wearing soft pants and a henley when Stiles gets back in the kitchen thirty minutes later. There is a hamburger and a giant portion of curly fries waiting for him on the counter.

“Oh my god,” Stiles groans and almost faceplants into the stove in his rush to get to them. Thankfully Derek manages to grab his arm and right him just in time.
“How are you still alive?” Derek sighs.

Stiles sometimes asks himself the same thing. He devours the food and after long hours on a cramped plane, he’s not sure if he’s ever tasted anything better. They eat in silence, but he really doesn’t mind. Being quiet with Derek has been so easy lately.

When he yawns around his last curly fry, Derek smiles at him.

“You should go to bed,” he says and grabs the empty plate from the counter.

Stiles thinks about protesting, because he’d rather hang out with Derek, but he’s so tired that his entire body aches. “Are you coming as well?”

The way Derek hesitates at that gives him the answer before Derek even opens his mouth. “I have to wrap up a few things. I’ll be there later.”

Stiles is even too tired to be very disappointed about that. “Okay.”

He brushes his teeth and undresses, but just as he’s about to get into bed he realises that he has no clue if he’s expected to leave when Derek heads into work in the morning. Knowing himself, he probably needs more than Derek’s forty-five minutes to be a somewhat functional person after such a long day of travel.

Padding out of the bedroom again, Stiles finds Derek in the study, frowning over a stack of papers, marking things with a pen as he goes. Stiles knocks on the open door, and wishes he’d kept his shirt on when Derek looks up.

“Do you want me to leave when you head into work tomorrow?” he asks. A month ago, Derek would probably have turned that question right back to Stiles, but tonight he says:

“No, sleep in and do whatever you want. I can drive you home after work.”

“Alright.” Stiles hesitates for a second before he adds, “Don’t stay up too late.”

“Promise,” Derek says but he’s already back to focusing on his paperwork.

Stiles thinks that he might be asleep even before his head hits the pillow. He wakes again, briefly, when Derek gets in bed and Stiles reaches blindly for him. Sleep takes him again before he can think too much about the way Derek presses up close against him under the covers.

The next time Stiles wakes, it’s five-thirty and Derek’s alarm is going off. He groans and moves in closer to Derek, wanting to keep the warmth of his body against his own.

“I need to get to work,” Derek murmurs against his neck, and the way his lips brushes Stiles’ skin makes him shiver.

“No,” Stiles protests, and presses closer, pleased to find Derek hard against his ass.

“I have a morning meeting.” The disappointment in his voice is obvious even to Stiles’ sleepy brain.

When Derek moves away, Stiles rolls over on his back and squints at him as he gets out of bed.

“Any plans for the day?” Derek asks him.

“No,” Stiles grumbles.
“Come by the office and we’ll grab lunch?”

Stiles doesn’t know where it comes from, but he definitely blames the fact that he’s still half-asleep. “Bring lunch here and I’ll blow you.”

His stomach surges at the way Derek’s gaze darkens.

“Alright,” he says before he leaves for the bathroom.

Stiles listens to the sound of water running until he dozes off again until Derek leans over him, already dressed in a suit.

“Don’t forget to eat breakfast,” he says. “I’ll see you at lunch.”

Stiles blindly grabs at his tie and pulls him down for a slow kiss, before letting him go again. “Have a good day at work,” he says, smiling helplessly into the pillow after Derek leaves.

A few hours later, Stiles presses the buttons on Derek’s coffee machine and opens the fridge, fully expecting to eat cereal and milk. He freezes at the sight of eggs, and bacon, and bread. Scratching at his chest, he can’t help but wonder if this is for him. He remembers so well saying that Derek doesn’t have a lot of breakfast food in front of Scott just before he left for Christmas, and now this.

< Did you buy all this food for me

He sends it without a question mark, because it feels like a more serious question if he puts it there. Like this, he can play it off as nonchalant. Probably.

The answer comes a moment later.

> No.

Stiles rolls his eyes, pretending like he isn’t smiling like an idiot, and grabs the eggs. Knowing Derek, he most likely had someone do it for him, but it still counts.

< Thank you

> You’re welcome.

Stiles eats breakfast on the couch in front of the TV and then runs a bath in Derek’s huge bathtub. At some point, he’s going to have to buy bubbles for this. He soaks for almost an hour, constantly distracted by the thought of Derek coming home and Stiles hopefully getting to actually blow him again. Stiles doesn’t remember the last time he wanted someone like this, not before Derek, but it’s like he can’t get enough now. He allows himself to think of the last time he had Derek’s dick in his mouth, and the way he made Stiles’ jaw ache in the best of ways.

He dries himself off, digs out a pair of sweats from his suitcase and shamelessly grabs a shirt from Derek’s closet. It’s a little big on him, but it’s nice being reminded of their size difference. Despite knowing that he’s just waiting for Derek to get home, he’s oddly comfortable lazing around on the couch and watching TV, and doing his best not to touch his dick.

It’s past noon when he hears the elevator doors open and Derek’s shoes against the floor, and like on cue, his pulse picks up and he looks away from the TV, gaze locked where Derek will show up any moment now.

When Derek steps into the room, Stiles’ mouth goes a little dry. He looks so immaculate, from the
hair to his perfectly shined shoes, and Stiles knows that the morning meeting must’ve been successful, because the confident air around Derek makes his skin tingle with anticipation.

“Hey,” he says, watching as Derek puts the brown paper bags down on the kitchen table. His heart trips over itself when Derek walks over and leans down to kiss him. Scrambling up into a sitting position, Stiles kisses him back.

“How was your morning?” Derek asks as he pushes Stiles right back down on the couch, flat on his back, and then kisses him again.

“Good,” Stiles breathes against his lips. “But slow. Been kinda looking forward to you coming home.”

“Well, I’m home,” Derek says against his lips, and his hands slip under Stiles’ shirt, making his stomach contract. His palms are warm as he drags them up Stiles’ chest, and then down until he’s curling one around Stiles’ hip and cupping him through his pants with the other.

“Oh my god,” Stiles groans, pressing up into Derek’s hand before he can stop himself. He’s already hard, having been thinking about this all morning, and the way Derek rubs him now makes him boneless.

Lifting his hips obediently when Derek pulls down his pants and underwear, leaving his shirt on, Stiles is just about to say something when Derek climbs onto the couch and sucks his dick into his mouth.

Instead of words, all Stiles can do is let out a low moan, his hips trying to arch off the couch, but Derek’s holding him down.

And then Derek starts sucking him deep and fast, like he too has been waiting for this for hours. All Stiles can do is make helpless, needy sounds, his eyes rolling back as he tries to keep himself from coming.

“Derek,” he groans, tugging at Derek’s hair, but instead of pulling off, Derek just swallows him down and all Stiles can say is: “Oh yes–fuck!”

And then he comes so hard that he possibly whites out for a moment. Derek must’ve swallowed all of it, because the next thing Stiles knows is Derek kissing him hard, jerking off fast.

“Come on,” Stiles whispers, still out of breath and a bit dizzy, and reaches down to replace Derek’s hand with his own. “Come all over me.”

It doesn’t take more than a few strokes before Derek stripes Stiles’ stomach, and the shirt he’s still wearing.

“You should shower before you head back to work,” Stiles tells him when he finds his breath again. Derek looks nothing like he did when he got home this morning. His hair is crazy, and his suit wrinkled. “Or at least clean up a bit.”

“Reheat the food, and I’ll be right back.”

It’s impressive how coordinated Derek is so quickly after coming. Stiles feels wobbly and unsteady when he finally manages to get up from the couch, put his clothes back on, and microwave the Thai food Derek brought home with him.

He’s sucking on his scorched fingertip, having just put the containers back on the table, when Derek
reemerges. If Stiles didn’t know that Derek blew him less than ten minutes ago, he would never have been able to guess. He’s switched suits, and this one is just as immaculate as the first one was this morning.

“Thanks,” Derek says, and sits down pulling his food towards him.

Stiles watches him eat, and mostly pokes at his own food. He’s so warm and fuzzy that there’s not much room for food right now, but he’ll probably be hungry again as soon as Derek has left.

“People are going to know,” he says, pointing with his fork at Derek’s suit.

“Know what?”

“That you went home to get some.” Stiles thinks he succeeds pretty well with not sounding smug.

Derek shrugs at that. “They’re not going to say it to my face.”

Snorting, Stiles goes back to poking around his food.

“Don’t you like it?” Derek asks, and for a second Stiles thinks he’s asking about the sex, but when he looks up, Derek nods towards his plate. Of course Derek’s observant enough to notice that Stiles isn’t eating much.

“No, it’s great. I’m just not that hungry right now.”

Derek frowns and wipes his mouth on a napkin, before he pins Stiles with his gaze. “Was it something that you didn’t want?”

It’s no question that he’s referring to the sex this time, and Stiles’ chest aches. “No. I wanted it.”

He still wants it.

Derek doesn’t look convinced and Stiles tries to find the right words for this.

“I did want it,” he says firmly. “It’s great. It’s always great.”

When Derek doesn’t say anything, he continues and that’s always when his brain to mouth filter goes kaput.

“I mean, you always make sure that I’m okay with everything.” Biting his lip, Stiles can’t come up with any other way to say it than: “I’m not very hungry because I just came my brains out.”

To his surprise, Derek laughs. He doesn’t do it very often, and the warmth behind Stiles’ ribs swells further.

“Fair enough.”

It seems to be enough of a comfort, though, because Derek’s still smiling when he leaves for work.

Stiles remembers his Christmas present when he goes through his bag for a fresh shirt later, finding the cardboard box underneath a pair of jeans. He can’t bring them home to his shitty apartment – it’s not safe enough for something of that value. Derek, on the other hand, lives in a building with security and he probably has a safe somewhere.

< Can you safekeep my Christmas present for me? I don’t trust my front door enough to have them at home
> Yes, if you want.

< Duh. I’m leaving them on your desk in the study

Stiles hasn’t been in there much, but it’s impersonal, just like most of Derek’s home. It mostly consists of a big desk with a laptop, and a few business cards in a holder. Stiles assumes that the important papers are locked away somewhere.

Later that night, when they’re in the car heading towards Stiles’ apartment, Derek’s jaw is clenched and his gaze carefully eyeing the traffic, and never on Stiles. A while back, Stiles would probably have pretended not to notice and hope that Derek would be back to normal the next time they met. However, Derek came home during lunch to blow him, so Stiles thinks he’s allowed to ask.

“Is something wrong?”

Derek blinks, gaze flicking over to him briefly. His jaw unclenches immediately, though. “No. Just a lot to think about.”

“Work stuff?”

“Some of it,” Derek offers and Stiles bites his lip, waiting him out. “Do you remember that charity auction?”

“The one where you bid on my Christmas present?” The one where you kissed me for the first time afterwards, is what he means. Like he’d forget it even if he tried.

“Do you remember that cottage weekend?”

Stiles’ stomach flips even before his brain has a chance to process those words. “Yes.”

“It’s in three weeks.” Derek goes quiet as he turns at the next intersection and Stiles holds his breath. “Would you like to come with me?”

“Is it just the weekend?” he asks, trying to distract himself from the way his chest can’t seem to decide if it’s contracting or expanding.

“Thursday to Sunday. I know you have classes–”

“–Yes,” Stiles interrupts, before Derek can finish the sentence. He can talk to his professors and work stuff out.

“Yes?” Derek asks, looking over at him briefly again. He’s smiling.

“Yeah. I’d like to come with you.”

Derek is still smiling when Stiles gets out of the car a little while later, and Stiles hasn’t stopped either, even as he crawls into bed that night. A four-day weekend with Derek, seemingly for no reason, is probably the last thing he should agree to right now, considering how he can’t stop thinking about Derek. This is still a business arrangement, not a relationship. But he can’t wait.

◊

The Adirondacks look like something taken out of the fairy tales. It’s dark by the time they reach the cabin, but the snow makes it easy to make out the silhouettes of the nature around them. The air even smells different from New York City.
It’s cold as hell, though, and Stiles is really happy with his decision to finally get himself a decent winter coat. The snow creaks under their feet as they get out of Derek’s rental and retrieve the groceries from the trunk.

The creaking snow and the metallic clinking of keys are the only sounds as they walk up to the door and Stiles waits, his arms already tired, as Derek unlocks it.

Stiles expected an ice cold cabin, with everything made out of wood, and freezing floors that would kill his feet until tomorrow morning at earliest. However, when Derek ushers him through the open door, he finds that the lamps in the windows are already lit and there’s a welcoming warmth enveloping them as they step in.

“I asked someone to turn on the heat this morning,” Derek tells him, as though he’s read Stiles’ mind.

“Thank god for that,” Stiles groans, wiggling his toes in his shoes. “I’d have died.”

Derek rolls his eyes as he leans down to untie his shoes. “You wouldn’t.”

Stiles hands over the grocery bags when Derek reaches for them, and then toes off his own shoes. Hanging up his coat on the rack, he trails after Derek to the kitchen. It’s very much a cabin, with an open, shared kitchen and living room area. There’s a freaking furry rug on the floor in front of the fireplace, and through an open door, Stiles catches a glimpse of a bed.

“Do you want to go to bed right away?” Derek asks him, as he places the bags on the kitchen counter.

“Not really.” It might have something to do with Stiles spending several hours sleeping on the way here. “Do you?”

“I’m good.” Derek’s gaze catches on the fireplace for a moment, and then the logs stacked next to it. “If you put away the groceries, I’ll get a fire going.”

Pretending that this isn’t weirdly domestic, Stiles concentrates on stuffing the fridge and the cabinets with the contents of the bags. When he looks up, the fireplace is crackling happily, and Derek’s face is lit up.

“I’m going to get our bags,” Derek tells him, looking up from where he’s crouching.

“Want me to help?” Stiles asks, already knowing the answer.

“It’s fine. I’ll be right back.”

Derek doesn’t bother with a coat for the short walk to the car. Stiles feels like he’s halfway to death from just being in the same room as an open door. Looking around, he spots a capsule machine on the kitchen counter, and when Stiles investigates the flavours, he finds hot chocolate ones. Maybe it’s overdoing things a little bit, with the cabin, the open fireplace and hot chocolate, but if there’s a time for overdoing anything, Stiles guesses it’s now.

“I’m making you hot chocolate,” Stiles announces when Derek comes through the door again.

“You pressed the button, you mean,” Derek says as he carries the bags to the bedroom.

Stiles can’t help but grin at his dry tone. “Don’t be so high maintenance.”

When Derek comes back in soft pants and a knitted sweater, Stiles is warm all over, clutching the
mug in his hands.

They haven’t seen each other much the past weeks. Mostly because Stiles has had to complete school assignments in advance to be able to go on this mini-vacation, and Derek’s been doing the same with work. It’s probably not the best method to get some time off of work, as Derek put it when they’ve spoken about this weekend, but Stiles isn’t going to complain. His Derek situation hasn’t exactly gotten better, but he pretends like it isn’t there most of the time. He can turn it off when he needs to. And considering the way Derek’s hand slides down his lower back and over his ass briefly as he comes up next to Stiles to grab his own mug, Stiles doesn’t think Derek minds too much, either.

“I think our morning view is going to be great,” Derek tells him, sinking down on the couch in front of the fireplace. He looks like something taken out of a travel catalogue for ski trips.

“For sure,” Stiles grins, waggling his eyebrows in the way he’s recently learned that Derek hates.

Derek gives him a flat stare. “The actual view.”

“You don’t know where I’ll be looking.”

“I’m already regretting this,” Derek tells him, not the least bit convincingly, considering the smile on his stupid mouth.

Digging his fingers into his palm, Stiles considers staying at the counter for a while longer, hoping that the itch under his skin will go away. However, when Derek slides over to one side of the couch, making room for him, Stiles can’t stay away.

He lies down on his back, legs bent and feet towards Derek, and listens to the crackling in the fireplace as he stares at the ceiling. It’s so quiet in comparison to New York City. No cars, no loud neighbours, no honking from annoyed drivers. Nothing but quiet and the sound of burning logs.

“I like this,” Stiles says, propping a cushion under his head to be able to drink his chocolate. “Thanks for bringing me.”

“I’m glad you could come with me.”

“Don’t say that until the weekend is over,” Stiles scoffs, because he knows that he’s usually preferred in smaller doses by other people than Scott and his dad.

They don’t say anything for a while after that, and it’s nice. Being quiet with Derek is one of his favourite things, he realises. It’s so uncomplicated. He’s just about to make them both another mug of hot chocolate when Derek’s phone dings, and Stiles has to bite his lip to hold back a sigh. It’s not his place to talk to Derek about working too much, and he does it too often as it is anyway.

To his surprise, however, Derek just looks at his phone before putting it on the coffee table, display down.

“Just my sister,” Derek explains, like he’s felt Stiles’ surprise.

“You’re not going to reply to your sister?” This is a sensitive subject, and Stiles knows it. Derek never talks about her unless he has to, and then it’s only briefly. If he has any other family aside from her, he’s never mentioned them as far as Stiles can remember.

“It wasn’t anything important.”
Stiles puts his empty mug on the table next to Derek’s phone, chewing his lip as he considers his options. “Do you mind me asking about her?”

At that, Derek looks over at him, a frown on his face. “Laura?”

“Yeah?”

With a shrug, Derek stretches his legs out in front of him. “There’s not a lot to say. We’re not that close.”

“Has it always been that way?” Stiles asks, since Derek didn’t say that he couldn’t.

“No.” Derek’s quiet for a moment, before he continues, “We drifted apart after our parents and little sister died.”

Stiles doesn’t know what he expected, but this isn’t it. “I’m really sorry,” is all he comes up with to say.

