I Lit a House On Fire (Just To See a Painted Sky)

by panicattackkisses

Summary

And every night my mind is running around her, thunder's getting louder and louder. - ELECTRIC LOVE / BØRNS.

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Stiles Stilinski was nineteen years old and had discovered when he was young that he liked his roof better than his bed. He tore through town in an old, beaten car that might have been someone else's and he read about myths and legends when the sun went down.

And this is what they did when the world wasn't looking.
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It was dark and quiet in Stiles' room, just like he knew it to be. His room was empty and his house was emptier, the freezer downstairs humming obnoxiously and the old pipe in the bathroom groaning. When he crossed his bedroom floor, the wooden boards were cold on his bare feet and the streetlights burned amber, letting the boy see his empty driveway, the tarmac missing his dad's cruiser.

So he sighed and switched on the desk lamp, ignored the red numbers on the clock that read too late, the ones that told him it was only three minutes past two. Outside the night was almost morning but the sky was still navy, and he knew that somewhere above the streetlights, full of stars.

Stiles swept away his homework that wasn't quite finished, brushed it from his desk to the floor without another glance before he fired up his laptop. It hummed to life and the screen glared at him, reminded him again of the late night hour as the big, dark numbers flickered across his screensaver. He clicked at the trackpad, a little too harshly, and pulled up his web browser instead.

He flicked through the already open tabs:

A new engine fan on eBay that was too much and more expensive than the car he owned. The countdown timer to the end of the bid flashed red, taunting, teasing. The boy tutted and clicked the 'X' in the corner of the screen.

His history paper, again half written but not quite forgotten about. His own words swam on the screen, the sentences a little too long and rambling but full of intelligence and facts.

The next tab was some porn, a video barely watched with a girl with doe eyes and big breasts, lounging on a bed as a faceless man with a tattoo on his left arm went down on her, her long legs too tanned and hooked over his shoulders.

The last window was of an estate agency website, the listing showing a house that was achingly familiar and just as empty as the one he lived in now. From the photo on the screen he saw his old bedroom window, the broken porch swing, his mom's favourite flowers on the living room window sill.
He swore under his breath, voice rough and still filled with sleep and he slammed his laptop shut before wrenching open his wardrobe doors and pulling out clothes.

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It was three minutes past two and Lydia was sitting at the dining room table, her dinner cold in front of her and her parents forgotten plates on either side. Her potatoes were too hard, her sweet corn arranged to spell out “fuck this” across the pretty China plate.

The night was almost morning and her parents were still arguing in the kitchen.

She'd watched the day die from behind the French doors of the dining room, sat on her velvet lined chair as her father spoke about college and scholarships and her mother bit the inside of her cheek before she erupted about money and receipts for diamond jewellery she never saw and affairs and lies.

So Lydia sat in her chair, pulled at the loose thread of her pleated skirt, mopped up the puddle of spilled wine that happened when her mother slammed her hands on the table. She listened to them yell for hours on end, let herself stare hard out of the window until the streetlights became blurry and turned into stars in the sky.

And when her father's voice got as loud as her mom's, Lydia pushed back her chair and smiled a little when it hit the white wall, ran a finger over the mark it left and climbed the stairs to her room. When she shut the door, the world got a little more quiet, and when she grabbed her denim jacket and climbed out of her bedroom window, the whole universe turned silent when her feet hit the pavement.

She counted her steps as she walked out of town, walked the tightrope that was the long, white lines in the middle of the road. When she reached four hundred and seventy nine, there was less cars and more stars in the sky. The air was warm and when Lydia started the ascent that took her up the cliff side, she held her chin high and walked a little faster.

California was warm regardless of the month, the time of day - and that night was no different. Lydia's skirt was short, the barely there breeze lifting it across her thighs and warmth clung to her skin, the night becoming thicker as she climbed higher.

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Seventies style bass and electric keyboards crackled out of the old tape player in Stiles' Jeep, static interfering with the frontman who sang about girls that tasted like candy and catching lightning. So he turned it up a little, rolled down his window and let the muggy air catch in his throat. The deserted streets washed past him in greys and navys, the streetlights left behind as he willed the old motor to push itself up the steep incline that led to the cliff tops.

When he reached the top, he pulled into the gravel car park, smiled when he saw it empty - just how he liked it. He stepped out into the silence, ruined it with the crunch of pebbles under his sneakers and Stiles let out a low breath when the air lifted at his dark hair, cooled him down and took away the heaviness that his bed brought him.
He stretched, let the breeze touch his stomach, the back of his neck, slammed the car door shut and revelled in the quiet that followed. It soaked him up like the darkness, covered him in a blanket and soothed away everything else he felt.

So he walked, a little bit numb but a little more alive than he'd felt all day, through the empty car lot, over the broken hedges that no one was really supposed to go past, and into the woods.

The branches were full of leaves, the trees touched by summer and blooming colours and little flower buds that made Stiles' nose twitch. The grass was wilder here, longer the further he went and he let the tall tips of green brush his palms as he walked through it.