“It’s been over fifteen years,” Derek says, looking over at him with a little smile, as he drags Stiles’ feet into his lap. It’s obvious that he doesn’t want to talk about it, but Stiles thinks it’s more because of the moment, and not that it’s because he doesn’t want Stiles to know.

“You’re that old?!?” he deadpans, but breaks almost instantly when Derek grabs his legs and drags Stiles over the couch cushions so quickly that his shirt slides up over his stomach. He laughs, breathless, as Derek holds him down, and somehow manages to find all the places where Stiles is ticklish.

He’s too weak from laughing to be able to break free, so instead he laughs, with tears in his eyes, until Derek lets him go. Then he just remains there, with his ass in Derek’s lap, legs over the armrest and head halfway off the couch. And when he looks up, Derek’s watching him with an expression Stiles hasn’t seen on him before. His face is so soft, and even though he’s not exactly smiling, there’s something in his eyes that makes Stiles think he’s happy.

“I’m going to bed,” Derek says, with that look still on his face. “Don’t stay up too late.”

Stiles moves away from his lap, watching him as he disappears into the bedroom and then, supposedly, into the bathroom. Despite biting his lip, he can’t stop a helpless smile from spreading on his face. For a while, he stays there, lying on the couch and staring off into the fire, until his eyes start to droop. He rinses the mugs and puts them away in the dishwasher, putting out the fire, and then making sure that the door is locked, before he switches off the lights.

Derek is already in bed when he gets in there, and the room is dark, except for the strip of light leaking from under the bathroom door. The warmth from the fire and the hot chocolate stays in his body as he climbs into the bed after brushing his teeth. Derek is gone for the world, but Stiles only hesitates for a second before he moves in closer, pressing his face to Derek’s shoulder.

He wakes by Derek kissing him the next morning. It’s gentle and slow, and Stiles can’t stop himself from smiling into it.

“Morning,” he whispers against Derek’s lips, and then chokes back a groan, as Derek’s hand slips into his briefs, curling around his already-hard dick.

“Good morning,” Derek replies, and if Stiles wasn’t so preoccupied with Derek working him slowly but steadily towards the edge, he’d probably be offended by the pleased tone in his voice.
It doesn’t take long before he comes, tumbling over the edge with a low moan. Derek kisses him through it, and then pushes Stiles’ hand away when he wants to reciprocate.

“Maybe later,” Derek tells him, and when Stiles opens his eyes, the soft expression from last night is back. Or maybe it never went away.

“Do you have somewhere to be?” In Stiles’ mind he’s already listing possible conference calls with work, maybe a client meeting over the phone, or replying to important emails.

“The kitchen, making you breakfast before we go on a hike.”

Stiles blinks. “We’re going on a hike?”

“Nothing massive, don’t worry. It’s a group thing.”

A group thing. Derek hasn’t exactly come across as a group thing kind of guy to Stiles. However, if going on a group hike is what it’s going to take to keep that look on Derek’s face, Stiles is more than willing to do it.

“Alright, just let me shower first.”

Derek disappears out to the kitchen a lot quicker than Stiles wants him to. However, as he looks around, stretching the sleep from his limbs, he notices the view. The windows are big, and outside is an endless stretch of frozen water, white mountains and bare trees. It’s so bright, and the frost glitters like jewels in the morning sun. It’s kind of breathtaking.

When he hears Derek rummaging through the cabinets, he gets up and into the shower. He decides against washing his hair, suspecting it’s a really bad idea if they’re going to spend the day outside in this cold. By the time he’s dressed in a t-shirt and sweats, the cottage smells like fresh coffee and toast. In the kitchen, he finds Derek at the counter, sipping his mug. His plate is already empty, but there’s one waiting for Stiles.

“I didn’t know you could make anything but cereal,” he says, mostly to get rid of the tightness in his chest.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me,” Derek replies, and it’s clearly meant as a joke, but Stiles’ stomach sinks. Because it’s true. He barely knows anything.

“Well, you don’t pay me to ask questions, do you?” he grins, although it feels like he’s dying inside just from saying the words.

Derek’s smile falters for a second, but then he pushes the plate towards Stiles. “Eat. I need to shower.”

The toast seems to grow in his mouth as he chews, and he has to force himself to swallow it down. He knows what this is. He’s known from the beginning. The fact that they’ve started having sex doesn’t change the core of what they are – a business arrangement.

Going on a hike with a group is a better idea than Stiles anticipated. They’re about ten people, plus two guides, and Stiles doesn’t think he’s worn this many layers of clothing in his life. He’s grateful for Derek making him put on an extra sweater, though, as they sit down for lunch at a snow-covered rest stop. Derek is on the other side of the open fire, talking to a woman who seems to really like red, considering that’s all she’s wearing.

The girl next to Stiles bumps his shoulder as she sits down next to him. “That your boyfriend?” she
asks, as she hands him a stick and a hot dog.

“Who?” Stiles looks up, and follows her nod towards Derek. He looks so good, with his cheeks rosy and dressed in clothes so far from his usual strict suits. It hurts a little, but the only possible answer to that is: “Yes.”

Because he can’t tell her the truth. He smiles, helplessly so, when Derek looks up and meets his gaze over the fire.

The rest of the hike, he talks to the girl – her name is Savannah – and tries to push down any kind of budding interest he has for Derek. It’s okay to want him, Stiles supposes. It’s hard not to, honestly. It’s the other things that worry him. Like the way he feels all weak just by being close.

It’s not that late when they get back, but it’s already dusk. Even though Stiles is cold, he’s not the walking icicle he expected to be. Instead he just sighs, relieved, as he’s allowed to go inside their cottage and take off his boots after stomping off the snow outside the door.

“That was nice,” he says, shivering as Derek takes his warm coat, and at the way he runs a hand over Stiles’ hair after pulling his hat off. It’s probably just to smooth it down, but it’s so intimate in a way that Stiles doesn’t expect.

“Not exactly Manhattan, is it?”

“Manhattan would be a terrible destination when you’re supposed to get a break from work,” Stiles scoffs.

When they enter the kitchen, there are steaming containers on the counter, and he looks over at Derek, who doesn’t seem the least bit surprised.

“I figured we might be too tired to cook,” he explains, as though Stiles’ look says it all. “So I had them deliver something.”

Stiles has to bite his lip hard to keep himself from saying something stupid.

“That’s a good idea,” he says, when he has himself under control again. He’s distracted all through dinner by the way Derek’s hair is so soft and messy, after wearing a hat all day.

Derek refills his glass of red wine without asking, and Stiles is happy for the way it eases the tension out of him. It makes it a lot easier not to think too much.

“How do you feel about the hot tub?” Derek asks after throwing the empty containers in the trash.

“There’s a hot tub?” Stiles is far from drunk, but he’s at least non-sober enough to think it’s a good idea to get into a hot tub with Derek.

“I figured we might be a bit cold after being outside all day, so I asked them to get it going.” Derek shrugs like it’s not big deal that he’s been thinking about these things in advance.

“Do I even dare to ask who they are?”

“Probably not.” Derek smirks, and grabs an unopened wine bottle from the counter. “Yes, or no?”

“Yes,” Stiles says, licking his lips as he picks up his glass. “I didn’t bring any trunks.”

“Good.”
The water is hot around him as he gets in after Derek. It’s decidedly less awkward than he thought it would be. He grins, accepting his glass when Derek hands it to him, and scoots closer.

“Do you have big plans for tomorrow as well?”

“What qualifies as big plans?” Derek asks, pulling Stiles halfway into his lap. His body is so strong, all corded muscles under Stiles’ hand as he slides it up Derek’s thigh, and stomach, to loop around his neck.

“Hiking?”

“No hiking.” Derek takes a swig from his glass. His hair is curling slightly at his temples from the hot steam. “I think we could stay indoors and take a slow day, if that’s what we want?”

Right now, Stiles has a lot of activities in mind that they could do indoors. He’s definitely looking forward to that.

“Yes.”

It’s not until they’re out of the tub over an hour later, and Stiles is all pruny and warm to the bone, that Derek kisses him. He’s dry, except for his hair that’s still damp, and Derek pulls him close by the towel over his shoulders. For a moment, he just looks at Stiles, before he leans in and presses their lips together.

“Take me to bed,” Stiles whispers against his mouth, as Derek wraps an arm around his waist and then kisses him again.

Derek doesn’t reply. He just leads Stiles to the bedroom, rubbing the towel over his hair one last time, before he discards it on the floor. Then, he kisses Stiles again, and it’s not at all rushed, but definitely with intent. Stiles goes willingly when Derek pushes him down on the bed.

The weight of Derek’s body on top of his own makes him shiver. Stiles just wants to touch him everywhere and never stop.

He closes his eyes when Derek’s mouth finds his jaw, throat, chest, and digs his fingers into Derek’s hair. He’s already hard, whimpering when Derek’s stubble grazes his nipples, and it’s like his skin is melting under Derek’s mouth.

“Oh god,” he groans, when Derek licks up the length of his dick, rubbing his lips over the head like he wants to smear Stiles’ precome all over them. He doesn’t dare to look, wanting this to last for a lot longer than it will if he opens his eyes.

Derek hums, stroking him slowly and takes Stiles’ balls into his mouth, one after the other. And Stiles can’t help the way his legs falls open further. He feels raw, hypersensitive, and the graze of Derek’s stubble against the inside of his thighs makes him tremble.

Derek’s mouth is warm, and Stiles whimpers when Derek licks up the length of his dick again, slowly sucking him down like he’s got all the time in the world. Like Stiles isn’t panting already, twitching against Derek’s lips and tongue.

“Oh,” he groans, when Derek takes him deeper, and pulls back, sucking the head of his dick.

“Fuck.”

Even though he loves Derek’s mouth, and the way his tongue seems to find every sensitive spot on Stiles’ body, sucking marks to the insides of his thighs, and then licking his balls. He wants more.
Needs more.

Stiles isn’t sure he has any words left. The only sounds coming out of his mouth are breathless moans, whenever Derek sucks him into his mouth again. And then desperate groans, when he pulls back, covering the rest of Stiles’ body with his lips and his teeth.

Reaching out blindly, Stiles manages to grab the lube from the bedside table and tosses it down in Derek’s direction. He’s too out of it to do more than that. A moment later he’s rewarded, when Derek pushes his legs apart, and slick fingers slide down behind his balls, and then graze his hole.

“Please,” he whines, spreading his legs even further, muscles protesting.

“I’ve got you,” Derek murmurs, kissing the jut of his hip, before slowly pushing a finger into him. And oh, Stiles has to grab the sheets to keep himself from arching off the bed. It’s like his body tightens and relaxes at once.

His world zeroes in on Derek’s fingers slowly stretching him, and the slight burn quickly gives in to something a lot more intense. Whimpering, Stiles pushes back when Derek adds a second, arching his back to help get the angle just right. And when he does, he has to grab the base of his dick to keep himself from coming, and Derek’s shoulder with his other hand to ground himself.

“I really need you to fuck me right now,” he pants, when Derek rubs his fingers over that great spot just enough for Stiles’ entire body to wind up, ready to let go, before he pulls back, rubbing his fingers over the rim, and then pushing in again. Stiles thinks he’s shaking all over, covered in sweat and precome, and his eyes too heavy to keep open. “Please, Derek. Fuck me.”

“That what you want?” Derek asks, right in Stiles’ ear, making him shudder.

Pushing back over Derek’s fingers, Stiles nods desperately. “Please.”

“You want me to fuck you?” Derek’s lips graze his jaw, and his voice is hoarse.

“Please,” Stiles begs again, forcing his eyes open to meet Derek’s gaze. His pupils are blown wide, and his lips are swollen, like he’s been biting them. “I need it.”

Now that his eyes are open, Stiles can’t stop watching as Derek pulls back and tears open a condom packet. A slow, tight anticipation forms in Stiles’ gut as he watches Derek roll the condom on, and then cover his dick in lube. He holds his legs open as Derek settles, and then wraps them around his waist as he slowly pushes in. And all Stiles can do is breathe to keep himself from coming from that alone.

“Oh god,” he whines, both grateful and frustrated with how slow Derek pushes into him. Derek takes his time at first, pulling out and pushing in at an evenly slow pace, and there’s a determined look on his face, like he wants to take Stiles apart.

And he does. Stiles is riding the edge, sobbing from being so, so close and too far away, gripping the sheets desperately. Then, when Derek picks up the pace, he’s delirious, making punched-out sounds every time Derek pushes in, and even though it’s been building forever, it’s still a surprise when he comes. Before he’s able to reach down and stroke himself, his back snaps up and his body seizes up almost painfully.

When he comes back to it, Derek’s pulling out and Stiles doesn’t know if he’s been loud or not, but his throat feels raw, so he thinks he might’ve been.

“Derek,” he mumbles, reaching for him, suddenly craving to have him close.
Derek kisses him for a long, long time before he pulls away and tosses the condom in the trash. Stiles looks after him as he disappears into the bathroom, and then comes back almost immediately with a towel. He feels boneless and too out of it to care when Derek cleans him up before throwing the towel in the direction of the bathroom door, and then climbing back into bed.

Reaching out, Stiles’ arms are heavy as he pulls Derek close. If he closes his eyes and concentrates on the little kisses Derek presses to his cheek and jaw, Stiles can ignore the way his heart swells.
New York City has never felt as grey as it does now, after spending a weekend with Derek. It’s not just the fact that Stiles has to catch up with some school work, or that Derek is back to working a lot.

It’s just that when they meet, it’s not the same thing as it was those four days.

Stiles drops by his office on a whim, one day after class, and waits patiently as Mr. Matthews makes a call to check if he’s allowed to continue up. Even though he feels less out of place now, with a new t-shirt and a coat with sleeves that actually cover his wrists, it’s so obvious that he doesn’t belong in a place like this. Their suits don’t match his skinny jeans.

He decides that it doesn’t really matter, anyway. He hasn’t seen Derek since their quick lunch at the beginning of last week, and despite that he still gets a text every night when Derek gets home from work, he’s a bit lonely.

“Floor sixty-five,” Mr. Matthews tells him, probably more because it’s his job and less because he thinks Stiles needs the information.

“Thanks,” Stiles says, and as soon as he steps into the elevator, the doubts start creeping up on him. Surely Derek thinks it’s okay that he’s dropping by, since Stiles was let through, right?

It’s only a little past three, but Derek’s floor isn’t as busy as Stiles remembers it being the other times he’s been here during office hours. Isaac looks up from his desk, as soon as Stiles steps out of the elevator.

“Stiles,” he greets, and it’s hard to pinpoint his tone.

“Hey.” Stiles resists the urge to dig his hands as deep into his pockets as he can. “Is Derek free?”

Isaac eyes him, like he’s searching for something, and Stiles looks at everything but him. “For you? Probably.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Stiles asks, before he can stop himself.

Shrugging, Isaac sips his coffee and leans back in his chair. “Why wouldn’t he? You’re dating.”

Stiles almost flinches, but he’s able to stop himself as he remembers that this is the only logical explanation to Derek’s employees. It’s not like Derek told them he’s paying Stiles.

“Well, you made it sound like he doesn’t want to be disturbed,” Stiles says, after too long of a silence.

Isaac shrugs again. “I think he’s in a conference call, but I’m sure it’s okay if you wait in there. Quietly.”
“I can be quiet.” Stiles wants to glare at him, but it’s not like Isaac has spent enough time with him to know about his inability to shut up.

At that, Isaac just waves him towards the door. Apparently he can’t be bothered with anything else than what he’s doing on his computer.

Stiles spots Lydia further down the corridor as he heads towards Derek’s office. She’s arguing with someone over the phone, and it doesn’t sound like it’s about business, so Stiles isn’t going to try and say hi.

Through the glass doors, he can see Derek on the phone, like Isaac said. His jacket and tie are over the back of his chair, per usual, and he’s wearing a waistcoat. There’s a focused look on his face that Stiles has learned isn’t just there when it comes to business, but whenever Derek’s set his mind to excel. He shivers when he thinks about the last time he saw that expression.

Just as he’s about to knock, Derek looks up, and the surprise is clear on his face. He’s silent for a second with his mouth slightly open, and then he blinks, returning to his conversation with a small smile on his lips. He gestures for Stiles to come in, and then points towards the couches further away.

Stiles is pretty sure that the smile on his face makes him look like an absolute dork, but he can’t wipe it off despite trying. Instead, he dumps his bag with textbooks on the couch, and slumps down next to it.

A moment later his phone buzzes with a text.

> Business meeting. Will take another 45 mins. Sorry.

He tries desperately to stop the warmth spreading in his chest. It doesn’t work that well.

< Don’t worry I’ll do school stuff

At first, he feels a bit weird, taking out his textbook to catch up on his reading before class tomorrow. But after a while, Derek’s voice turns into background noise and Stiles zeroes in on his reading.

He’s on the second-to-last page when familiar fingers comb through his hair. Looking up, he finds Derek standing behind the back of the couch.

“Did it go well?” Stiles asks, keeping his thumb in the book to mark the page as he closes it.

“Sure,” Derek says, and his fingers are still in Stiles’ hair. “It was just a regular checkup with the California office.”

He looks so good, but so different from the Derek in the Adirondacks, who wore knitted sweaters and soft smiles. It’s not that he isn’t smiling now. It’s just that everything is harsher, somehow. His hair so immaculate, his suit so well-pressed and his cufflinks so executive.

“Did you need anything?” Derek asks, bringing him back to reality.

“Not really,” Stiles confesses, and he should probably feel a lot more awkward about that than he does. “I just wanted to see you. Will it be distracting?”

“It’s fine.” Derek’s hand slides from his hair to the nape of his neck, then. “I have a couple of meetings, but you’re welcome to study here and we can grab dinner afterwards?”

Stiles had only dared to hope for a brief talk, like asking Derek how he is and then leaving. But
dinner with Derek means at least a couple of hours of alone time. It’s not like he’s going to say no to
that.

“Will the meetings be in here?” he asks, because there’s no way he’s trying to get a grip on labour
law if important people are going to be in the same room.

“No, we have a conference room down the hall.”

“Okay.”

“Okay, as in you’ll stay?” Derek’s thumb grazes his cheek, and Stiles nods helplessly. “Good. I need
to brief a few people. I’ll tell Isaac to bring you some refreshments.”

“Refreshments,” Stiles snorts to hide the way his chest aches. “Who says that?”

“I just did.” Derek smirks.

“That’s because you’re a grandma,” Stiles tells him, but the way Derek’s ass looks in his pants
definitely tells a different story.

The expression on Derek’s face is somewhere between fond and exasperated. He doesn’t bother
with replying to Stiles’ comment, and instead he just grabs his tie and suit jacket, and heads for the
door with the words: “I’ll see you later.”

Throughout the rest of the afternoon, Derek comes and goes, leaving or grabbing folders and stacks
of papers from his desk. Isaac brings him a tray of fruit, a cup of coffee and three water bottles.

Stiles has had worse study afternoons.

It’s past eight when Derek is finally done with his meetings. The fruit is long gone, and Stiles has
been going to the bathroom a lot the past hour after finishing the water. Isaac hasn’t commented, but
Stiles can feel his judgment every time he walks past Isaac’s desk.

“Hungry?” Derek asks him, as he pulls his tie off and puts it in his briefcase.

“Starving.” Shoving his books into his bag, Stiles stands, stretching the stiffness from his legs and
back. “How did the meetings go?”

“Decent. Studying?”

“Great. I’m all prepared for my classes throughout this week.”

“Well done.” Derek smiles and grabs his overcoat, gesturing for Stiles to head towards the door.
“Eating out or at home?”

“Definitely at home.”

Once there, Derek changes into a sweater and soft pants, and it’s almost like the Adirondacks again,
as he lets Stiles snuggle in close on the couch. So maybe Stiles can be okay with Derek being all
official and stiff in his suit when they’re in public, if he gets this when they’re alone.

◊

Things continue much like that for the rest of January and February. Stiles tries to stay away between
events at one point, thinking that maybe all he needs is a Derek detox, but that only results in Derek
showing up at his apartment and spending the night.
After that, he gives in. To everything. To spending the night. To spending the morning. To spending the weekend. To wearing Derek’s clothes. To letting his heart beat extra hard whenever Derek comes home from work.

To kissing Derek just to kiss.

So when they’re in bed one night, Stiles still slightly out of breath, and Derek asks him what he’s doing for spring break, he doesn’t have to think too much.

“Nothing.” It’s not like he had plans anyway.

“My company is going to the Canary Islands.” Derek props a pillow under his head and turns toward him. “Do you want to come with me?”

Isn’t the Canary Islands in Europe? Stiles shifts, trying to get his brain to come back online. He’d expected Derek to invite him to something similar to the cottage weekend. This, however, is something different. If Derek’s colleagues are going to be there, Stiles won’t know how to act around them.

Derek must’ve seen the conflict on his face, because he says, “We’d have our own place. I’d be going to a meeting a day, and maybe we’d have to attend a dinner at some point. It’s mostly a reward for good work, taking the employees on a trip, but we need a few meetings to be allowed to call it a business trip.”

“Oh.” Any doubt still left goes away immediately when Derek pulls him closer under the covers and kisses him. “Okay. I’ll go with you.”

Stiles calls his dad a few days before he has to leave. It’s been easier to pretend that leaving the country isn’t something he should tell his dad about, until he starts packing his suitcase. It’s not as much about the trip, but about the fact that he’s going to have to lie to his dad about Derek as well. It just doesn’t sit well with him. Lying to Scott is difficult enough.

“Hey,” he says, when his dad picks up on the other end. “Are you free to talk?”

“Sure. What’s on your mind, son?”

Taking a breath, Stiles shoves his new swim trunks in the suitcase. He’s got no idea how warm it is in Tenerife mid-March, and Google gave him ambiguous results, but hopefully there’s a pool.

“I’m going on a trip for spring break,” he begins, somewhere hoping that there won’t be any follow up questions on that. “Just thought you’d know.”

“On a trip?” his dad echoes, and Stiles winces. “To where?”

“Um, the Canary Islands?” He tries for casual, but it doesn’t work that well.

“To Europe?”

Oh god, Stiles forgot how much his dad likes trivia shows on TV. Of course he knows where the Canary Islands are.

“Yeah,” he says, picking up the trunks he just shoved into his suitcase and folds them carefully instead. “It’ll just be for the week.”

“Where did you get money to go Europe?”
Wincing, Stiles really should’ve thought more about the practical questions. “Well, the person I’m going with. Uh. His company is paying.”

There’s dead silence on the other end for a long, long moment. Stiles is just about to ask if his dad’s had a stroke, when he clears his throat.

“Is this the same guy you spoke to during Christmas break? On the phone?”

“Did you listen to my phone calls!”

His dad heaves a sigh. “No, I just noticed that you’d make a call around the same time every night.”


“And who is he?”

Stiles can imagine his dad straightening up in his desk chair at the station, preparing to search every system he can find for Derek’s name.

“That’s Derek. He’s nice.” Chewing his lip, he thinks about leaving it there, but that’s probably only going to lead to even more suspicion and weird questions. “We met early last semester. He works a lot, so it took a while before I decided if I wanted to be with him or not.”

“And you do? Want to be with him?” His dad sounds so serious, yet soft, and Stiles doesn’t know what to do with the realisation that just dawns on him.

“Yeah. Yes, I do.” Because he does. And he shouldn’t. He can’t.

◊

Stiles dresses in the clothes that Derek bought him last week before he heads to the airport. He’s never been exactly comfortable like this, but now it feels like a dress-up game. A charade. But the flight is going to be full of Derek’s colleagues, employees, and Stiles doesn’t think he should show up in ratty jeans and a washed-out t-shirt. It’s nothing fancy, anyway. It’s not like Jackson put him in a suit or anything. He just looks proper. Like he’ll fit in.

It shouldn’t make him this uncomfortable.

Derek picks him up outside his house, and he’s not wearing a suit, but not exactly the soft pants and the knitted sweater, either. He’s in a button-up and slacks, his coat slung over the back of the seat.

It’s not like Stiles wants to think that he’s the hottest man alive, but he can’t really help it.

“Hey,” he says, climbing into the car when Derek reaches over to let him in.

“How are you?” Derek asks in a way of greeting, and smiles. It looks a little tight, like maybe he is nervous about Stiles meeting people from his company as well.

“I’m okay.” That’s the closest to good he can get, without outright lying.

“Did you bring your passport?”

Stiles pats the pocket to his coat. It’s still freaking March – he needs something more than a sweater still. “Yep.”

Derek is quiet during the ride, and for once, Stiles doesn’t know what to say. The silence is not
exactly heavy, but it doesn’t really feel like he’s going on a vacation with his boyfriend. Which is what they’re pretending, isn’t it?

“All we going to meet everyone as soon as we get in there?” he asks, as they grab their bags out of the trunk and head for the doors.

“Some, possibly. I don’t think you’ll meet too many of them until the dinner. Most of them fly economy.”

Stiles blinks. “And we’re not?”

“No.” Derek smiles a little when Stiles narrows his eyes at him. “Company policy.”

“You’re so full of shit.”

But after the check-in, Stiles can’t exactly complain when they get to go into one of those fancy-looking lounges that he’s only ever just walked past before. It’s so quiet in there, compared to the other side of the door, where people are shouting to each other what to buy in the stores, or someone watching a movie on their laptop without headphones.

He shakes hands with a few people that Derek introduces him to. They seem to be his closest confidants, judging by their fancy titles. While Derek talks contracts and clients with them, Stiles concentrates on the free snacks and coffee.

“Nervous about flying?”

Looking up, he finds Lydia sliding up next to him, preparing her own coffee.

“Not really.” He shrugs. “More nervous about the company.”

She laughs, pouring two packets of sugar into the mug before stirring. “They’re a lot less intimidating than they look. I promise.”

“I know Derek is,” he says, glancing over to where Derek is talking to two of the men, looking kind of intensely serious like he always seems to when they’re around other people. “Usually people in suits freak me out.”

“It’s not until you’ve known them long enough to notice the bread crumbs from breakfast and spit-up stains from their baby, that they stop being a mass of powerful men and become individuals.” She smiles at him. She’s so tiny, but the way she holds herself makes Stiles suspect that she’s the smartest one in the room. “Most of them are nice.”

“And the rest?”

“Appreciate them for their qualities at work, and stay the heck away from them at all other times.”

Stiles laughs, and it’s like he can breathe a little easier now when he returns to Derek’s side.

In comparison, the flight is easy. Flying first class is so calm and quiet, and Stiles has never been this pampered in his entire life.

“You get champagne?” he whispers to Derek, when the stewardess puts down a glass in front of him, and then pours one for Derek as well.

Derek just rolls his eyes at him, smiling, and continues replying to his work emails.
It’s evening when they land, but as soon as they step off the plane, Stiles knows he’s going to like it here. It’s warm, and it smells like the salt of the sea. The flight exhausted him, but he still takes in as much of the surroundings as he can while Derek herds him to a car that takes them to their hotel.

“When’s your meeting tomorrow?” he asks, as Derek swipes the keycard to let them through the door to their...suite. He should’ve known that Derek wouldn’t settle for a regular room. Stiles sighs when Derek turns on the lights. “Oh my god. You don’t do anything halfway, do you?”

“Company policy,” Derek says, and Stiles doesn’t believe him for a second. “I have a morning meeting starting at eight, so I’ll probably be back before you wake up.”

“Can we have breakfast in bed?” Stiles asks, dropping his bag inside the door, and hunting down the bedroom. It’s beautiful, with a huge, cloudy-looking bed and double doors leading to a wide balcony. If he isn’t imagining things, he’s pretty sure he can see the glittering of water in the moonlight just outside. Taking a few steps into the room, Stiles takes in the many pillows, the loveseat in the corner, and the fresh flowers in the vase on a side table.

These days, he really doesn’t need a lot of space when he’s sharing a bed with Derek, so it’s maybe a little unnecessary. His own has started to feel spacious enough the last couple of times Derek has stayed over.

“We can,” Derek says, coming up behind him. His hand is warm and strong where it curls around Stiles’ hip. “Was the flight okay?”

Turning around, Stiles raises his eyebrows, trying to figure out if he’s kidding or not. “There was champagne.”

Derek kisses him, then. Slow, gentle, almost like it’s the first time.

“Thanks for coming with me.”

“I’ve never been to Europe,” Stiles says, and it’s like the realisation dawns on him as he says the words. “So I should probably be the one thanking you.”

Derek doesn’t reply. He just kisses Stiles again.

The following morning, he wakes before Derek is back. It’s only a little after nine, and the sun is pouring through the balcony doors and the flowy curtains. For a second, he’s annoyed, but then he remembers that he’s in a hotel room. In Tenerife.

Scrambling out of bed, Stiles heads to the doors. Outside, far below him of course, stretches the ocean in an endless blue. There’s a pale strip of white sand and he wonders if it’s usually cluttered with multicoloured sunshades closer to summer than it is now.

Cracking the door open, he closes his eyes to the sound of the waves and the light breeze. It’s a lot warmer than New York City, and the sun is already bright on his face as he squints at it.

Bringing sunscreen was definitely a good call.

After putting on a shirt, because it’s not that warm, he pads out on the balcony. He leans against the banister, looking down at the people crossing the beach, and the small road leading up to the hotel. There are a few boats out on the water, but other than that, it’s just so very calm. Maybe it’s too early for all the tourists.

“Good morning.”
Turning around, he finds Derek standing in the doorway. The soft expression from the cottage is back on his face, and Stiles can’t breathe for a second.

“Morning,” he manages finally. “Come look at the view. It’s amazing.”

“No thanks,” Derek says, and smiles when Stiles frowns at him. “I don’t like heights, remember?”

He had completely forgotten about that, but he goes to Derek instead, pressing a kiss to his mouth before stepping back into the bedroom. “How was the meeting?”

“Good. Mostly just for the sake of it.” Derek grabs him by the waist and pulls him back in for another kiss. “Do you still want breakfast in bed?”

“I don’t think that’s all I want.”

“Champagne, too?” Derek asks, and Stiles can feel him smirking against his lips.

“Shut up,” he grins.

Just because Derek’s an asshole, he does get them champagne for breakfast. There’s the regular stuff too, of course, like toast and croissants, eggs and bacon. Stiles holds his coffee cup in one hand, and his champagne flute in the other, unable to decide which one to drink first. Derek doesn’t say anything, he just shakes his head and smiles.

They’re in no rush. Stiles tries to wrap his mind around the fact that he’s in Europe, with Derek. That this entire suite is theirs for the entire week, and that he might even get a bit of a tan before they go back home.

“What are we gonna do today?” Stiles asks, once he’s so full that he has to lie back on the bed to breathe properly.

“It seems like we’re going to nap,” Derek says, squeezing his calf.

Stiles frowns at him. “Why? We just had breakfast.”

“You’re going to be sleepy in a while. Food coma.” Getting up from the bed, Derek puts the empty plates and remaining food back on the cart. His shirt is unbuttoned at the top, and Stiles catches a glimpse of the hair on his chest. He watches as Derek pushes the cart out of the room, and concentrates on swallowing down the tightness in his throat until Derek comes back. He stops in the doorway, meeting Stiles’ gaze, with his hands in his pockets.

Stiles reaches out a hand to him, not knowing what to say, but sure that he wants Derek close. It’s usually easier not to think about his own feelings when Derek’s around. But when Derek steps closer, taking his hand and kissing his knuckles, it only amplifies the way Stiles’ heart aches for him.

The only sane thing to do would be to pull away, to create some distance and clear his head. He’s in so deep that he’s got no clue which way is out. Truth be told, he’s not sure he even wants it anymore.

Instead, Stiles pulls him down, muting the way his heart beats faster with a hard kiss. For a second, Derek is unresponsive, like the force of it has caught him off guard. Then, he groans low in his throat and pushes Stiles back against the pillows.

The kiss is desperate, and Stiles puts all his tangled mess of feelings in it, digging his fingers into Derek’s shoulders, groaning when Derek’s mouth finds his jaw, and his neck, and then his shoulder
after pulling off the t-shirt. Stiles knows that he’s going to have marks, but right now that’s all he wants. Like evidence that it’s real.

“Come on,” he groans, pushing his own underwear down and then reaching for Derek’s clothes. He doesn’t want to go slow, to be gentle. He needs to feel it.

Derek seems to feel the same, or at least he’s able to read Stiles enough to reach for the lube. “Turn around.”

Stomach tightening in anticipation, Stiles rolls over on his stomach and presses his face into his arms, trying not to feel exposed when Derek pulls him up on his knees. His hands are so strong and sure, spreading Stiles’ legs further apart, and probably getting a pretty great view of Stiles’ dick hardening rapidly.

He shudders when Derek grazes his stubble over his neck and shoulder, palming his ass like he’s hesitating. But Stiles doesn’t need hesitation right now, he just needs Derek close. To feel him all over.

“Come on,” he says again, spreading his legs further and arching his back. Judging by the throaty sound Derek makes behind him, it gets the message across. Stiles takes a breath when Derek’s slick fingers slide between his cheeks, gently rubbing over his hole.

He wants to snap, ask Derek to hurry up, but just as he’s about to, Derek presses a finger into him. Groaning, Stiles pushes back against it, suddenly desperate to get it deeper. Derek works him open methodically, not exactly rushing but definitely not going as slow as he usually does. Stiles barely has time to adjust before he gets another finger, and he groans at the slight burn, clutching a pillow to his face to smother the sound.

“There you go,” Derek murmurs, stroking up and down his back, and then finds the spot that makes Stiles lose his breath and his stomach clench at the same time.

Whimpering, Stiles clings to the pillow, his spine turning to liquid as Derek rubs the spot over and over, until Stiles is practically sobbing.

“You’re doing so good,” Derek says, and Stiles feels white-hot pleasure zing down his spine at the praise. “I’m going to give you another before I fuck you.”

Stiles can’t even respond; he just moans breathlessly into the pillow, thinking that he might not make it that far. But then Derek presses a third finger into him and finds that spot again, and Stiles thinks he might be dripping precome steadily all over the covers. But he needs more.

“Oh god,” he whines, biting his lip to distract himself from the way Derek’s setting his entire body on fire. “Fuck me.”

“You’re doing so good,” Derek says again, and Stiles thinks he’s turned into puddle for a second. “You can take it for a little while longer, can’t you?”

“Yes,” he breathes, screwing his eyes shut and clutches the pillow until he can barely feel his fingers. It’s so good, too good, and it feels like he’s barrelling towards the edge so fast. And yet not fast enough. Derek’s murmuring nonsense to him, stroking his back, and his hair, cupping his balls and kissing his neck. Every time Derek tells him how perfect he is, how good he’s doing, Stiles somehow both gets even closer to coming and manages to keep himself from it at the same time.

His chest is heaving, and he pants wetly into the pillow, as Derek pulls his fingers out.
“Ready?” Derek asks, pressing the pad of his thumb against Stiles’ hole.

Nodding into the pillow, Stiles swallows several times to find his ability to speak again. “Yeah.”

For a moment, he thinks it can’t possibly get better, but then Derek curls a hand around the back of his neck – gentle but steady – and pushes into him. He’s less careful than he normally is, but Stiles needs the burn to keep him from coming, to keep him grounded. Derek’s hand is warm on his neck, steadying him, and the other curls around his hip.