And he walked and walked and walked until the tree tops fell away and the sky turned black and the stars came out to greet him.

Stiles sighed, took another deep breath that burned his lungs and made his ribcage feel ten times bigger than it was. When everything smelled like cedar and oak and rain that wasn't quite there yet, he stepped out into the clearing - his clearing - to see that it wasn't all his at all, not anymore.

Not that night.

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Electro-pop made the neon nights so much prettier for Lydia and the music seeped into her ears from too big headphones, the old school style with a permanently curled wire that linked to her cell.

They were her father's and when they used to talk and when they used to pretend things weren't about to fall apart, he would tell her how those same headphones had listened to Jimi Hendrix, the very first album that Pink Floyd released on vinyl, the guitar solo of Bohemian Rhapsody. How he'd forgotten them once in a sunflower field, took them on a road trip across the west coast, an overnight drive through San Francisco.

The furthest Lydia had taken them was to the heights of the cliff tops that overlooked Beacon Hills, the small town tucked in the hills of California, far away from the noise of LA, the lights of Santa Monica and the beaches of Miami.

It held the essentials, a school, some stores, a diner or two, a gas station that had the original pumps from the eighties. The streets were clean, the suburbs had perfectly white picket fences and if the couple down the road didn't know your name, they knew your parents or aunt.

So she climbed away from it all, broke out of the barriers that her home held, past the lace curtains, the suffocation of lavender and honeysuckle, and she dug the heels of her shoes into the perfectly manicured lawn harder than she needed to before she ran down the empty streets.

She felt like she was scaling the city, swimming through a forest of green and gold before she reached the precipice of the only good thing in the toy town that now lay at her feet.

There was a formation of rocks that jutted out from the cliff above and spread over the grass, mixing with the roots of old trees and the weeds and wildflowers. Among them all, a huge, flat slab lay, a table top above the city, Lydia's bed away from home.

And she sprawled there, tapping out the beat of her songs with her sneaker on cool rock, the drums
beating in time with the flashes of light that came from the highway. A male voice crooned in her ear, telling her stories of ten thousand emerald pools as she looked up at the sky and stars, counted the constellations she could find and renamed them after the things and people she loved most in the world:

Bowie.
Allison.
Cleopatra.
Ophelia.
Lovegood.
Attenborough.
Mozzarella Sticks.

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Standing at the edge of the forest line, Stiles stared hard out onto the cliff edge, taking in that little space of nature that was entirely his - or used to be.

The lights in the distance were still there, twinkling like a second set of stars below the sky. The flowers still grew wild, mixed with weeds and other fallen branches. The old willow tree still hung low, the long leaves and tendrils brushing the ground like fingertips reaching from the clouds above.

The night was dark, inky indigo.

The huge slab of rock still sat in the middle of the clearing, the bed he preferred over his own.

It just wasn't empty.

There was a girl there.

A girl with hair that looked like early morning skies and it grazed the forest floor from where she reclined on his spot. She didn't hear the broken branches crack under his footsteps, didn't stir when he wander a little closer, and when he stood only five feet from her, he heard the music float out of her headphones. They sat comically large over her ears, her sneaker covered toes tapping out the beat from drums that even he could hear.

And then she opened her eyes and screamed.

Stiles stumbled backwards, his hands flailing out to grab at something that wasn't there. So his palms caught the night, his fingers curling around warm air. When he looked up, the girl was standing, the backs of her knees against the huge rock that he knew to be smooth and her chest was heaving.

She stared at him with unnervingly green eyes, one of her hands curled into a fist and the other hidden in the pocket of her jacket. A jacket that was a little too big for her, a little too worn. The denim was covered in pins and badges, everything from band logos to controversial political statements and Stiles' lip quirked upwards when he spotted an R2D2 pin on her collar.

A black pleated skirt skimmed the tops of her thighs, not much further down her legs than where the jacket sat and the summer breeze played with the hem, teased it, teased Stiles.
"Who the fuck are you?"

"...Excuse me?"


"I said," Lydia repeated forcefully, "who the fuck are you?"

Her music still played, tinny and faint from where her headphones now sat around her neck.

The boy in front of her furrowed his brows, seemed to consider taking a step towards her before he changed his mind. He toed at the grass beneath him, tiled his head when he replied.

"I don't see how that's any of your business."

Lydia huffed, clenched her fists a little tighter as she appraised the boy.

Tall, dark hair, possibly a little older than her. Freckles and moles that were scattered across high cheekbones and visible even in moonlight. Stupidly pretty lips that were turned down into a scowl.

His eyes were quick, sharp.

"You could be a serial killer, a rapist, an incredibly unskilled stalker," Lydia told him, her voice seeming so loud in the dead night, "you could be hiding a weapon."

The boys lips tilted upwards in what seemed to be a smile but it was gone before Lydia could appreciate it.

"A weapon?" The boy replied, "who in the hell carries a weapon around Beacon Hills?" He gestured out towards the city below them, the scattered lights that lay at their feet.

He soon snatched his hand back into chest with a surprised yelp, staring at the small blade the girl produced from her pocket. The pink switchblade seemed fluorescent in dark night and Stiles was incredulous.

"I do."

The girl rolled her shoulders, set him with a dead stare.

Stiles stood stock still, his jaw hanging open a little, the only sound from the small bugs and birds that lived in the trees behind him.

"So what you're telling me," he edged, "is that you're the serial killer here. I mean, I'm all for reverse psychology but usually flaunting the murder weapon is a dead giveaway."

The girl narrowed her eyes, flicked the blade down into the safety of the metal and shoved it back into her pocket. Her music played small vibrations against her neck, one of her favourite singers telling her about electric love and candy in her veins. She ignored it.
Stiles watched the pocket knife slip back into the safety of the girl's pocket, considered taking another step closer before deciding against it - again.

The girl stood at all of five foot something, definitely a full head and shoulders below him and he was amazed that she was in front of him, headphones still blaring music that he faintly recognised, switchblade by her hip and those damn green eyes that were doing there best to stare him down.

"It's not a murder weapon, it's protection," she stated, rolling her eyes.

"Ever had to use it?" Stiles mocked, his lips lifting into a smirk.

"If you don't tell me who you are and why you're here I will," she replied, words quick and low and something inside Stiles' ribs pulled towards her.

He lifted a brow, sent a smile to the ground 'cause the girl was sharp and quick and suddenly he was having fun.

He stepped forward - just once, only a little bit. Waited for the dust to settle and his feet and be looked at the girl and waited for her to move, to say anything, to stop, to yell, to leave, to bring back out her adorably pink blade.

She didn't.

He took another step, and another and another and another and suddenly there was freckles of brown in her green eyes and the air smelled like apples.

"You packing anymore heat?" Stiles tried to ask seriously, his mouth set in a straight line and his eyes sparkling with mock sincerity.

The girl saw right through his words and when she lifted her chin to look up at him, the world seemed to tilt a little on its axis, 'cause she smiled at him, tried to hide it like he did and she gave her grin to the wildflowers over his shoulder instead.

She shook her head, pursed her lips and looked back at him.

"You sure?" He asked, "should I, uh, pat you down?"

His eyes moved to her legs, her bare feet that were in converse much cleaner than his own. He watched her hand move back to her pocket and she smiled at him, saccharine sweet.

"Try it."

"You're trouble."

"I've been told. Why are you here?"

"I bet. You're in my spot."

"I don't see your name on a plaque anywhere."

"I hid it well. Besides, you don't know my name."

"Why don't you enlighten me?"
The boy grinned. A full on fucking beam that stretched his lips and showed his teeth and Lydia was stunned at just how pretty he was. He watched her watch him, his eyes brown and light and the colour of whiskey that she could see so much better now he was closer.

He smelled like deodorant and spearmint and boy.

"I don't trade information with gang members," he quipped his gaze trained on her jacket pocket and his lips a tamer version of the grin he just gave her.

Lydia had a blade in her pocket and he was smirking at her.

He turned his eyes back to her own, let them settle there like summer on their skin. He threw her words back at her, his voice softer than before, like the feeling of fizz that fresh lemonade left on your tongue.

"What's your name?"

She licked her lips, once twice, opened her mouth, breathed in the air that smelled like honeysuckle and gasoline and him. She cleared her throat, fingered the blade she'd nicknamed Tabitha and dug her heel into the ground. When she looked back up the boy was still there and he was still real and he was looking at her like she was art on a wall.

"Uh, I need to go," Lydia frowned, skirted round his solid frame, head down, eyes on the forest line, "my mom, my mom's, calling on me."

His laugh ripped through the silence, low and throaty and he spun around to follow her with his gaze, lazy and deliberate.

"So, no name, huh?"

Lydia shook her head, her body almost knee deep in the long grass that took her back home, back down to the roads and tarmac and perfectly manicured lawns that lined her street.

The boy flashed his teeth again, sat down on her rock that he'd also claimed as his.

"I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours."

It sounded like a threat, a promise, a treat, a secret and it knocked the breath out of the girl until she stumbled backwards and headed towards home. Summer was on her skin, heat crawling inside of her and she had wildflowers growing between her ribs - she tried to tell herself it had nothing to do with the stranger that she left on the tabletop above town.
A day later, Lydia Martin woke up in her queen sized bed, pulled on her robe and padded barefoot into her own bathroom away from her parents and did not think of the boy on the cliff.

Three days later, she sat in a classroom in the proud building of St. Mary's School for Girls and took notes on molecular biology, drew shapes and constellations and trees in the margins and did not think of the boy on the cliff.

By the time a week passed and Lydia had started and completed all the essays that were due in a month's time, she'd still not thought about the boy on the cliff.

She'd studied for her physics test, made Malia help her shop for new shoes at the mall, argued with her mother exactly twenty four times and watched her father sneak back into their home when the sun hadn't risen yet.