Derek sets a brutal pace. Snapping into him just fast enough for Stiles to never regain his control, hard enough to make him lose his brain function, and precise enough to make his belly tighten for every time Derek drives into him.

He’s loud, turning his head to the side, his cheek rubbing against the sheets with every push. His eyes roll back as Derek finds the right angle over and over, and the sounds Derek makes when he does, like he needs this as much as Stiles does, make it even better. And then Derek wraps a hand around Stiles’ dick, and his orgasm punches through him before he’s even able to comprehend what’s happening. He moans, loud, and his body clamps down around Derek like a vise.

Judging by the way Derek’s hand spasms against his neck, and how his thrusts turn erratic, he’s coming too. And then Derek’s kissing his shoulder, and his neck, nuzzling the soft skin behind his ear. Stiles throws out a hand, grasping the one Derek’s moved from his neck, and keeps his eyes closed for just a moment longer.

He slumps down on the bed, his legs finally giving in as Derek pulls out. He’s quivering, borderline shaking, like all the energy has left his body. But the suffocating, overwhelming burn in his chest is gone. Instead, there’s just a warm softness behind his ribs that spreads through his entire body when Derek cleans him up, turns him over and strokes the sweaty hair from his face.

“Okay?” he asks, and he’s so close that his face almost gets a little blurry.

“Yes,” Stiles says, because he is. There’s never been a time with Derek when he hasn’t been okay. Where he hasn’t felt safe. When Derek leans in to kiss him, Stiles puts a hand on his chest to stop him. “You?”

“Yes.”

Stiles reaches up, strokes the stubble on his cheeks with his palms, and the curve of his lips with his thumbs. Derek’s eyes are bright, and Stiles can make out all the different colours in them; the greens, the browns, the flecks of gold.

“What?” Derek asks, voice barely audible, and he looks so vulnerable and open that Stiles has to tell the truth.

“You’re really beautiful.”

That startles a laugh out of Derek, who leans in and smacks a peck to his lips, and Stiles can breathe a little easier again as the moment breaks.

“I think you need to sleep.”

Stiles is about to protest, but then a yawn interrupts him out of nowhere. “Thinking that you’re beautiful has nothing to do with that.”

Smirking, Derek pulls the covers over him and tucks him in. “I’ll wake you in an hour.”
Stiles drifts off before he has the chance to protest, and he wakes again before the hour is up. Blinking against the sunlight pouring in through the open doors, he listens to the muted sound of the TV in the other room. He stretches a little, smiling to himself at the way his body is sore in all the right ways.

“Awake?”

Looking up, he finds Derek in the doorway.

“Yeah.” Sitting up, he looks around for something to put on. “Did you nap?”

“No, I’ve been watching TV.” Derek hands him a t-shirt that is decidedly not Stiles’, and underwear that thankfully are his own. “Are you hungry, or do you want to do some sightseeing?”

Right now, Stiles would mostly just want to curl up with Derek on a couch and make out like a high schooler, but that’s probably not an option.

“Sightseeing. After I’ve showered.”

It’s probably bad form to smell like sex in a new country. Instead of putting the clothes on, Stiles takes them with him to the bathroom. He likes wearing Derek’s shirts, so he’ll just put on some pants before they head out.

It takes Stiles almost the entire day to realise that Tenerife isn’t the name of the town they’re in, but the entire island. But as it turns out, Costa Adeje isn’t only a beautiful view from their balcony, but also captivating while walking the narrow streets along the coast. They avoid the malls, and stick to the smaller streets and discover little shops with insanely overpriced items.

Stiles is grateful that he thought to put on sunscreen, because even though it’s only March, it’s definitely in the seventies and the sky is cloudless. Derek surprises him by speaking Spanish when they grab their lunch at a cafe.

“When did you learn Spanish?”

“In high school.” Derek shrugs, like it’s no big deal that he placed their entire order in another language a second ago.

“I took Spanish too, but I don’t remember a word.”

“We had family friends in Mexico,” Derek says after a beat of silence. “I guess I got a lot of practice.”

Bumping his foot against Derek’s under the table, Stiles shuffles his food around the plate. “You don’t see them anymore?”

“No, we lost touch after the accident.”

Stiles looks up, finding that Derek’s gaze is lost somewhere in his glass of wine. This is the first time he’s mentioned that there was an accident. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Derek blinks as though he’s been far away, and his eyes find Stiles’. “No, it’s fine.”

Nodding, Stiles reminds himself of his own words from the cottage. Derek doesn’t pay him to ask questions. He swallows the bile rising in his throat and concentrates on his food for the rest of lunch. Derek doesn’t say much, and Stiles can’t find it in him to lighten the mood.
They stroll barefoot along the beach on their way back to the hotel. Derek greets a few people that Stiles assumes are from work, but he doesn’t ask, and they don’t stop to be introduced either.

“When’s the dinner?” Stiles asks and bends down to pick up a pearly shell. “With your company, I mean.”

“Friday.” Derek’s tone is sort of short, again. Not annoyed, or in any way signalling that Stiles is in trouble. It’s more like he doesn’t feel like talking with anyone right now.

Nodding, Stiles pockets the shell and watches the slow roll of the waves over the sand. “Wanna order room service tonight?”

When he sneaks a glance, Derek looks relieved for a second, before he slides his stoic mask back on. “Sure, if you don’t want to go out?”

“I’d rather stay in. I’m feeling the jet lag.” Stiles is pretty sure that his lie is obvious to anyone, but he thinks Derek’s grateful for it, because he slides his fingers down Stiles’ arm before taking his hand. He holds it until they reach the hotel lobby, and Derek is caught by a colleague wanting to discuss something about a budget.

Stiles takes the opportunity to head up to the suite and pick a movie, before Derek can ruin their evening with his bad taste. No one wants to cuddle up on the couch to a historical documentary.

Well, except for Derek, he’s learned.

He’s looking over the room service menu when Derek comes back. He’s less tense, as though business talk has cleared his head a little.

“I picked a movie,” Stiles tells him.

Humming, Derek leans over the back of the couch to read the menu over his shoulder. “What did you pick?”

“To watch or to eat?” Stiles suppresses a shiver as Derek squeezes his neck.

“Both.”

Biting his lip, Stiles scans the menu again. “I’m thinking about the salmon, maybe.” He points it out on the list. “You?”

“I’ll take the same thing.” The smirk in Derek’s voice is obvious as he continues, “And since you’re avoiding the movie subject, I’m assuming you picked something terrible, per usual.”

“Rude.” Stiles smacks him over the head with the menu – it’s three sheets of paper, so it’s not like he’s doing any damage. “I have excellent taste in movies.”

“Did you pick another superhero one?”

Pulling a face, Stiles reaches out for the hotel phone on the side table. “Obviously. What do you want to drink?”

The next few days follow the same pattern. Stiles wakes around the time when Derek comes home from his morning meeting, and they eat breakfast in bed. There’s usually sex after that, and apparently Derek has a newfound obsession with taking Stiles from behind, because he guides Stiles over on his hands and knees, or on his stomach, every time. Not that Stiles minds. It’s something
with the angle that makes him sort of dissolve into himself, and more than once he comes without being touched. Above all, Stiles loves the way Derek presses his face against his neck, groaning into his skin, when he comes.

And then, they spend the rest of the day doing touristy stuff, like going to Mount Teide – a volcano – and having a barbecue with a bunch of other people, and going dolphin and whale-watching on a giant yacht. Stiles hangs over the rail most of the time, watching the dolphins play around the bow. Derek isn’t as impressed, but he’s a lot more captivated by the two whales they manage to spot, even though they’re from a much greater distance.

The evening of the dinner, Stiles fiddles with his button-up and the tie, until Derek takes pity on him again.

“I should teach you how to tie this yourself,” he says, focused on the slim silk around Stiles’ neck.

“Why?” Stiles breathes, remembering so well when Derek did this the last time. It was the same evening as their first kiss. It’s been thousands since. “Then you’d stop doing it for me.”

Smiling, Derek kisses him as he folds the collar down. “It might be helpful one day, if I’m not around.”

Stiles’ stomach sinks, heavy like he’s just swallowed a rock. “Planning on firing me?” he asks, feeling defensive.

Derek freezes for a moment, before he tightens Stiles’ tie and squeezes his shoulder. “No.”

It’s weird after that. Derek is clearly tense, and doesn’t say much on their way to the restaurant, and Stiles can’t think of anything to talk about. He likes being in this bubble, where he can pretend like this isn’t a business arrangement. Like Derek’s with him because he wants him, not because he’s paying.

At least the sex isn’t something that was in the initial deal, Stiles tells himself, trying to make himself feel a bit better. It’s something that’s grown organically, that’s been building between them. He’s not stupid. There’s something there.

Despite his internal pep talk, he’s grateful that they’re not seated at the same table. Derek’s with the rest of the important people, and Stiles is sitting with a bunch of other plus ones. He doesn’t think any of them are paid to be here.

One girl, Margaret, is the high school sweetheart to one of Derek’s junior partners. Stiles is immediately mesmerised by her and the way she talks. She’s so eloquent, for one, and her beauty matches her husband’s. Stiles wonders briefly if she’s done a lot of beauty pageants. Not in a bad way, because she’s ridiculously sweet and funny, but the way she holds herself. It’s like she’s so aware of how she represents her husband as well.

“How did you and Derek meet, Stiles?” she asks, and looks at him with such genuine interest that he feels like a bad person for lying.

“Well, um, he does these things for my college, so we met there.” He swallows, looking around the table. A few of the other people are listening too, and he resists the urge to squirm in his seat. “Obviously we didn’t meet in high school.”

Margaret laughs, and the other people follow her lead. “No, that makes sense. What’s your age difference?”
Picking on his napkin, Stiles tries to not look as guilty as he feels. “Twelve years.”

That’s a lot, isn’t it? He expects someone to ask about it, to push for details, but instead a middle-aged woman on his left nods knowingly.

“My husband is fourteen years older than me. It’s not really something you can control, right, hon?” She smiles, eyes twinkling, and Stiles can breathe a little easier.

“Yeah.”

“I’ve only ever met Derek at events like these, and he’s always so formal,” a man – Stiles has forgotten his name, too – butts in. “You don’t come across that way.”

“Oh, well, he’s pretty relaxed at home?” Stiles tries, and glances in Derek’s direction. He can see what they’re talking about, of course. He’s thought the same things, too. Derek’s usually so serious around other people. It’s like his position burdens him, weighing him down. But Stiles knows the other sides to him. His dry humour and his smile. “I think it’s important to him to do his job right, so maybe he forgets to show personality, too. He’s genuinely one of the kindest people I know.”

Margaret sighs, tilting her head to the side, and smiles. “You’re obviously very in love with him.”

Swallowing down the sour taste in his mouth, Stiles reaches for his glass. “Yeah. Yeah, I am.”

And he pretends that it doesn’t sting.

That night, Derek eats him out until he comes sobbing into the pillow, and then fucks him so, so gently until he comes again, shaking through it. And when he scoots in close, after cleaning them up, Stiles can’t think of anywhere he’d rather be.

Their last night in Costa Adeje, Stiles can’t help but feel like it’s a goodbye as he stands on the balcony, staring down at the people below. Derek’s inside, taking a shower after their day trip to the mountains and dinner at a restaurant down at the beach.

It’s the warmest day yet, and even though it’s past ten and dark out, the air is warm against his skin. He’s gotten a bit of tan, and the skin on his shoulders is tender and reddening after he forgot to put sunscreen back on after a swim yesterday.

Stiles thinks that maybe his heart is a little tender, too.

Before he can delve any further into that, there’s a gentle knock on the open balcony door behind him. Looking up, he finds Derek standing there, his hair damp after the shower and he’s only wearing pants.

“Do you want to come back inside?” Derek asks him, leaning against the doorjamb.

Glancing over at the ocean stretching out in front of him, Stiles shakes his head. “I think I’ll stay here for a bit.”

He turns back, leaning against the banister, assuming that Derek’s going to go back inside and watch some TV. After a long silence, Derek clears his throat behind him, and Stiles just lifts his head to acknowledge that he’s listening.

“Do you mind company?”

Suspecting that he’s going to get a lot of time away from Derek as soon as they get home, since
that’s what usually happens, Stiles shakes his head. “No, go ahead.”

He fully expects Derek to sit down on one of the lounge chairs by the wall, so when familiar hands and arms slide around his waist, and Derek presses up against his back, he doesn’t have a chance to steel himself. Instead, he melts against the warmth of Derek’s body heat, and the way his stubble scratches against Stiles’ skin.

“I thought you were afraid of heights,” he says, fitting one of his hands over one of Derek’s.

“It’s okay as long as I don’t look.”

Stiles resists the urge to turn around and check for himself. He suspects it’s true though, considering how Derek has refused even taking a step outside of those doors until tonight. Maybe he’s feeling a bit blue, too.

“It’s been a good week,” Stiles whispers and shivers at the way Derek drags the tip of his nose along his throat.

“It has.”

“Thanks for bringing me.” He digs his fingers into Derek’s palm, pressing up closer against him.

“Thanks for coming with me.” Derek presses a kiss to his jaw, just below his ear.

Hesitating, Stiles looks out over the water again. It’s barely distinguishable in the darkness, but he can still hear the waves rolling in. “I don’t wanna go home.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know.” But he does know. He doesn’t want to go home, because he knows so well how it’s going to be as soon as they step off the plane. Derek’s going to check his work email, possibly stop by the office, and then pull away that fraction that feels like eons to Stiles. He doesn’t want to go home, because he’s close to graduating, and then what? He’s started applying to internships over the summer, trying to decide what his next step will be.

Up until this year, he’s been certain that going back to California was his only plan. Finding an internship or hopefully a job that was close enough to home that he could live with his dad for a bit and save up some money again.

Now, he isn’t sure if he’s ready to leave New York. To leave Derek, and Scott.

But mostly he’s afraid that this arrangement will come to an end in a few months, and he’ll have to face that it’s exactly that – business.

Derek squeezes him a little tighter, and Stiles blinks back to reality.

“Can we go back inside?” Derek asks, and Stiles thinks about staying behind a little longer, but the last thing he needs right now is to be alone with his head.

“Okay.”

When he turns around, he finds that Derek actually has his eyes closed, and it feels like he’s been punched in the chest. Sucking in a breath, he takes Derek’s hand, hoping that the way his fingers shake is only his own imagination.

“Come on.”
They don’t have sex that night. Instead they lie on their sides, legs intertwined and Derek drawing patterns with his fingertips on Stiles’ skin, his face pressed to Stiles’ hair, mouth to his forehead.

On the flight home, all Stiles can do is look at Derek, where he’s going through work emails on his phone and think: *I love you, I love you, I love you.*

◊

It’s been almost a week since they touched down in New York again, and Stiles has almost convinced himself that he’s not the only one with feelings, when he checks his bank accounts on a whim.

He stopped doing that months ago, when he noticed that the money appeared every month, and no longer had to double-check his finances whenever he wanted to buy himself a coffee in the library.

At first, he just marvels over the fact that he has more money now than he’s ever had. It’s a relief, obviously, since he no longer has to carry the constant stress of not knowing if he has food for the week. However, despite not having to sleep with strangers, the money still leaves a bad taste in his mouth.

It’s Derek paying him. No matter how he looks at it, it’s not a normal relationship. For a while, he considers that maybe Derek’s just making the transactions out of habit. Maybe it’s already been set up for a period of time, so it’s done automatically every month. But then he makes the mistake of checking the amount of the transactions.

Frowning, he notices that the amount was increased in December, and then the months following. It’s by quite a bit, and he grabs his phone to let Derek know – it’s his money after all – when realisation washes over him like a bucket of ice water over his head.

The first time they had sex was in December. Wasn’t it? Stiles goes back, trying to pinpoint the exact date and, yeah, it was after finals when he went to Derek’s office to confront him about the kiss.

Eyes burning, Stiles swallows fiercely and puts his phone back down. He’s so goddamn stupid. All this time, he’s been thinking that Derek might be feeling something too, because sex was never in the deal to begin with. And all this time, he’s been paying extra for it.

Hugging his knees to his chest, Stiles presses his face against them and breathes as deeply as he can, trying to ignore the way his scalp prickles.

He wants to tell himself that it’s good. He needs the money for moving back to California. There’s really no point in him staying here now, is there? Truth be told, putting the entire country between them is probably the distance he’s going to need when all of this is over.

Because it will be over.

It’s not Derek’s fault that Stiles got his heart into the mix. That he couldn’t be professional. That he had to fall in love.

He only has himself to blame.

The front door slams, and Stiles hastily wipes his eyes on his sleeve. A moment later, Scott knocks on his door and opens it without waiting for a reply. He stops, mouth open as if he was about to say something, when he spots Stiles on the desk chair.

Closing his laptop, Stiles doesn’t say anything.
“What happened?” Scott asks, and his face falls like a sad puppy’s.

“I was stupid enough to watch sad clips on YouTube,” Stiles rasps, wiping his eyes again. “You know, soldiers reuniting with their dogs, and stuff.”

He expects Scott to laugh it off, like he normally does, because they both do this too often. Instead, Scott steps up to him and hugs Stiles’ head to his stomach.

“No, you didn’t,” he says, but his voice is soft, like he isn’t calling out Stiles for lying. “It’s okay, we don’t have to talk about it.”

Stiles sucks in a breath, and then he closes his eyes as he gives up on protesting. “Okay.”

He turns his phone off for several days, concentrates on school and trying to sort out his head. Well, mostly his heart.