She'd cleaned her room, colour coordinated her wardrobe, fell asleep with her headphones on as her parents yelled into the night and had not thought about the boy on the cliff.

And then she would close her eyes and surrender to the night and the darkness that her duvet brought, slid her way down her sheets until cotton and her own mint and lime shampoo surrounded her.

And then.

And then.

She would think about how he had looked like summer and smelled like rain, a human version of those April showers that left rainbows on the roads and in the skies, the ones that make navy grey clouds a little bit brighter.

But she didn't think about the boy on the cliff.

No.

Of course not.

She stayed away from the forest and the cliff and the overlook that was her throne above the town. She stayed away from the night skies and tried her best to sleep under blankets instead of the stars. But the late night hours created a hum in the air that was electric and it refused to let her sleep.

And when family dinners with parents seeped past seven o'clock, bitterness and resentment leaving more acid in their mouths than the wine, Lydia would leave the table and walk past the melting raspberry gateaux in the kitchen, sit in her garden instead. She'd shred blades of grass with her fingers, turn up the volume on her iPod until her mother and father were screaming silent curses at each other from behind their double glazing.

The girl would sigh, watch with boredom and resentment and familiarity as her mother clattered their fine china into piles, half eaten dinners scraped into the bin as the man she called her father followed, red in the face and lying through his teeth.

Lydia was smart, she was clever, intelligent beyond her years. And at nine years old she was learning French, solving equations developed for high school students and living with the
knowledge that her father had sex with women that weren't her mother.

When she grew older, she realised that her mother must have known too. Because Natalie Martin was sharp and knew secrets that weren't her own, kept them close to her chest like a weapon that she wouldn't use until she needed to.

So Lydia would watch her father come home with lipstick smudged on his shirt, smelling of perfume that she didn't recognise. He'd avoid her gaze, spend hours in the shower and let his wife scream at him until the night turned into morning and a new day came round. It would turn from dark to light, Monday became Tuesday, the earth rotated on its axis and the same thing would happen the next month.

Except, a week later, when her mother was yelling and her father refused to be remorseful, the older Martin woman would be wearing a new diamond necklace and throwing the latest Chanel clutch from the Spring/Summer 2017 collection at her husband.

Because, you see, Lydia's mother believed in marriage before love, but not sex before marriage and everything was statuses and popularity contests. Who had the best outdoor pool? Who had the biggest summer home? Susan Jancarski across the street had eight pairs of Manolo Blahnik's but Natalie Martin had eleven. Susan also had a husband who loved her but apparently that wasn't as high on Lydia's mother's list of priorities.

But she had a five bedroom home, two and half bathrooms and a foyer that boasted a crystal chandelier that Mr Martin purchased after his long "business" weekend in Cancun. Her outdoor pool was heated and her fridge boasted a magnificently expensive collection of wine.

Imported silk curtains in every room.
Egyptian cotton pillows in the lounge.
The best champagne from France.
Pearls from Singapore.
Leather handbags from Italy.

It only made sense that her daughter attended the most prestigious school in California. The grand building of St. Mary's school for Girls held the best of the best, talented girls who were hidden from boys and the treacherous gazes that they had.

Because, marriage before love but not sex before marriage, remember?

And from Monday to Friday Lydia pulled on her plaid burgundy skirt, inched it higher with every passing year she attended the school. Paired with the knee high socks and buttoned up shirt that hugged all the curves she grew as she powered her way through elementary, she was a walking, talking hot mess of irony wrapped up in a tight sweater emblazoned with an emblem of a saint.

Mrs Martin didn't want the white picket fence dream, she aimed higher - wanted more. The Martin household was a white brick and marble manor, a blue lagoon pool and custom made gates with their family name engraved on a plaque.

It was a castle.
Natalie was the queen.
And Lydia was the cliché.

The long haired princess with a dirty mouth who was fucking dying to escape her ivory tower.
Stiles dreamt about her.

The girl.

The one he saw in the dead of night.

He had spent all week trying not to think about her. How her hair was impossibly bright against the night sky. How her eyes were so green they stood out against the backdrop of stars and lights. How her legs were long and smooth and splayed out lazily across the rock he spent his early morning hours upon.

She'd stolen his private sanctuary, taken root, stubborn and pretty like the wildflowers that grew in the summer months.

He'd walked the hilltop every night, spent hours above the town with the stars even higher above him and a book in his hands. She had never shown up.

He tried to night after he first met her and the night after that. He tried at two am, stayed until four before giving up and following the white lines in the middle of the road back home. Four nights later he sprawled himself in the middle of that big rock, still slightly warm from the sun that had set only an hour or so before, he watched the colour fall from the sky, smiled as lilac leaked into navy. Then the stars came came out and somewhere way, way up high Venus shone a little brighter than usual.

But the girl didn't show and suddenly the night didn't seem all that worth it anymore.