Even though it’s happened once before, he doesn’t count on Derek showing up on his doorstep on Friday night. He’s been watching that TV show Scott is obsessed with – okay, Scott’s rewatching and Stiles is seeing it for the first time. It’s a little confusing to be dragged from a hundred kids trying to survive on Earth, to Derek standing on the other side of his front door, looking like he came straight from work.

His heart betrays him immediately, swelling three times its size with the way Derek almost sags against the doorjamb at the sight of him.

“I’ve tried to get a hold of you,” he says, and the relief on his face is quickly chased away by pinched eyebrows and a harsh set of his mouth.

Stiles gets it. The reasonable thing would’ve been to tell Derek that he wouldn’t be able to get ahold of him for a few days, instead of just shutting down. “Sorry. Turned my phone off for a few days.”

For a moment, Derek looks at him, and the annoyed look on his face fades as quickly as it came. Now, he just looks confused. Stiles thinks that might be even worse.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I guess I forgot.” Stiles doesn’t even bother with trying to sound convincing. “I should’ve told you. Sorry.”

“Did something happen?”

Stiles wants to say yes, wants to explain why his heart hurts every time he thinks about it. Wants Derek to tell him that he’s wrong. That he isn’t the only one.

But he knows that he can’t. So he just shakes his head. “No, just a lot with school and stuff.”

When he really looks, he notices the dark circles under Derek’s eyes and that his beard is longer than usual. Like perhaps he hasn’t been sleeping that great, either.

“Do you want to come in?” he asks, because he can’t let Derek stay in their shitty stairwell all night.

“Thanks.”

Closing the door after Derek steps over the threshold feels oddly like giving in. Now, when Derek is so close that Stiles can breathe in the familiar scent of his soap, and his cologne, he wants nothing more than press into him.
They just stand there, looking at each other, and Stiles counts the seconds ticking by. The worst thing about being in love with Derek is that his heart and his mind want the same thing, but only one of them knows that there’s no point.

A part of him wants to be angry, to make a scene, and make Derek feel bad. A much larger part knows that the only one who’s done something wrong is him. Feelings were never part of the deal.

“I don’t know what to say,” Stiles manages finally, staring down at Derek’s shiny shoes and his own bare feet.

Derek offers his hand, holding it out between them, palm up. After a moment of hesitation, Stiles takes it and lets Derek pull him closer, more gentle than Stiles can remember him ever being. Closing his eyes, he presses his nose to the collar of Derek’s suit jacket, and it feels like he’s being torn apart and put back together all at once when Derek holds him tight.

“What’s going on?” Derek asks, voice barely audible.

“I don’t know.” It’s mostly true. While Stiles knows exactly what’s going on, in a sense, he’s also so confused by the entire situation. This, for example, isn’t something he expected based on the nature of their arrangement. This isn’t part of the deal, either.

The only smart thing to do would be to talk about it. Confess that he’s messed up, and think of a solution together. However, that’s most likely going to end in not ever seeing Derek again, and considering how horrible the past few days have been, Stiles doesn’t think he’s capable of handling that just yet.

“Can I come home with you?” he asks, because he doesn’t want to do this under the same roof as Scott.

“Yes,” Derek says, rubbing Stiles’ neck. “When do you want to leave?”

Taking a breath, Stiles pulls away enough to meet Derek’s gaze. “Right now?”

Smiling, Derek glances down on Stiles’ bare feet. “Put some shoes on.”

His chest feels tight, as he goes to find Scott, who’s trying to look like he’s paying attention to the TV show.

“Who was it?” he asks, looking up when Stiles enters the room.

Stiles just rolls his eyes at him. “I’m gonna stay at Derek’s.”

Face softening, Scott nods. “Okay, dude. Just bring your phone and maybe turn it on.”

“You guys are so needy,” Stiles mutters, but he pockets his phone as he goes into his room to grab shoes and a hoodie. He’s already in khakis and a t-shirt, and Derek’s never cared about that kind of stuff before when it’s just the two of them, so he doesn’t bother.

“See you,” he says to Scott, as he passes on his way to the door.

“Turn on the phone!” Scott calls after him.

Derek’s standing where Stiles left him, but he looks less winded and more tired.

“Ready to go?” he asks, reaching out as soon as Stiles is close enough.
“Is the car already here?”

“It’s been waiting. I wasn’t sure that you would be home.”

“Oh.”

They don’t talk in the car, but he holds Derek’s hand like a lifeline. It’s easier to breathe, to not overthink, when he can feel Derek’s body heat mix with his own. Stiles wants to scream at himself, knowing that this is terrible. If he’s been breaking like this over being apart for a few days, how is he going to survive when graduation comes and their arrangement is up?

For months, he’s been telling himself that he can turn it off if he tries hard enough. But shutting Derek out has only made it worse. And now, when he’s here breathing the same air, Stiles feels like his whole body and mind has been grounded. Like this is how it’s supposed to be.

Stiles glances over at Derek. He’s staring out the window, and his eyes look so pale in the cold streetlights flashing by. He’s serious in a way that Stiles hasn’t seen in a long time. A dangerous voice at the back of his mind whispers that maybe Derek has missed him too. That it isn’t just Stiles.

He pushes away the fact that it doesn’t explain anything about the money.

Once they’re in Derek’s condo, Stiles is calmer, his heartbeat steadily going down to normal. This is where he’s supposed to be. Derek’s still holding his hand, and Stiles squeezes slightly, drawing Derek’s attention.

“Do you want to take a bath with me?” he asks. “Just, you know, wind down?”

Derek lets out a breath, and his shoulders slump. “I’d like that.”

Digging out the bottle of bubble bath he bought ages ago, Stiles fills the tub – it takes forever – while Derek hangs up his suit and probably does work stuff that needs finishing up. He might have overdone it with the bubbles, because he has to create a hole in the foam to see how far the actual water has reached, and dip his hand to measure the temperature.

Dimming the lights, he undresses, leaving his clothes in a messy pile by the sink, and gets in. It’s borderline too hot, but once he adjusts his body goes lax.

“It’s ready!” he calls and is about to close his eyes, assuming that it’s going to take Derek at least thirty minutes to get ready, when the bathroom door opens. It’s difficult to see with the dimmed lights, but Stiles can at least tell that Derek’s already undressed.

“Scoot back,” Derek says, which is the exact opposite to what Stiles expected, so he creates a splash of water by first sliding forward and then back again.

He watches as Derek gets in the water, and parts his legs further when Derek sits down between them. It’s strange, having Derek lean back against his chest, sinking down enough so that he can lean his head against Stiles’ shoulder.

Stiles wraps his arms around him, guilt curling in his belly as Derek heaves a sigh, and slumps against him.

“I’m sorry,” Stiles whispers against his temple, pressing a kiss there. “I shouldn’t have gone MIA like that.”

“No,” Derek agrees, reaching up to hold onto Stiles’ wrist. “I’m glad you came home with me
tonight.”

“Me too.” Pressing another kiss to his temple, Stiles squeezes him a little tighter to his chest. Hope unfurls in his chest, warming him from the inside. “I’m gonna stay the night.”

Derek hums, settling in against him. “Thank you.”

Stiles doesn’t know for how long they sit there, except that they refill the tub with warm water three times, and that Derek falls asleep against him once. Much to his own surprise, he’s content with just sitting there, pressing little kisses to Derek’s temple when he thinks it’s gone too long between them, and scratching his fingers through the hair on Derek’s chest.

“Hey,” he says quietly, when the water starts going cold again. “Wanna get to bed?”

Derek makes a little sound, like maybe he was drifting off again, and nods. “Probably should.”

For once, Stiles is the one to dry Derek off. The way his heart aches, when Derek smiles sleepily at him, is completely different than it has been the past few days.

“Can I kiss you?” Stiles asks, as he tosses the towel in the direction of the tub.

Derek’s gaze softens, and he nods. And Stiles does, making it as soft as he can, and he isn’t sure if he’s more worried about his own heart or Derek breaking.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers again, before he kisses Derek one more time.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Derek asks, resting his forehead against Stiles’.

“Yeah,” Stiles says. Not because he wants to, but because he knows he should. “Tomorrow.”

“Okay.” Derek strokes a thumb over his ribs, up and down, and then up again. “It’s going to be okay.”

Swallowing down the sudden lump in his throat, Stiles nods. “Okay.”

In bed that night, Stiles fits himself against Derek’s back, pressing his face against the nape of his neck. Breathing in the artificial peach scent from the bubble bath, but beneath that is every familiar smell that is Derek.

I love you, he thinks, before he falls asleep.

He wakes again at five-thirty by Derek’s alarm going off, and groans. He doesn’t know when they went to bed last night, but it feels like it can’t have been more than a couple of hours. Three tops.

Even Derek looks exhausted when he sits up and turns off the alarm. Stiles squints at him, wondering if he should get up as well.

“Go back to sleep,” Derek tells him, as though he’s read Stiles’ mind. “I have two meetings before lunch, but I’ll be home after that.”

“For how long?” Stiles asks, wanting to know how much time he has for their talk. The last thing he needs is Derek having to go back to the office in the middle of his confession.

Derek turns towards him, blinking. “For the rest of the day?”

Oh. “Okay. I’ll be here.”
That brings a tiny smile to Derek’s lips. “Okay.”

He wakes briefly again, when Derek comes back to tell him that he’s leaving for the office, and Stiles pulls him down by the tie to kiss him. It doesn’t hit him until Derek’s already left that it’s a weirdly domestic routine they’ve created.

It’s almost lunch when he finally gets out of bed, anxiety buzzing under his skin, and he can barely eat his breakfast, even though it makes it a little easier to notice that Derek’s fridge is still stocked.

He’s zapping through the TV channels for the fourteenth time, when he finally gives up and grabs his phone from the coffee table. It takes forever after he’s turned it on, and for a second, he thinks that there’s nothing waiting for him. No texts, no voicemails. Nothing.

But then, his phone starts buzzing with incoming messages and his fingers tremble as he counts to ten texts and four voicemails from Derek alone. There are a few texts from Danny, and two from Mason, but none that question why he hasn’t replied. He’s grateful that he at least was smart enough to call his dad and lie about having a lot of school work, and therefore turning his phone off for a while.

Taking a breath, he decides to go through the texts first. The first two are casual, and probably sent way before Derek realised that Stiles was avoiding him.

> Work is busy per usual. How are your classes?

> Do you have time for dinner on Thurs?

> I tried calling you, but I’m only reaching voicemail. I’m assuming that you’re busy with studying. Don’t overwork yourself.

Stiles swallows. The next one is sent almost forty hours after the last one.

> Can you get back to me when you’re free? I tried calling you again, but I’m still only reaching voicemail.

> Stiles, are you okay? You don’t have to talk to me, but please let me know that you’re okay.

He wants to close his eyes as he continues, wondering how he ever thought this was fair to Derek.

> Tried calling you. Voicemail again. I understand that I did something wrong, but you have to tell me what it is. Please get back to me.

> You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to. I just need to know that you’re safe and I will leave you alone, I promise.

> You can call Isaac if you don’t feel comfortable talking to me.

Attached to the message is a phone number that Stiles assumes is Isaac’s. He aches as he reads the last text, sent yesterday morning:

> Stiles, please.

The first two voicemails are just Derek sounding slightly frustrated, asking Stiles to call him back. It’s the last one that breaks his heart. It’s from yesterday.
“Stiles. I’m sorry for calling you again, I just want to make sure that you’re safe. I’m sorry. I never meant to hurt you. I...” Derek trails off there, and his voice is raw when he continues. “I’m planning on coming by in an hour just to make sure that you’re okay. If you don’t want me to, send me or Isaac a text, and I won’t. Please.”

Hugging his knees to his chest, Stiles puts his phone back on the table. Derek must’ve thought he was dead or something, judging by the worry in his voice.

The next moment, his phone buzzes with a new text. It’s from Derek.

> What do you want for lunch?

Stiles has no idea why, but he has to bite his lip to stop himself from crying. This stupid, stupid man who he’s fallen head over heels for, who’s been worried half to death for a week, wants to know what he wants for lunch. Stiles can easily imagine him sitting in his office, wanting to sound casual, but probably scared that there won’t be a reply this time either. So he types it out as quickly as he can.

< Anything. You.

Derek’s reply is instant.

> I’ll be home in two hours.

< I’ll be here

He needs to make sure that Derek knows.

When he hears familiar steps in the hall a little over two hours later, Stiles suddenly feels so light. He looks up from the couch, and smiles when Derek stops in the doorway. The relieved look on Derek’s face makes his heart beat a little faster, and then Derek smiles too. And Stiles, well, he thinks that things will be okay.

“Hey,” he says when he realises that he’s been staring. “How was work?”

“Dragging,” Derek tells him, and puts down the takeout bags on the kitchen counter. Stiles watches him from the couch, but the sudden burning need in his stomach makes him get up.

“Come to bed with me?” he whispers, crowding Derek against the counter, kissing him softly.

“What about talking?” But Derek’s hands are already curling around Stiles’ hips, betraying him.

“We can talk afterwards.”

Derek responds by kissing him again, and then taking him to the bedroom. This time, Stiles is the one to make him sit down on the bed, kissing him over and over again until Derek’s breathless and hard underneath him.

For once, Stiles gets to undress him. He takes his time, pushing the suit jacket off his shoulders and undoing every single button of his shirt. Derek’s skin tastes familiar, and a little salty, when Stiles runs his lips down his throat, his stomach churning at the little sound Derek makes.

“Stiles,” Derek groans when Stiles grinds down against him, and grabs his hips.

“Gonna take care of you,” Stiles promises, grinding down again, and smothers Derek’s helpless
Pushing Derek down on his back, Stiles kisses his chest, his stomach, and where the trail of hair disappears into his pants. He strokes the outline of Derek’s dick through them, feeling his own twitch in his underwear, and fumbles with the belt before he’s able to get it open.

He gets to his knees as Derek lifts his hips to help him get the pants and his underwear off. For a second, Stiles just looks at him. At the strong lines of his body, at the way his dick curves up against his stomach, hard and leaking. Leaning down, Stiles kisses him again and wraps a hand around his dick, biting his lip when Derek makes a little sound.

“You look so good,” he says, thumbing the head of Derek’s dick and then lifts his hand to his mouth to lick the precome off of it. “You want me to ride you?”

Derek hesitates for a second before he nods, looking breathless and he watches as Stiles slides down his body, licking the length of his dick. Derek tastes so familiar to him, and even though he’s done this a bunch of times by now, it’s still somehow exciting and new to him. He loves the bitten-off groan Derek lets out as Stiles wraps his lips around the head of his dick. He loves the furtive thrusts Derek makes under his hands, and the way the muscles of his stomach clench whenever Stiles takes him a little deeper.

After fumbling with the lube, Stiles pushes his own underwear down with one hand and keeps the other at the base of Derek’s dick, sucking at the head. He stretches himself, too impatient to allow Derek to do it for him. His jaw aches a little, and his lips feel raw and swollen when he finally pulls his fingers out and lets Derek’s dick slide out of his mouth.

Derek watches, eyes dark, as Stiles rolls the condom on him. Straddling him, Stiles reaches behind him to hold Derek steady as he slowly sinks down on his dick. He feels almost high with the way Derek stretches him, and he takes his time, revels in the way he’s slowly filled up.

“You feel so good,” Stiles groans and rolls his hips experimentally.

Derek’s hand flexes at his thigh, and he sucks in a sharp breath. Stiles does it again, loving the way Derek’s eyes slowly fall closed and his breath becoming ragged.

He puts a hand on Derek’s chest to steady himself as he finds the angle that makes his entire body feel like it’s going to collapse on him. So he pushes down again, and again, and again, until he’s moaning breathlessly and leaking all over Derek’s stomach.

He’s so close, chasing his release as he grinds down over Derek’s dick, biting back a shout every time he gets the angle just right. He doesn’t dare touch himself, wanting Derek to come first, and judging by the sound he makes and how hard his fingers are digging into Stiles’ hips, it can’t be that far away.

“Want you to come in me,” Stiles begs, and he twitches and leaks even more at the punched-out groan Derek lets out. “Want you to fill me up. Please.”

Derek has squeezed his eyes shut, and his face is pinched, like he doesn’t dare to let go.

“Look at me,” Stiles whispers, smoothing Derek’s hair back from his face. When Derek shakes his head, he slows down, heart speeding up for a different reason now. “Derek, look at me.”

“Don’t stop,” Derek groans, but he turns his face away when Stiles cups his cheek.

“Derek,” Stiles says, urgent suddenly, moving off as quickly as he can without wincing too much.
Isn’t this what Derek wanted? How didn’t he figure out until now? “Please, Derek, I need you to look at me.”

He glances down, but Derek’s still hard, so he tries again. “Please look at me.”

When Derek does, Stiles jolts back before he can even register what he’s seeing. As if there’s something in his baser instincts telling him to get the hell away. A moment later, surprised by how his own heart is racing behind his ribs, he sees what must’ve caused his reaction.

Derek’s eyes are red. Glowing red.

It’s like the rational part of him – the one that’s telling him that this isn’t possible – and the part where he’s freaked out of his mind can’t communicate.

“What the fuck,” he rasps, scrabbling backwards on the bed when Derek reaches out for him, eyes still glowing. “Did you drug me?”

“No.” Derek’s eyes go back to normal, but Stiles’ panicked heartbeat stays the same. He watches, tense and on the verge of taking off running, as Derek pulls his underwear on. “Stiles, I didn’t drug you. There’s something I need to explain.”

Explain? Like what? Like how he’s making Stiles see things? When he realises that he’s been staring at Derek without saying anything, he manages, “I don’t think I want that.”

“I’m not going to hurt you,” Derek says, his voice quiet, and there’s something with the way he holds himself that makes Stiles relax enough to remember that he’s still naked. His brain is still chanting get out, get out, get out.

“Can I get my clothes, please.”

“Of course.” Derek fishes them up from the floor and pushes them across the bed, careful to keep his distance, it seems.

Stiles plucks at the waistband of his briefs, unwilling to turn his gaze from Derek long enough to pull them on. “I’m going to the bathroom.”

“Okay.”

“Don’t move,” Stiles says, and holds his clothes to his body as he walks backwards to the bathroom, fumbling with the door handle behind his back, before he’s finally able to slip in there and lock the door behind him.

He’s shaking, he realises, as he tries to pull his clothes on. His heart isn’t racing anymore, but it’s beating so hard that he thinks his ribs might crack. There’s something here he doesn’t understand, and a little voice at the back of his mind tells him that he doesn’t want to find out.

Still trembling, he hesitates with his hand on the door handle. He needs to leave. Derek’s going to have to let him leave.

“I’m gonna come out,” he says, surprised by how terrified he sounds, voice wavering. “And you won’t move. I’ll grab my stuff and I’ll leave, and you won’t try and stop me. Okay?”

He hates himself for adding the question at the end. He heaves two, shaking breaths, before Derek says, barely audible through the door, “Okay.”
“Don’t move,” Stiles warns as he unlocks the door and pushes the handle down.

“I won’t move.”

In the bedroom, Derek’s still right where Stiles left him, like he hasn’t moved. He looks normal, eyes worried as he meets Stiles’ gaze for a second, before Stiles has to look away. Because he knows, he knows there’s something here that’s messed up.

“I’ll text you when I get home, and you won’t try to stop by or call me.” He manages not to add the okay? this time.

Derek nods, and if Stiles wasn’t so terrified, maybe he’d feel bad about how pale Derek looks.

He closes the bedroom door when he leaves, wanting another barrier between them, and he stares down the hall when he puts his shoes on, making sure that Derek doesn’t come after him.

Just before he leaves, he looks down at Derek’s well-shined shoes and whispers, “Bye.”

The ride home is a daze. He’s clutching his hands so tightly that his fingers go numb, and he almost misses his stop, too caught up in Derek’s glowing eyes to realise where he is, until the doors are about to close and he barely manages to hurl himself through them.

It takes him four tries to fit the key into the lock, and his brain is swirling with confusing thoughts, and the urge to tell Scott everything. But who would believe him?

He takes two steps inside the front door, when Scott shows up. “What’s wrong?”

And Stiles wants to lie, wants to say that he’s fine and that he’s just tired. But he’s still trembling, and the longer Scott looks at him with big, worried eyes, it migrates into full on shaking, and Stiles doesn’t know how to breathe.

“I need to tell Derek that I’m home,” he whispers, and fumbles with his phone, dropping it on the doormat next to the shoes he’s still wearing.

“Stiles, what’s wrong?”

Scott’s hand is warm on his arm, and Stiles sucks in a breath.

“I need to tell Derek that I’m home,” he says again. He doesn’t want Derek to show up again. Ever.

“Come on, sit down on the couch.” Scott gently herds him towards the living room, and pushes him down on their ratty couch. “I’ll call Derek and let him know. Just sit here and breathe, okay? Deep breaths.”

He doesn’t know how long it takes before Scott returns and puts his phone on the coffee table and sits down next to it.

“I called Derek,” he says and takes Stiles’ hand, pulling him back slightly from his internal spiralling thoughts of what the fuck. “He didn’t hurt you, did he?”

“No.”

“But you’re scared, right?” Scott says it like it’s nothing weird about that. Like he knows that Stiles saw Derek’s eyes flashing red.

“Yeah, I think maybe he drugged me.”
“He didn’t drug you,” Scott tells him, and Stiles frowns, because that’s not what a good friend says to that statement. “Well, his eyes flashed, right?”

Sucking in a breath, Stiles looks around, expecting there to be cameras or something. “How–”

“Look, dude…” Scott trails off, scratching his head. “There’s really no easy way to say this without sounding like a complete freakshow.”

“If you tell me your eyes flash red too, I’m gonna punch you, and I’m gonna call – I don’t know, Jesus – and tell him that I was joking about being transferred to an alternate universe during finals.” It feels easier, being ridiculous about it, that way his heart racing doesn’t seem so terrifying.

Scott smiles slightly, and to Stiles’ relief, it looks just as adorable as it usually does, even though his eyes are sad. “Not red, no.”

For a second, Stiles thinks that he’s going to faint. Whatever Scott is trying to tell him, he can’t make any sense of it, yet there’s this crawling unease under his skin. Does he even want to know?

“What do you mean?” he asks anyway, despite his better judgment.

“You gonna be okay if I tell you?” Scott cocks his head to the side, squinting at him as if he’s trying to determine if Stiles is going to combust or not. “It’s a pretty big deal, and not something anyone should know.”

“I’m not anyone,” Stiles protests immediately.

“True,” Scott agrees, “but you just freaked out on your boyfriend, and if you run away from here, you don’t actually have anywhere to go.”

Taking a quivering breath, Stiles has to admit that Scott has a point. Still, he knows that if he doesn’t find out now, it’s not like he’s going to be able to go to bed anyway. Now he knows that there’s something he doesn’t know. Something Scott and Derek share that he hasn’t been aware of.

“I’m a werewolf.”

Stiles blinks, and then he snorts out a laugh. He can’t help himself. “Sure.”

The way Scott frowns, looking annoyed probably for the first time ever, makes Stiles’ laugh die from his lips. “You’re not serious, right? Is it some kind of drug?”

Scott glares at him. “No. It’s the truth. I don’t know how you think eyes flashing red is more probable to be caused by a drug, than–”

“–than being a werewolf?” Stiles interrupts. He half-expects someone to jump up from behind the couch, screaming Punk’d. “I don’t know, maybe that’s because werewolves don’t exist?”

“I would show you if I was sure you wouldn’t run out on me.”

Stiles freezes. “What?”

“Stiles,” Scott says, voice gentle. “I’ve never lied to you before. I’ve never tried to hurt you. We’re friends, right?”

“Right,” Stiles repeats, wondering where this is going.

“And you’ve come home after running away from your boyfriend, right?”
“Right.”

“And you’re scared, because you saw something you can’t explain. Right?”

Stiles hesitates, trying not to think about Derek’s eyes flashing red. “Right.”

“So, when I tell you that I’m a werewolf, and that Derek is, too, it’s not because I’m trying to prank you. It’s because I want to try and make you understand what happened.”

“What happened?” Stiles whispers.

Scott visibly hesitates. “It’s not like Derek’s going to talk to me much about it, but sometimes, when we’re in...uh, intense situations, it’s more difficult to control the shift.”


“From what I’ve gathered during the couple of times I’ve met Derek, and the all of two minutes we got to talk after we went to the movies, he was born a werewolf, so he’s had more practice than me. But he’s also an alpha, so sometimes his instincts are stronger than mine.”

The rational part of Stiles understands that this is bullshit. However, there’s something nagging at the back of his mind, making him think but what if it’s not…

“His instincts to kill me?”

Scott snorts. “Obviously not. He’s not an animal–”

Stiles very much wants to protest at that, but he doesn’t.

“–but sometimes, when we’re in a really good place–” Scott clears his throat “–or with someone that takes up our entire focus, the control of the shift can slip.”

Looking down at his hands, Stiles thinks he might’ve gone crazy. Mostly because he isn’t running away. A little because it somehow makes sense. He can’t explain why it does, though.

“I need to sleep,” he says, finally, as the tension and adrenaline start to leave his body, and he’s just freaking exhausted.

“We’ll talk more when you get up.”

Nodding, Stiles gets up from the couch. His own steadiness surprises him. “Sure. Okay.”

His bedroom feels like a safe haven when he closes the door behind him. He doesn’t lock it, thinking that Scott’s words are true – he’s never tried to hurt Stiles before, so why would he start now?

It’s not until he undresses that he realises that his thighs and ass are still partially covered in lube. Oh god. He ran out in the middle of sex.

Sinking down on the bed, he curls in on himself after he pulls a blanket to his chin. The day started out like everything he had hoped for. Almost anyway. There had been hope for it to end with a happily ever after, or something similar.

He shivers when he thinks back on Derek’s eyes flashing. Scott’s explanation is ridiculous, obviously. Werewolves are for crappy TV shows and weird books. Not reality.

Still, he remembers so clearly now how Derek and Scott both froze when they met for the first time.
He remembers the time he had sex with Derek in his office, and how Stiles had assumed that it was the traffic outside making his eyes seem red.

Swallowing, he thinks back on the past few weeks, where Derek’s been insisting on taking him from behind, and he shivers, remembering how Derek pressed his face to his throat *every single time*. Back then, Stiles assumed it was because he wanted the closeness. Now, well, maybe he was trying to hide his face so that Stiles wouldn’t notice.

Derek’s eyes flashing today wouldn’t have happened if Stiles hadn’t begged him to open his eyes.

If he hadn’t, how long would it have taken before Derek had told him himself?

He looks over at his phone on the bedside table, and his heart burns as he thinks that it won’t light up with a goodnight text from Derek again.

That’s all over now.

◊

It takes two weeks before he can finally accept that Scott is telling the truth. It takes Scott actually shifting in front of him, his eyes turning gold and his face into this ridiculous thing, reminding Stiles of a bad Halloween mask.

He’s lucky that Scott is patient enough to let him pull at his sideburns and cheeks, just to doublecheck that it’s still *attached*.

Stiles has a forty-seven minute freakout in his bedroom, before he goes out and asks Scott to do it all over again.

Now, he’s gotten to that weird point where he’s forced to realise that werewolves exist, and then asking himself: *what else is there?* He tries not to think about that too much.

Derek, though. He does think about Derek a lot.

True to his word, he hasn’t reached out to Stiles. He hasn’t showed up, he hasn’t called, he hasn’t even sent a text.

Stiles wishes he could be happy about it. That he could move on, and leave it behind. But the words Derek said to him before he ran away that night have replayed themselves over and over in Stiles’ mind. *I’m not going to hurt you.*

He thinks back to when they met, and Stiles got into a car with a complete stranger. Derek didn’t hurt him then. He remembers when Derek warned him about Deucalion that time in the restaurant bathroom. Or the times Stiles was allowed to use his condo for studying. Not to mention every time they’ve been alone. That weekend in the cottage, an entire week in a tropical paradise. Derek could’ve hurt him hundreds of times, and he never once even came close.

Instead, Stiles thinks of the times Derek’s touched him so gently. How he stroked Stiles’ hair, or made sure that he was okay. And every time he kissed Stiles like Stiles was someone precious. Every conversation where he’s let Stiles in, talking about sensitive things regarding his work, or when he fell asleep on Stiles in the bath.

It’s past eight when Stiles realises that he can’t give up on Derek because of this. Not when he’s okay with living with Scott. Not when he’s still so incredibly *in love.*
He grabs a sweater on his way out and pats his pocket to make sure that he’s got his phone. The entire subway ride, he thinks about what he’s going to say. He tries not to think about Derek turning him down.

The building is echoingly empty, compared to how busy it usually is during the day, but Stiles is relieved to find George Matthews behind the front desk.

“Hey George,” he says, going for friendly, fiddling with the hem to his sweater. “Can I go up?”

“Does Mr. Hale know?” George asks, but he doesn’t sound the least bit suspicious, to Stiles’ relief.

“No,” he confesses, because the last thing he wants is for George to catch him in a lie. “We had a fight and I want to surprise him. Say that I’m sorry.”

“Oh.” George’s eyes grow big. “He’s been looking tired lately. That explains it.”

Stiles pretends that his chest doesn’t ache at that. “Please? I’ll make sure you won’t be in trouble. I just...I really want to talk to him.”

“I think he has a meeting, but I’ll allow you to go through.” George clicks around on his computer. “You’re actually on the approved list. Mr. Hale updated it just before the company trip.”

Relief hits him so hard that he sags a little against the desk, as George hands him a visitor’s badge and presses a button to open the gate. “You know the floor.”

It doesn’t hit Stiles until he’s on the twenty-third floor that it’s pretty weird for Derek to have a business meeting at nine in the evening. On the other hand, he usually works late when Stiles doesn’t force him to go home and catch some sleep.

Derek’s floor is dark and quiet, when Stiles steps out of the elevator. The only light is from Derek’s office, further down the hall. Taking a breath, calming his trembling heart, Stiles knocks his knuckles against Isaac’s desk, before he heads towards his goal.

He can do this. It’s just Derek. He’s come here to sort things out before, late at night, and it’s worked out just fine in the past.

When he gets closer to Derek’s office, however, he hears voices. One is decidedly Derek’s, and the other is one that Stiles thinks that he recognises, but he can’t pinpoint from where.

He slows, though, trying to connect the dots. He sees them before he’s even by Derek’s door. They’re at the conference table, and from this angle, Stiles can see them just fine from this distance away, still covered mostly in darkness.

And he knows, in an instant, why he recognises the voice. Because he’s met this man before. He’s had dinner with him. He’s been offered money to sleep with him.

Derek was the one who told him to think again. Derek was the one who offered him a solution.

And now, they’re both in Derek’s office. Like they know each other.

Deucalion has slung his suit jacket over an empty chair, and he’s drinking something from a glass. Derek’s leaned back, where he’s sitting, but he has his back towards Stiles.

Looking over his shoulder, Stiles notices that the elevator is still there, with the doors open. And he runs back, punching the entry floor button as fast as he can. He doesn’t want to be caught up here,
with a werewolf and a fucking creep. Who apparently know each other, even though Derek never bothered to tell Stiles about that.

He’s breathing hard as he reaches the first floor, and hands over the badge to George without knowing what to say.

“Already?” he asks. “How did it go?”

“Fine,” Stiles lies, forcing a smile. “We’ll sort the rest out at home.”

The smile George gives him in return is so genuine that Stiles feels like the shittiest person on Earth for lying to him. “Glad to hear that, Mr. Stilinski. Have a good night!”

“You too.”

Once again, he’s riding the subway, so caught up in his thoughts that he nearly gets off a stop early.

He tries to figure it out, to come up with any sort of logical explanation to why Derek and Deucalion would be meeting. But he can’t. All his brain screams at him is that he’s been set up this entire time. That maybe, maybe it was the plan from the start. That Deucalion would be the creepy one, and then Derek would sweep in like a knight in shining armour. And Stiles, well, he bought the whole thing.

Scott isn’t home when Stiles gets back, and he’s grateful for that. He really isn’t in the mood to explain another goddamn weird thing regarding Derek right now.

He’s just going to bury that entire chapter of his life, and never look at it again. He’s done that a billion times before, and he can do it again. Eventually it will go away by itself.

And for the first time since he ran out on Derek the first time, over two weeks ago, Stiles cries until he falls asleep. Because this is it. It’s over.

And he’s been in love with a lie.

◊

He’s sad for a week straight, thinking that he’s going to split in half. And then, then he’s just angry. He’s angry as he studies for midterms, and furious by the time he gets an email from HR at ABO Finances in San Francisco, where he applied for an internship forever ago and forgot about it.

He thinks that maybe this is where it turns around. Maybe this is where he relearns how to breathe without chest pain, and how to go to bed without feeling hollow. Maybe.

Agreeing to a Skype interview, he’s relieved to occupy himself with something other than Derek for a few days. The HR manager is a pleasant woman, who asks him difficult questions, and Stiles is sure that he bombed the entire thing until he gets another email, offering him the spot.

That night, he lies in bed and thinks about the fact that he’s going to escape New York for at least three months this summer. After graduation, he’s leaving, and he’s going to get some experience, and hopefully a job. It should be a relief to know that he won’t ever worry about bumping into Derek there. But it isn’t.

A week before finals, he stares at the pile of money in his account, and it’s like he’s swallowed concrete. It hits him then, maybe for the first time ever, that he used to have sex with strangers for money. He knows that there are many who do the same thing without hesitation, who love their job. But he isn’t one of them. He wouldn’t have done this if he didn’t have any other choice. If he could,
he would forget all about it. There’ve been times of too much touching, and not enough lube, of rough hands and words he’d rather not think about again.

He calls a therapist in San Francisco the next day. He has all this money anyway – he can spend it on healing.

After his last final, he calls his dad and cries into the phone. He pretends it’s because he doesn’t want to leave Scott behind, even though he’s remaining on the lease for the apartment, and not because he was packing for California and had to go through all the clothes Derek’s bought for him.

The next day, Stiles packs them up in a bag and heads to Suit&Tie.

“We don’t do refunds on tailored items,” Jackson tells him, and he definitely does not approve of Stiles’ jeans and t-shirt, or scruffy vans.

“I told you, I don’t want a refund,” Stiles sighs. “I just want to return them. I don’t want them.”

Jackson scrutinises him. “You look like shit.”

“Thanks.”

“Haven’t seen you in here in awhile,” he says then, like Stiles didn’t just tell him he wants to give back all the clothes.

“I haven’t exactly needed your help.” He doesn’t want to talk about it. He doesn’t talk about it with Scott, who’s given up on asking a month ago, so he definitely doesn’t want to bring it up with this asshole.

“Okay.” Jackson pauses, and then looks down at the bag. “Do you want me to send them back to Mr. Hale?”

“Well, technically they’re his. He paid for them.”

Jackson looks like he wants to say something about Derek not being able to fit in any of the clothes in there, but he shrugs like he doesn’t care. “You could give them to him yourself. His car just stopped outside.”

Freezing on the spot, Stiles’ heart takes off so fast, and so hard that he’s sure that he’s going to faint.

“Christ,” Jackson mutters and grabs his arm. “Get in the back, then.”

A moment later, Stiles is shoved into the back room, trying to get his heart back under control, as there are voices on the other side.