So the boy spent his night in his bed, slept until late morning and wondered why the hell rose coloured curls had gotten him all caught up. She was a fantasy, a fleeting moment in the magic and darkness of the night. In fact, sometimes when Stiles was staring at his ceiling, he wondered if she was even real.

Then he remembered her smile and quick words, sharp and cutting with a pretty, pink switchblade to match.

He padded around his house barefoot on Saturday mornings, waited for his dad to come home from the station so they could eat lunch together. He spent his Sundays in the towns auto shop with his jeep, trying and willing to piece it back together.

During the week he spent his time in between the classes he was supposed to be attending, passing his tests with flying colours when he did show up. He collected books from the library to read late at night, spoke about lives left behind with Scott on the courtyard floor, took shit from Isaac and gave it back with a smirk on his face, drove Kira home from lacrosse practice when it got too late after school.

And the whole time he tried not to think of the girl on the cliff that he met in the middle of the night. By god, he really tried not to.

But when the night came round again, familiar and dark and the air still smelling sweet like summer, he thought of her.

He didn't see her again. And in a town as small as his, he marvelled at the notion that this girl was
almost lost forever. He'd considered asking his friends about her, describing her to them. Then he thought better of it and kept her tucked inside his mind, just for himself. Stiles had decided she wasn't from here, a visitor, a stranger, someone on vacation probably.

He didn't see her again.

Not for another two weeks
CHAPTER THREE

The night spoke to her.

It whispered to Lydia, sang the lullabies her mother gave to her when she was young, brought the stars into the sky, pulled the moon down so low that she could almost touch it from her bedroom window.

It told her stories, lured her outside with its warm air that smelled sweet like candy floss, leftover ice cream on the sidewalk from forgotten waffle cones.

And when she got a little older, it told her about death, how it could creep up on her in the dark, come for the ones she loved from the shadows. Death used night as a cloak, hid its dagger under the stars and planets and told Lydia that it was unforgiving and all powerful. Bigger than her. Bigger than the moon. Bigger than the planet she stood upon.

Eventually it was just another place for her to hide. Up high, in the clouds surrounded by the dark night air, the stars for friends.

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The night called to him.

It told him to come out to play, to escape the four walls of the home he never really wanted. The one that was almost always empty. And when the hum of his laptop finally cut off and the screen died with a fizz, he would sigh and look out to his window, nod and give in.

The white lines that ran down the middle of the roads were so much brighter at four in the morning and Stiles used them to tight walk his way brought town, trying not to touch the tarmac and wondering where he was going to end up that night.

’Cause darkness brought adventure and wonder and excitement to a time of night when Stiles was supposed to be asleep. And sleep meant bad dreams with people who weren't in this world anymore and waking up under the stars was so much better than waking up tangled in sheets and drenched with sweat.

So he made a bed out of granite, a blanket from the stars and he had the moon for his companion.

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The early evening sky was the colour of peaches and pink lemonade, not a cloud above the crumbling auto shop and the ones that lay in the distance were as dark as the night to come.

Stiles swore, kicked away a few rusted bolts that littered the concrete floor and shrugged at his friend. A thin sheen of sweat covered the boy's faces, tanned and full of summer heat, the air thick and full of magic that only July could bring to the world. Scott smiled sympathetically, looking
down at Stiles from his seat on an old counter top, the painting peeling at the edges.

Stiles sighed and put down the spanner he had been nudging his engine with, letting the hood of the jeep fall back into place with a sharp snap.

"Dude, maybe you should just consider a new-"

Scott's soft words were cut off by his best friends offended scoff and Stiles brushed a hand over the pale blue paint of his car lovingly.

"I've told you before Scotty, wherever I end up in this world, this car is coming with me."

"It don't think it can make it five miles out of town never mind anywhere near the French Polynesia."

"You don't know that," Stiles told the other boy, both of them climbing into the cab that held stifling summer heat. The engine spluttered more than ever as he turned the key over and over, "I'll get new parts next week, it'll be fine. It's fine."

Something beneath the hood rattled and the radio fizzed before tuning and Stiles stared hard at the steering wheel, ignoring his friends pointed look.

"It could get me to Europe, right?"

With a slow start, the vehicle eventually pulled out of the old garage and into the heat drenched street, the neon sign that usually flashed red with "Deaton's Auto" outshine by the setting sun.

"Vegas, maybe."

Stiles pondered the suggestion, his eyes set on the road. He pursed his lips, lifted one shoulder in surrender, "that would do."

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Lydia hated her car. It was shiny and black and smelled like new leather. It had been a 'gift' from her father when she turned sixteen, coincidentally aligning with the same week she witnessed him dropping a young blonde lady at the Beacon Inn just outside of town. He'd looked at her through his windscreen with red lipstick burned onto his cheek.

Six days later, on the morning of her sixteenth, the brand new car sat in their driveway with a big bow on the hood, as red as the lipstick that hadn't belonged to her mother. Lydia hated her car. It was shiny and black and smelled like new leather and it was tainted with her father's guilt.