“Here to pick up your suit, Mr. Hale?” Jackson says, and he sounds completely different compared to when he talks to Stiles.

Stiles can only hear something that sounds like vaguely affirmative, but even the low sound of Derek’s voice through the door makes him curl in on himself. He slides down the wall, pulling his knees to his chest.

“I was also asked to hand you this.”

Stiles wants to swear, but he’s pretty sure that Derek would hear him. The past few weeks, he’s learned a lot about Scott’s enhanced abilities. It’s made a lot of things awkward, when he thinks back on them. Either way, Jackson wasn’t supposed to give Derek the clothes now, when Stiles is under
the same roof.

“Is he here?” Derek asks, and Stiles breathes in, trembling, because he sounds so close. *He knows Deucalion,* he tells himself, and trembles for a completely different reason this time. He can’t see Derek. He’ll break if he does.

“Not anymore,” Jackson says, and he sounds almost cold. “I don’t know what you did to him, but he looked like he’d lost ten pounds and the ability to sleep.”

Looking down at his thighs, Stiles doesn’t think the weight part is true. The sleeping, though. Sleeping is difficult in a way it hasn’t been in a long time. Not since Derek came into his life last fall.

There’s a long silence, where Stiles wonders if Derek can hear his erratic heart and is about to call Jackson on his bluff. Scott once said that he can hear a lie, because of how the heartbeat picks up, so Derek must too.

A part of him wants nothing more than to see Derek again. A much bigger part – the one that’s rational – wants to stay the heck away.

“Okay,” Derek says finally. He sounds tired. “If...if you see him, tell him that he can keep everything else.”

*The money,* Stiles thinks. He means the money.

“Have a good day, Mr. Hale,” Jackson says, and the place goes quiet.

Stiles takes long breaths, until Jackson finally yanks the door open.

“If you’ve barfed on anything worth more than a hundred, you’re going to pay for it.”

“I didn’t barf on anything,” Stiles snaps, but as he scrambles to his feet, taking in Jackson’s unimpressed face, he can’t help but be grateful. Jackson Whittemore just saved his ass. “Thank you.”

Jackson rolls his eyes. “Just get out of here.”

Feeling a little lighter, Stiles heads home again and packs up the rest of his clothes for the summer. It’s strange, looking around his room and thinking that maybe the next time he gets back here, it’s going to be because he’s moving out.

“Why can’t you do an internship here instead?” Scott complains as they watch the final episode of that TV show the same night. Everyone Stiles liked has died, so he isn’t as into it anymore.

“I didn’t get one.” It’s true. He might’ve been able to, if he had put more effort into it, but escaping to another state is probably exactly what he needs right now.

“Can’t you come back afterwards?” Scott gives him a pleading look. He’s got a couple of years left before he’s done, and Stiles wishes they’d gotten to know each other his first year.

“Maybe,” he says, shrugging. “They have an office here as well.”

“That would be great.” Scott gestures around the room. “We could live in this shitty apartment and eat Cheerios, and life would be great.”

Swallowing down the lump in his throat, Stiles nods. “Yeah, I’ll see what I can do.”

*I’ll see if I’m whole enough,* is what he means.
His dad flies out to see him graduate and Stiles can only think of a handful of times he’s been this happy.

*He’s free.*

For some reason, he half-expects to see Derek in the crowd, but he’s not there. Stiles doesn’t think he should be disappointed about it.

For the past few weeks, he’s been turning the Deucalion thing in his mind over and over, and it doesn’t seem right. Stiles had gotten the creeps from him right away, and Derek never gave him a similar feeling. Ever. The only time Stiles has been scared of him was when his eyes turned red.

He can’t exactly blame himself for that, but he doesn’t think he can blame Derek for not telling him, either.

On the other hand, Stiles really doesn’t think there’s anyway he can look past Derek meeting with Deucalion outside office hours, having a drink with him. He pushes the train of thought away for the hundredth time, and lets his dad and Scott hug him until he’s in pain.

He’s going to California anyway. There’s no use for him to think about Derek anymore. It’s a closed chapter.

◊

San Francisco is everything Stiles knows it to be. It’s beautiful, and fun, and he’s immediately at home at ABO Finances. The other HR people are friendly and welcoming, but Stiles thinks he likes the CEO the best.

Her name is Laura Keating, and she’s been dropping by to have a donut with Stiles every other day since he told her, his first week there, that she should clean her own coffee mug instead of leaving it in the sink. In his defence, he hadn’t known that the CEO was a woman in her late thirties, with clothes and an attitude that remind him of every sassy woman in *Suits.*

“You graduated from NYU, right?” she asks him on a Tuesday, when he’s trying to concentrate on the health watch reports for this month. People are less stressed compared to last month. That’s a positive sign.

“Yeah,” he says, not looking up from the screen. “Why?”

“We have an office there as well. Why did you want to come here?”

“Had to get away for a bit,” he mutters, and wonders why Robertson in Customer Services always has to add a complaint about something irrelevant (this time it’s the selection of teas he finds lacking) in the last box labeled *Other things my employer should know.*

Tea is not freaking related to work environment. Well, until now, because for Stiles it’s becoming an issue of annoyance right now.

“Do you want to go back there, or stay here?” she asks, and Stiles sighs, minimising the window on his screen. He can’t concentrate when she’s talking to him anyway.

“Wherever I get a job, I guess. I miss my roomie, though.” He does. He talks to Scott almost every day, and it’s almost impossible to imagine not living with him in the fall.
“Let me talk to HR there, and we’ll see what we can do.” She grins at him and gets up to leave.

“Wait, did you just offer me a job?” Stiles calls after her, making her stop in the doorway.

“We’ll see.” Then her grin grows a little more serious. “You’re going to have to make an impression on the guy who runs that place, though, and he’s made of stone.”

“Help,” Stiles whispers under his breath as she leaves. He isn’t sure if he’s referring to the potential job offer, or the fact that he’s going to have to be charming and competent with some dude who’s apparently an iceman.

The positive thing about spending between nine and ten hours at work every day is that Stiles doesn’t have a lot of time to think about Derek.

He’s started therapy, too, and some of the things he’s pushed away for a long time now – that don’t involve Derek whatsoever – are difficult to deal with. Sometimes he crashes into bed and falls asleep immediately, but often after his therapy sessions, he lies awake and thinks.

His therapist has told him that there’s no use for regret. That his what ifs are destructive and won’t change anything anyway. He’s made the choices he’s made, and the past won’t change no matter how hard he tries. She tries to make him focus on the now, and on what he needs to move forward.

So, that’s what he attempts. Mostly, he just works very hard on not being too hard on himself.

It’s the end of July, and his tenth week, when Maura – the stern-looking but not actually stern fifty-something woman at the desk next to his – says, “Hon, prepare for a crazy day. The New York president is coming today, and it’s always hilarious.”

She moves around the porcelain kittens on her desk into a new arrangement. She’s done that every once in a while since Stiles started – it’s definitely weird.

“Why?” he asks, stretching in his chair.

“Dude is yummy,” says Jordan from the other side of the pinboard wall that separates their desks. “But you know, Mrs. Keating is funny and relaxed...well, her brother didn’t get the same traits.”

Maura sucks the straw to her iced latte. “Just keep your distance and you can appreciate the yummy, and not experience any of the awkwardness between the two. They’re not on very good terms.”

“Jesus,” Stiles groans. He was planning on finishing up the presentation he’s preparing for new career paths within the organisation today, but judging by their excitement, he’s probably not going to have a lot of time.

Two hours later, he doesn’t know how he didn’t put two and two together. It’s not until Derek walks through the doors to the auditorium after Laura and Stiles almost has a heart attack that it dawns on him.

He should’ve figured it out. He should’ve connected Derek’s Laura to this Laura. Blood is whooshing in his ears, and he can’t hear a word that either Derek or Laura are saying on stage.

Derek looks like he’s been worn out over these past few months. It’s probably not something anyone else would notice, Stiles thinks, because he still wears his tailored suits, his hair is immaculate, and his beard is trimmed. But his gaze is tired, even from where Stiles is sitting, and his cheeks a little hollow.
Staring at him from the audience, Stiles feels a pang behind his ribs. It’s so sharp and precise, and yeah, it doesn’t matter what he’s saying to himself. He misses Derek. The feelings he has for him, they aren’t gone.

He’s been worried for a while that maybe he only came to care for Derek because he was nice, and the fact that he was paying Stiles kept him from doing things he didn’t want to. It wouldn’t have been weird.

Right now, sitting somewhere where Derek can’t see him and just allowing himself to look, Stiles doesn’t think that’s the case. He fell for Derek because he’s Derek. For his dry humour, and the way he’s always cared despite pretending not to. For his smile, and the way he’s been there to listen. For his kisses, and his encouragements.

Yeah, right now, Stiles is pretty sure that he would’ve fallen for Derek regardless, had he gotten the chance.

However, as soon as the information about this fall’s upcoming challenges and opportunities is over, Stiles gets a sneaking suspicion that maybe Derek had more to do with his internship than he could’ve ever guessed. For so long, he’s assumed that he got this on his own merit, but knowing Derek, Stiles is almost certain that he wanted to compensate somehow. And that’s just not freaking okay. At all.

He’s fuming at his desk, and both Maura and Jordan are keeping their distance by dining out together for once, clearly confused over what brought this on. Stiles can’t blame them, but he can’t exactly explain it either.

It’s not until lunch break that his anger goes up in smoke. Because just as he’s about to head to the lunchroom, Laura strides through the doors, gesturing to Stiles and saying:

“So this is the guy you need to hire for HR in New York.”

And Stiles freezes, slumping back in his chair, as Derek walks in. He might’ve kept secrets from Stiles, but he’s never been a good actor, so the shock that flashes across Derek’s face until he manages to get it under control is real. Stiles knows. So when the look of hurt settles in Derek’s eyes, once he’s schooled his features back into his usual stoic mask, Stiles knows that that’s real, too.

“Hi,” Stiles manages finally, and he’s trembling where he’s sitting. He wishes he had something to occupy his hands. When Derek doesn’t reply, Stiles sneaks a glance at Laura, who’s obviously a lot better at putting the pieces together than Stiles.

“You two know each other?”

Stiles nods, fumbling to find his words. “Yeah, but we didn’t know.”

Resisting the urge to slap himself, he tries again.

“I mean, I had no clue that Derek’s your brother. That, uh, the companies are the same.”

“Technically they’re not,” Derek says, and the sound of his voice makes Stiles’ chest ache.

“Christ, Derek, they basically are,” Laura snaps, before looking between them. “So I’m thinking it would be a lovely idea if you two decided to have a lunch meeting for the rest of the day, and sort things out before tomorrow.”

“I have a presentation deadline,” Stiles protests.
“It’s been extended. Now get out before other people notice.”

Staring, Stiles watches her leave the room, and then there’s just the two of them.

“You should have told me,” Derek says, and he sounds stern. It doesn’t match the raw look in his eyes.

“Told you what?” Stiles asks, checking if he can still feel his legs so he can stand up without making an idiot of himself.

“That you took an internship here. That’s something you need to tell me.”

Blinking, it takes Stiles a second to understand, and then– Oh god, now Derek’s the one who thinks Stiles had something to do with this.

“Like you told me about being a werewolf?” he asks, dropping his voice on the last word, and Derek looks away momentarily, closing his eyes. Stiles is grateful for getting annoyed, because that’s easier than dealing with his heartache. “I didn’t know, Derek.”

“I gave you my business card. It’s on there.”

Flinging his arms out, Stiles heaves a frustrated sigh. “I had no clue. I don’t even think I have that goddamn card anymore. I have your number in my phone, I knew the way to your office, it’s not like I needed it.”

Derek looks at him for a long moment, and maybe he’s checking Stiles’ heartbeat. Maybe he doesn’t have to, because he knows Stiles better than anyone.

“Okay.”

Up close like this, he looks even more like he’s run a constant emotional marathon since Stiles left his condo that day. He’s still the most handsome man Stiles has ever laid his eyes on, but the way his eyes are sort of dull, like his soul is tired, makes Stiles’ heart break.

And he can do this. He can sort this out. Obviously it wasn’t enough to just put the lid on and leave the state for a few months. His therapist has told him that he has to deal with his uncomfortable moments and feelings, despite his body rewarding him for running away from them. So that’s what he’s going to do.

“Are you okay with lunch?” he asks, because even though he’s started therapy, he doesn’t think Derek has anyone to talk to. He isn’t even sure if Derek has friends. “It’s okay if you’re not, but I think talking would be good.”

Derek looks away, and Stiles waits. It takes forever until Derek nods. “Alright. Let’s go.”

Stiles grabs his phone and trails after Derek as he walks swiftly towards the elevator. They don’t say anything as they leave the building, or as they get in the car together. They don’t say anything while they pick their food, or after they’ve ordered.

It’s not until Stiles has his risotto in front of him that he realises that, for the first time when it comes to the two of them, he’s going to be the one to have to take that step.

“I didn’t know that this was part of your, you know, organisation. If I had known, I wouldn’t have taken it.”
“It’s fine,” Derek says, not touching his food. “I know you didn’t know.”

“Because you listened to my heartbeat?” Stiles asks. That makes Derek meet his gaze, and oh, Stiles has missed this too. The way Derek looks at him.

“I don’t need that to know when you tell the truth.”

His chest feels a little tight, and he rubs a hand against his breastbone. “Yeah. That makes sense.”

There’s a pause again, and Stiles figures that this might be his only chance. “Two weeks after... you know... I went to your office to talk to you. The fact that you’re a–” he looks around, acutely aware that there are people here. “–yeah. It doesn’t matter that much. Scott...he explained things. I get why you didn’t tell me.”

“When was this?” Derek asks, frowning.

“Well, it was kinda late, and I went to your office. George let me up without calling you. I told him that we’d had a fight, and he said I was on some kind of list so he let me through without calling you.”

As he speaks, realisation dawns in Derek’s eyes, but he lets Stiles continue.

“When I came up there. You were having a drink with...with Deucalion.” Sucking in a breath, he pushes the risotto round on his plate, trying to distract himself of the sudden fear that he’s been right about this. “And I started thinking that maybe– that maybe you know him better than I thought. That you’re friends. That you set me up. That it was some kind of grand scheme all along. You know, that he’d be a creep and you’d swoop in to save me.”

“You don’t need me to save you. Admittedly, I did think that before I knew you, but I know better now.” Derek says, but his face is a little more gentle than before. “I do know him better than I let you believe, but not in the way you think.”

Stiles forces himself to take a deep breath. It’ll be okay.

“He’s also an alpha,” Derek begins, and puts his cutlery down. “We meet on occasion, both alone and with other local alphas, to track the activity in the city and things like that. Remember that I warned you about him?”

“Yeah.”

“I had that meeting with him because I’ve had enough of his behaviour. I can’t actually prove that he’s made people disappear, but the rest of us have our suspicions. It was basically to tell him that if he didn’t leave town and stop, I’d make sure to get that evidence and that he’d take responsibility for it.”

“You threatened Deucalion?” Stiles isn’t even sure where to put the emphasis in that sentence, because it would all make sense.

“I wouldn’t call it that,” Derek says, sounding awkward. “And I still will. I just wanted him out of the city first.”

Stiles doesn’t even know what to say. It’s better than any scenario he’s thought out for himself.

“I–” Derek begins, and Stiles zones back to their conversation. Derek looks almost shy, with his gaze diverted. “I thought I smelled you there, but I was sure it was just me imagining things again.”
“Again?” Stiles echoes, and Derek shrugs.

“It was right after you left. Coming home was difficult. Everything smelled like you. I tried to stay at work as much as I could.”

“I’m sorry I left,” Stiles whispers and his fingers itch to reach across the table and take Derek’s hand. Derek shakes his head. “You don’t have to be sorry about that. I think you did the right thing. I should’ve told you a lot sooner.”

“I mean, Scott didn’t tell me, and we share an apartment.”

“You still live there?”

“I’m on the lease. Laura said I could transfer to the New York office instead if I wanted to.” He puts his fork down. “I get that I can’t now, because you’re there.”

“You wouldn’t be comfortable with that?” Derek guesses.

Maybe it’s weird that that’s not at all what Stiles was thinking about. It probably should be his reason. “I figured there was some kind of company policy.”

“There would be a number of managers between you and me, and Laura could still keep the final responsibility for you. If that’s what you want to do. I doubt that you’d even see me around much, what with being on different floors and all that.”

Stiles wants to rub a hand over his face. This is exactly how Derek is, trying to make sure that he’s comfortable, that he’s not missing out.

“What about you?” Stiles asks, because that’s what Derek usually forgets.

“What do you mean?”

“Would you be okay with having me there?”

Derek looks at him for a moment like he doesn’t understand, and then he diverts his gaze again. “If that’s what you want.”

“Derek, I don’t want you to have a hard time, just because I’m there like a reminder of a bad memory.”

At that, Derek’s gaze snaps to him, and he gives Stiles a bitter smile. “That’s the last thing you’d be.”

And for a second, Stiles thinks he’s floating, body light like air. Before he has a chance to stop them, the words tumble out of his mouth. “I fell in love with you. You know that, right?”

Derek doesn’t say anything immediately and Stiles is left waiting and waiting, his heart beating harder with every second that passes, until he thinks his ribs are going to crack.

“I hoped,” Derek says finally, voice quiet. “I suspected, but I wasn’t sure. You told me about the boyfriend experience, and I was worried that I was reading too much into it.”

There’s a long pause, where Stiles holds his breath, before Derek continues.

“I fell in love with you, too. I didn’t mean to, but I did.”
Stiles gives in to the itch in his hands and reaches across the table. Derek’s hand is warm beneath his, and his fingers familiar as Stiles threads his own through them. His heart is beating so hard that he’s sure Derek would be able to hear it even if he didn’t have enhanced hearing.