That's why she was coming home from school on her bike, her skirt flirting dangerously with the tops of her thighs and her over sized sunglasses making the whole world tinted pink like lemonade.

She pedaled at a slow, lazy pace, her legs tired in the heat and every now and again the toes of her shoes would scuff along the sidewalk, the whole time her friends voice a constant in her ear.

Malia's lips were a striking pink, her tongue stained blue from the slushie she drank from. The air around them smelled like artificial raspberries and up ahead, the sun made the sky the colour of peaches as it set.
It was late afternoon, too late to just be coming home from school but Lydia had taken two after school classes, for no reason other than just not wanting to return home. So Malia had sat next to her in solidarity, dutifully taking notes as their maths professor tried his best to pretend he knew more about microbiology than he actually did.

And Lydia had just stared out of the window, watched the clouds fade away and the sky change colour, willing the stars to come out and ignoring the empty desk that sat on the other side of her.

When they left the school gates behind them, Lydia turned left, looked at the ground as her friend opened her mouth to speak before thinking better of it. So they took the long way home and Malia broke the silence with suggestions of slushies or milkshakes, smiled when Lydia did and enjoyed the sun on their faces.

It didn't matter if it took them four times as long to get home this way, Lydia enjoyed the ride through town, her bike wheels spinning slowly, the old and repetitive 'clink clink clink' of her chain made the time seem to go slower.

The slower the better.

The slower they went, the further away home was.

So the girls made their way past the grocery store Lydia's mother had deemed "too small", nodded politely at the town's sheriff as he stopped for coffee in the cafe that Lydia's father said was "bitter slodge".

But it was all there was, this part of Beacon Hills quaint and filled with eighties aesthetic of old brick buildings and neon diners that Lydia adored. 'Cause once she reached Red Brick Park and her bike carried her to the other side of town, the houses grew larger and brick stairways turned into marble and every lawn had neatly trimmed hedges, a mailbox adorned with a gold plated plaque of the family name.

And she looked longingly behind her, trailed her fingertips over the last of the old wooden posts that made up the fences for the houses that had character and colour. She gave up all together when Malia looked at her with sympathy, said goodbye too low and sad for a day that held so much sun and warmth before entering a house with double doors and a balcony on the first floor, a gardener tending to the rose bushes in the front yard.

Lydia slipped off of her bike seat and she pushed it along the middle of the street that was Beacon Hill's very own Wisteria Lane, eyed the white mansions with disdain, housewives with perfectly neat babies on their hips, homemade pies sitting in the window of their kitchens. Each car in the drive was new and sparkling, the children on the sidewalk dressed in pastel colours and playing hopscotch.

She passed the Whittemore residence, ducked her head and picked up her step, ignoring the tut from Mrs Jarcarski when she kicked at a stone and scuffed the toes of her already dirty converse.

She smirked instead, turned herself around and faced the sun and walked back out of the street until she passed Red Brick Park, passed the school and ended up on the side of town that was so much more quiet, a lot more empty.

It held secrets and buried treasure, mountains that led to the sky and cities above clouds and space and stars. It held mystery and peace and lakes that no one really visited anymore. It had no school buildings, no parents and no noisy, new cars. It held nothing.
Nothing but one long road that led out of town and an old jeep parked at the side of it, two boys sitting on the hood and staring at her with a slack jaw.

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Stiles' hands were still smudged with oil when they pulled over just outside of town, something under the hood of his car hissing and spluttering. And when he opened it, the hinges protested and smoke spilled out into the summer sky. Scott climbed out after him, the heat hitting both boys square in the chest and they stood on the long, empty road a whole six miles from their homes.

"So, turns out Vegas was an overshot," Scott smiled softly, his dark eyes full of sympathy for his best friend who was already elbows deep inside the engine, grease and oil staining his white shirt.

"Yeah, yeah, I know, but I can fix this okay?" Stiles grunted, stared hard at the still smoking engine and sighed before pulling out a roll of duct tape.

"Are you serious?"

Stiles turned to his friend's incredulous expression, tape between his teeth before he spat it out to respond.

"Tried and tested method, Scotty! NASA uses this shit."

"Yeah, to wrap their fucking Christmas presents, not to hold together Apollo thirteen."

"Shut up", Stiles grumbled in response, "just, help me, okay? The vent hose has came loose, it's just overheating."

"So are we," Scott grunted, pulling at his top where the sun had made it stick to his skin, but he made his way over to the still hissing engine anyway, holding parts that he didn't know the name of together so the other boy could tape them together haphazardly.

Eventually the smoke stopped and Stiles slammed the hood shut with a satisfied thump, smiling and holding his arms out.

"See? Huh? I told you I'd fix it."

"Sure thing Tesla, now what?" Scott knocked on the Jeep that was still grumbling quietly to itself before gesturing to the slowly fading sunlight, the town still small in the distance.

"Uh, now we wait for the engine to cool, shouldn't take too long?" Stiles winced and hopped onto the hood of the car before patting the space next to him for his friend.

Scott joined him, both of them shielding their eyes from the bright sun and candy coloured clouds. After a beat of silence Scott asked:

"Should we call Isaac?"

"Not a chance in hell, Scotty."

Scott sighed, leaned back against the metal of the hood that was warm from both the smoke and the sun, "come on man, he's our friend, he would want to help."
Stiles chuckled, "yeah sure, totally, you're right. He is our friend," the boy nodded emphatically, "but he's also Isaac and he'd want to gloat."

"No he wouldn't-"

"He said my car is a sack of shit."

"Dude..."

Stiles clutched at his chest dramatically, his jaw falling open as he spluttered.

"I'm offended. This car is vintage! Pure class, worth a fucking fortune in like, ten... thirty years... maybe... holy shit..."

Stiles' rant trailed off and ended in a hushed whisper, his body slipping down the front of the car before his shoes hit the tarmac and he stared down the road with his hand shielding his eyes.

Scott sat up, a question on his lips as his friend fell completely and unusually silent. He watched as Stiles watched, a girl on a bike with hair that the wind picked at, the colour of autumn and sunsets and with bright eyes that were trained on Stiles.

She came to a stop, all of six feet away from them, her hair windblown and her cheeks tinged pink from the sun that was high and hot in the sky earlier on. Stiles' raked his eyes over her, greedy and in awe and fucking shocked.

She was here.

She was real.

He took in the old bike she was still straddling, the paint chipped and flawed, the colour an olive green that made her eyes that so much fucking brighter. She balanced on her toes, her shoes scuffed and dusty from the desert that surrounded their town. She wore a uniform that Stiles instantly recognized and his lips lifted up at the realization that this girl who roamed the night with a switchblade in her pocket attended St. Mary's school for Girls.

Rich.

Gifted.

Snob.

But her tartan skirt was sinful, too short and skimming way too high on her thighs, the wind lifting at it until he pulled his gaze away and looked at her face instead. She was staring right back, eyes full of the same mischief that he saw the first time he met her. She looked different in the day, the sun making her warmer, lighter, like summer and lemonade and long, long walks through sunflower fields. She bit down on her bottom lip and he almost stumbled but he swiped a hand over his face instead, blinked to make sure she was really there and spoke.

"Hey trouble."
Lydia didn't know why she kept pedaling, truly she didn't. She didn't know it was him, she had no way of being sure. So that's why she kept going, moving closer, further from the town until the two strangers sitting on top of the oldest Jeep she had ever seen became one.

Two dark haired boys.

One she had never seen before, a Latino looking boy with skin the colour of caramel and eyes soft and gentle.

The other she'd met once, late when the night was turning into day and there were more stars than clouds in the sky. His hair was still dark, his eyes still brown and amber and gold. But god, he had so much more freckles dusting his cheeks when the sun was on his face. And when he spoke, his voice was rough and low and it held a lot more meaning that the words he said.

"Hey trouble."

There was a longing there, quiet and waiting like the heat in the air at five in the morning. It lingered, somewhere higher, up in the clouds, a little out of reach.

Lydia's fingers curled tighter around her handlebars.

"So you do exist, huh?" The boy spoke again, the stranger she'd shared part of her night with, the boy who didn't have a name, "I mean, I mean, I haven't seen you again, like, anywhere. At all."

Lydia bit down on her lip, ducked her head so this boy didn't see her grin escape.

"Not that I was looking for you or anything... shit..."

Lydia let him see her smile this time, just a small one and he smiled back, slow and wide and a little bit perfect.

"It's not a big town, y'know?" he said as a way of explanation.

Lydia swung her leg over her bike, easy and graceful and so aware of how the boy's eyes followed her movements. The only sound was the quiet spin of her old bike wheels as she moved closer, just a little. Enough that she could see the little cluster of moles by his jaw, the way the sun made his eyes so much warmer and a little bit less dangerous than all those nights ago.

"No, it's not," Lydia agreed, her eyes drawn to the way the sun was setting in his eyes. She gave a brief glance to the other boy who still sat on the hood of the Jeep behind them, quiet and observing with a small smile of his own on his lips.

She smiled back, polite, courteous, like her mother taught her.

"So," Stiles cleared his throat, "what you doing all the way out here? I didn't think I'd ever see you in daylight."

"I could ask you the same no?" Lydia quirked an eyebrow, a perfect arch she'd mastered over the years and used to bring her father into a pit of guilt, "and as much as it will pain you to hear, I'm not a vampire."

"God, you're right, I'm distraught that the knife wielding girl i met in the dead of night isn't also some blood thirsty demon. Succubus, maybe?" Stiles wiggled his eyebrows, before remembering the girl's first question and he answered it with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder.
"We're all the way out here 'cause we actually have a real mode of transport."

Scott snorted at his choice of words and with a jolt of realization, Stiles turned, scratching the back of his neck with awkward guilt as he gestured between the two of them.

"Uh, this is my friend, Scott," he looked back at the girl who returned the small wave the other boy gave her.