“Yeah?” he asks, just to make sure.

Derek smiles then. It’s small, but it’s there. “Yes.”

Taking an unsteady breath, Stiles smiles too. This is good, he decides, but he still has questions. Things that he thinks about, but can’t figure out himself. He needs some answers.

“Why did you start paying me more after we started having sex?” he asks, too bluntly, but knowing that it’s the only way.

Derek is quiet for a long moment, but he keeps holding Stiles’ gaze. Then, he lets out a sigh, like he’s been holding this in for a long time. “It was an attempt to tell myself that I didn’t have feelings for you. I thought that if I kept paying you, and made it obvious to myself that it was nothing but an arrangement, it would go away.” He’s quiet for a moment again, but this time he diverts his gaze. “And I was protecting myself, because I thought that it was about getting through college for you – that was the agreement. I figured that I could stop being in love with you if I made that blatantly clear for myself.”

Taking a slow breath, Stiles nods. All this time, they’d been worried about the same thing. Then, because there’s been too many misunderstandings between them already, he asks:

“Are you still?”

“In love with you?” Derek asks, and when Stiles nods, he says, “Yes.”

“Me too. I think.” Swallowing, Stiles squeezes a little tighter around Derek’s fingers. “I mean, I am, but I wanna go slow.”

Derek cocks his head to the side, and Stiles feels uncertain, suddenly. Just because Derek’s in love with him, and he’s in love with Derek, it doesn’t mean that Derek wants them to be together.

“If you want to try when I get back to New York,” Stiles adds.

“Do I have to wait until then?”

Stiles’ heart leaps in his chest. “No. I guess not.”

The rest of lunch slowly becomes less awkward, and despite Derek looking more tired than ever, he’s smiling when he drops Stiles off by his car so he can drive home.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” he says, and brushes his knuckles over Stiles’ cheek. “Do you still have the same number?”

Feeling warm, Stiles nods. “Yeah. You?”

“Yes. Drive safe.”

Derek disappears towards the office building, and Stiles climbs into his car. Beacon Hills is a little over an hour’s drive away, but he needs it right now. A part of him still can’t believe this isn’t a dream.

He turns the music up during the drive home, and sings along – he doesn’t really care if he knows
the lyrics or not. At home, his dad quirks an eyebrow at him.

“What?” Stiles asks.

“I’m assuming something good happened, or I’ll have to drug test you.”

“Wow, thanks for the trust.” Stiles rolls his eyes. “Yeah, I think I maybe have a job.”

Of course his dad isn’t going to buy that. “And?”

Stiles thinks about not explaining further, but he also knows that his dad’s been worried about him and pointedly not asked any questions about Derek, after making that mistake once the first week Stiles came home. Stiles had had to lock himself into the bathroom for forty minutes and then they’d both pretended that his dad never asked.

“I met Derek today,” he says, fiddling with the newspaper on the kitchen counter.

“Here? In California?”

“Duh.”

“And?” His dad prompts again.

Taking a breath, Stiles pulls his phone from his pocket when it buzzes with an incoming text.

> Thank you for lunch.

“And I think we’ll be okay,” he whispers, throat feeling a little tight.

“So you’re going back to New York?” his dad asks, and for a second Stiles is worried that he won’t approve, but when he looks up, his dad looks fond. Pleased.

“Yeah, I think I might. Scott’s there.”

“If that’s where you want to be.” His dad ruffles his hair, and Stiles can’t breathe for a moment because his chest feels so tight.

“I love you, Dad,” he says.

“Love you too, kiddo.”

And his dad hugs him so hard that Stiles is pretty sure he’s not the only one with tears in his eyes.

That night, he hesitates all of five minutes before he calls Derek. It feels like Christmas break all over again, but this time, there’s no anxiety over the way he feels. Derek answers on the fourth ring.

“Are you at the office?” Stiles asks, and the moment of silence before Derek replies answer the question for him.

“Yes.”

Stiles isn’t going to scold him. If Derek’s been working late since Stiles left him that day, it’s probably going to take a while for him to start going home at a decent hour.

He picks at his pillow. “Is it okay that I’m calling?”

“Of course. You can always call.”
After hanging up almost an hour later, Stiles lies in bed, clutching the pearly shell he picked in Tenerife in his hand. He’d found it a few weeks back in his suitcase and had a complete breakdown. Since then it’s been tucked away in a pair of socks at the back of his drawer. Until now. He rubs his thumb over the smooth surface, smiling a little to himself and thinks that, yeah, it’s going to be okay.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

AUGUST

Stiles twitches where he stands. He’s been back in New York for all of two days, and he hasn’t seen Derek. In Derek’s defense, though, he’s been in Boston for business since Sunday. They’ve been talking on the phone every day since that lunch, and while Stiles thinks it’s been good for them – all the talking and no action – he can’t wait to see Derek’s face.

When a familiar, sleek Porsche rounds the corner and slows in front of him, his heart picks up. Swallowing, he leans down to look inside when Derek leans over the passenger seat to open the door for him, and Stiles just can’t help himself.

“Looking for company?” he asks, and grins when Derek rolls his eyes, not quite able to hide his smile.

“Get in, or I’ll leave you here.”

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Stiles says, climbing into the car. He looks over then, taking in Derek’s navy suit and the hint of chest hair where his button-up is open at the collar. “Hey.”

“Hi,” Derek says, drawing Stiles’ gaze to his face.

And oh, he looks just like Stiles remembers him. Tired, sure, but there’s a smile playing at the corners of his mouth. Stiles has no idea what to say, so he’s grateful when Derek gives him a little smirk, like he knows so well, and says, “Hungry?”

“Starving.”

The dinner is a little awkward at first, because Stiles somehow expects things to be different now than they were before. They’re not. Except for the things he needs to talk to Derek about. Like his therapist said before she referred him to someone here, they need to be equals for this to work.

He saves it until they’re in the car home.

“I want to pay you back,” he blurts.

“You don’t have to pay me back,” Derek protests immediately, just like Stiles knew he would.

“Yeah, I do.” When Derek opens his mouth to protest again, he adds, “It’s important to me. For this to work.”

And Derek gives in. “Okay. I’ll look into a payment plan.”

When he drops Stiles off, they don’t kiss, but Stiles’ belly is all fluttery anyway as he climbs out. Scott forces him to eat the stale Cheetos left in the pantry and tell him everything on the couch later. Stiles leaves out some details. While he’s fairly sure that Scott knows that there was something else to his relationship with Derek, he doesn’t ask, and Stiles doesn’t know when he’ll be comfortable telling. He doubts that Scott would ever judge him, but Stiles is still trying to make peace with himself and figure out this new thing with Derek.
The following week, Erica Reyes calls him and offers him a new job within recruitment at a music app company. Stiles knows Derek arranged for this – Derek told him over the phone – but he’ll take a job offer through Derek’s network over working for Derek any day. He doesn’t want to be the guy who’s sleeping with the boss.

Their second date – Stiles calls them that now, because he realised the day before that they’ve never had actual dates – is a lot less fancy than the first one. That’s because Stiles is paying.

He thinks he’s got a thing for Derek in jeans, as they have milkshakes at a diner and then head to the movies. They hold hands in the dark, and Stiles can’t concentrate much on the actual plot. Instead, he thinks that tonight he’s going to kiss Derek goodnight.

Derek follows him to his front door, and Scott slinks to his room when he notices them.

“Thank you for tonight,” Derek says, still holding Stiles’ hand. “The milkshakes were great.”

“I told you they’re the best ones in the state.”

Derek smiles, all soft and warm. “That you did.”

“I wanna kiss you goodnight,” Stiles says. “Can I?”

Nodding, Derek steps into his space. Stiles lets go of his hand and cups his cheek, stroking Derek’s stubble with his fingertips. For a second, he gets lost in the realisation that this is real. That Derek’s here. That it’s going to be okay.

Derek tastes a little like the salt from the popcorn, and his lips are so familiar against Stiles’ that it aches. He kisses Derek slowly, wanting it to last as long as he can possibly make it. When he pulls away, he feels tender behind his ribs.

“Goodnight,” Derek says, when he pulls away. “I’ll see you Friday.”

SEPTEMBER

They’ve been on five dates, and Stiles is in Derek’s bed. He’s equal parts frustrated and happy that sex hasn’t happened yet. While he can’t wait to get his hands back on Derek again, he’s convinced that there needs to be more time for them to be just them. Without a contract.

This way, they’ve been able to sort out the details. When Stiles tried to give back the comics to Derek – technically they’ve been in his safe the entire time, but still – Derek had looked hurt, so Stiles had agreed to accept one of them instead of any other Christmas present for the next few years. The fact that Derek agreed to this without hesitation, as though another three years with Stiles is something he’s expecting, makes Stiles dizzy whenever he thinks about it.

“I’m in therapy,” he says, when they’ve done nothing but look at each other for several minutes.

Derek slides his hand up, covering Stiles’ where it’s resting on the pillow between them. He hums, letting Stiles know that he’s listening.

“It’s been really good for me,” Stiles continues, shivering when Derek drags his fingertips down his forearm and then up again. “I’m gonna keep going.”

Derek drags his hand to his mouth, kissing his knuckles. “I’m glad.”
And Stiles feels a little lighter when they fall asleep like that – two morons holding hands under the same covers.

OCTOBER

Stiles’ entire body is buzzing as he follows Derek into the elevator of his building after their seventh date. Derek’s been touching him all night, lingering, with intent and Stiles is ready to crawl out of his skin.

“Are you staying the night?” Derek asks against his lips, kissing him so, so good that Stiles misses the coatrack completely and drops his jacket on the floor. He doesn’t care.

“Yeah,” he breathes out. He feels amazing like this, with Derek’s arms wrapped around him. Safe.

After taking him to the bedroom, Derek undresses him with care, kissing him more times than Stiles can count. He watches Derek looking at him, when he’s lying naked on the bed waiting for Derek to get undressed too, and Derek’s gaze is so open, and a little marvelled, like he can’t quite grasp that Stiles is here.

When Derek climbs on top of him, covering him with slow, lingering kisses until Stiles is trembling, he thinks that everything is the same. And at the same time, he doesn’t think anything is the same. When Derek kisses the cut of his hip and bites gently at the sensitive skin at the inside of his thigh, Stiles closes his eyes, smiling.

Derek steals what little breath he has left when he prepares him, slowly but his fingers so sure, and Stiles feels that steady pressure low in his stomach build, and build, and build.

“What do you want?” Derek asks him, kissing him again, and Stiles has to swallow to find his words again.

“You,” he whispers, wrapping his legs around Derek’s waist. “Like this.”

When he pushes in, Stiles thinks he’s going to break. Because this, he’s missed this. Derek keeps the slow, steady pace, and continues to kiss him. His mouth, his cheeks, his throat. He gets the angle right every time, and Stiles can do nothing but gasp, his toes curling as his belly tightens.

“Derek please, I need–” he groans, arching when Derek pushes into him again, and Stiles squeezes his legs tighter around his waist.

Derek whispers sweet nonsense into his throat, stroking the skin at Stiles’ wrist as he keeps his slow, steady pace. And Stiles doesn’t know when it happens, how it happens, but suddenly he’s tumbling over the edge and it feels like he’s coming apart.

Derek kisses him through it, and a few short strokes later, he comes, too, with his face pressed against Stiles’ throat. His hands are cramping, but Stiles holds him through it, stroking his hair and kissing his sweaty forehead.

And he just loves, loves this man.

NOVEMBER
It’s a crisp fall morning just before Thanksgiving when Derek climbs back into bed after his morning shower and looks at Stiles for a long time, before he says:

“My parents and little sister died in a car crash sixteen years ago.”

Stiles abruptly forgets everything about breakfast and coffee. Instead he shifts a little closer, resting his hand on Derek’s thigh.

“And then, Laura and I started drifting apart.” Derek looks down for a second, before he continues. Like maybe he’s trying to sort out the order of events. “I had just started college, and she was done with her bachelor’s degree. At the time, she was so grown up to me, but she was just twenty-three. Still, she handled everything with the funeral, the lawyers, and paid for my education with the money our parents left behind. And we drifted apart.”

Derek’s voice sounds sort of angular, like Stiles knows from when he’s trying to detach himself. He keeps quiet, waits Derek out as he pauses again.

“She was the alpha at the time, and I relied on her to take care of everything. She moved to California and I went to school in Boston. We talked somewhat regularly, but never about our parents, or Cora. Then she met Brian, and I was furious with her for leaving me behind. When they got married, she handed the alpha status over to me – said she didn’t want me to be a lone omega, and she had a new pack with him. I didn’t attend the wedding. I gave her a gift at the next board meeting.”

Derek snorts, like it’s crazy to his own ears.

“She couldn’t stand me, and I couldn’t stand her. I have two nieces that I’ve met twice. They’re six and four. I’m not sure if they’re even aware they have an uncle.”

When Derek looks at him this time, Stiles squeezes his thigh, thinking that this is his cue.

“You should talk to her.”

“What if she prefers it this way?”

Stiles doesn’t think he’s ever seen Derek look so young and insecure. There’s always been a confidence to him that Stiles has been drawn to, but seeing this, he can’t help but get to his knees and wraps his arms around Derek’s neck. He’s not the only one taking steps towards something better.

“I don’t think she does, but there’s only one way to find out.”

Derek does make the call two days later, and then has dinner with Laura when she’s in town the following weekend. Stiles can happily miss out on a date night to see Derek come home, looking like the weight of the world has been lifted off his shoulders.

DECEMBER

It’s snowing outside when Stiles looks up from the latest batch of resumes he’s going through. Erica is fiddling with her phone, her feet resting on the table of her desk, and their recruitment expert Boyd is nowhere to be seen.

“It’s Friday,” Erica says, pulling him from his thoughts.

“I’m aware.”
“You should head home, before we’re snowed in.”

Looking out the window, the snowfall has gotten heavier, but Stiles is pretty sure there’s no risk of getting stuck in a skyscraper in Manhattan. However, it’s date night with Derek and Stiles hasn’t seen him in four days. That’s the longest they’ve gone since he came back to New York, but Laura has been visiting with her kids and Derek hasn’t seen them in a long time. It’s not the time for Stiles to get introduced to them, and he’s happy to hang out with Scott and Allison, just so Derek can reconnect with his nieces.

With a sigh, he grabs his coat and his bag.

“Alright. See you Monday.”

He heads to Derek’s condo, nodding his greeting to Bernard, and unsurprisingly it’s empty when he gets there. Even though he still shares a place with Scott, he has a bunch of his clothes and stuff here. Derek’s even cleared a section for him in the closet.

Getting out of the clothes he wears to work and into a pair of sweats and one of Derek’s shirts, Stiles starts peeling potatoes and types out a text with his pinky.

< Starting dinner. Be home in 45

Derek’s reply is instant:

> I’ll be home in 15.

Smiling to himself, Stiles turns on the oven and continues peeling. Working full-time is a different kind of tiring than studying, but he’s grateful for everything he has. A steady income, great colleagues, and something to put on his resume if he ever wants to go somewhere else. Above all, it’s an important part of feeling like Derek’s equal. Like a boyfriend.

While nothing’s really changed, except for tearing up a contract, he’s pretty sure that everything’s changed.

He jumps when familiar hands wrap around his waist, and Derek’s stubble grazes his cheek.

“Has it been fifteen minutes already?” he asks, wiping his hands on a kitchen towel, before turning around.

Even though it’s Friday, Derek looks good. There’s no trace of the dark circles under his eyes anymore, and the sharpness to his gaze is back.

“More like ten,” Derek tells him, and smirks as he adds, “I might’ve asked the driver to speed a bit.”

“Stupid,” Stiles says, before kissing him. “Missed you though, so I’m not gonna complain.”

“Missed you too,” Derek whispers against his lips. “I’m going to change clothes, and then I’ll help out.”

“You better,” Stiles calls after him.

When they’re on the couch later, with an almost-empty wine bottle on the coffee table, Stiles lays on his back, his feet in Derek’s lap, and he can’t stop looking. Derek’s wearing a grandpa sweater (“It’s called cable-knit, Stiles.”) and soft pants. He’s absently rubbing a hand over Stiles’ ankle, his gaze glued to the TV and he grins at something happening on the screen.
“I love you,” Stiles blurts. It sounds so different out loud.

Derek freezes, and then he looks over. Stiles swallows at the look in his eyes, and the way his hand squeezes around Stiles’ ankle. Holding his breath, Stiles watches as Derek turns off the TV and puts the remote on the table. It’s not like he doesn’t know that Derek feels the same, it’s just that they’ve never actually said it before. When Derek leans over him, he clutches at the stupid sweater and closes his eyes for a second. Derek cups his cheek, and when Stiles opens his eyes again, Derek’s gaze is raw. His face has that soft expression that Stiles first got to know in the cottage. He knows what it means now.

“I love you, too,” he says, and rubs his nose against Stiles’ before kissing him so, so gently.

They kiss for a long while, and Stiles thinks he’s been cracked open in the best of ways, when Derek says:

“Let’s go to bed.”

They go slow, and Derek clutches at his thighs when Stiles straddles him. Despite having sex a lot, they haven’t done this since the day Stiles left. So, when Derek covers his face with his hand, Stiles slows without stopping, and gently grasps his wrist.

“Please show me,” he breathes, and Derek’s other hand twitches at his thigh.

Derek gasps, but urges him to keep moving, as he says, “Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

Because he is. He’s never been more sure. Holding his breath, he clutches Derek’s hand as he removes it from his face. This time, when Derek opens his eyes and they’re glowing red, Stiles doesn’t move away.

He smiles.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. <3

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