And with a smile that was entirely smug, he raised his eyebrows expectantly at the girl.

"Scott this is...?"

Lydia huffed out a small laugh and Stiles reveled in it, his fingers pulling at the hem of his t-shirt as he waited for the girl to answer.

"Someone who's leaving," was her response.

She smiled as she spun her bike around, pointing towards the entrance of the town. The sun was almost gone, the sky lilac and pink and navy and pretty. Lydia looked up, searched for the first glimpse of some stars, just for a second before looking back at the boy's sack jawed expression.

"What, still no name?" He asked, his hands out to his sides expectantly.

"You got one yet?" She shot back, already seated on her bike, her toes dragging along the road.

So Stiles laughed, kept his own to himself and watched her pedal back to town; long, bright hair behind her.

"Hey, what were you even doing out here anyway?" He called out, a little nervous, a little hopeful for an answer, something real, something that he could say he knew about her.

"Just checking all escape routes," the girl called back without looking, her eyes set on the new night sky, "making sure I can still leave this place, you know?"

And god, Stiles did know.
"Where on earth have you been?" Mrs Martin was standing by the range stove she never cooked at, her hands on her hips and a stern expression on her face that Lydia was so used to seeing.

The younger of the Martin women ducked her head, tucked her hair behind her ears and slid her school books onto the breakfast bar, kept her lips closed and didn't speak.

"Lydia? I asked you a question," Her mother moved closer, tapped her two hundred dollar manicure against the marble worktops, raised her eyebrows at her daughter and waited for an answer. "Well? You missed ballet."

"Shame," Lydia muttered under her breath, letting a perfectly red apple tumble between her hands.

Her mother grabbed it, wiped it clean from some sort of invisible lint and placed it back in the crystal bowl it came from, balanced neatly and precisely between the English pears that were only there to add colour to the arrangement.

"Lydia Grace, I am waiting."

The girl sighed, stared at the tiles before lifting her head and smiling with her mask on, her lips stretched into the familiar smirk that held no meaning, no emotion.

"I had after school classes, I'm sorry Mom," she explained her, "and I need to go do my homework."

"Have you finished your Biochemistry essay?" Natalie Martin asked, her gaze on the textbooks and notepads that Lydia had stacked beside her.

"Almost," Lydia sighed, gathering the books her mother was starting to rifle through.

"Almost?" Her mother questioned, "Lydia, 'almost' isn't going to get you place at MIT."

Lydia took that as her cue to move out of the kitchen, dragging her feet along the too expensive marble tiles, and leaning against the door frame as she took a deep breath, closed her eyes, waited one beat, two beats, three beats, four...

"It's not due for another week and a half, Mom," Lydia said, deadpan, her eyes on the walls that held family portraits of smiling strangers that once looked like her.

"Yes, but taking an extra hour or so each night to get work done will allow more time for extracurricular activities. MIT adore seeing their students with an active and promising social life. Your ballet will show so much more dedica-"

"Where's dad?" Lydia cut in, eyes wide and innocent, gazing at her mother with hidden intent.

Her mother's mouth snapped shut, her words trapped inside and her lips nothing more than a thin line that conveyed so much more than the blunt words she did give in response.

"Out."

Somewhat smugly disappointed, Lydia walked out of the kitchen and up the stairs, shutting the door to her bedroom with a soft click, letting her forehead lean against the cool wood as she heard the telltale sign of a wine bottle being opened downstairs, the clatter of the crystal glass against
table tops, the glug of liquid being poured too generously.

So she paced her room like a caged animal, let her hands run over the jeans and shirts that were piled on her dresser and waiting to be put away. She added to the stack of homework that sat on the desk and closed the books that were sitting open, fooling her into thinking she would sit and study, read, learn, behave.

As if she could.

So she sat on the floor, her back to her bed and her shoes still on her feet until the evening washed the remainder of the sun across her bare legs, her skin changing from gold to pink to red to lilac.

So when the night settled over the sky, the heat trapped under the stars and summer air lingering just outside her window, she climbed out of it. Her ballet shoes were left on her bed, the sheets silken and still tucked perfectly into the sides of the mattress untouched.

And as she shuffled down the garage roof, let herself drop to the driveway below, she brushed past her father's shiny new Mercedes, ducked by the living room window that showcased her parents yelling at each other, both clutching glasses filled with wine and whiskey, venom falling from their lips.

Her watch read midnight and she headed to the top of the town.

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"Stiles?"

His dad's voice came through from the other side of his bedroom door, faint and tired sounding.

"Son? You decent?"

Stiles sat up from where he had sprawled out on his bed, his shoes hanging off the edge, textbooks around him and his earphone wire wrapped around his limbs.

"Not morally, no," he called back, "but yeah, I have pants on."

The door opened and his father appeared, still dressed in his sheriff's uniform and a fond look of exasperation etched into his tired features. Between Stiles and the older Stilinski man, the word 'tired' was a perpetual state of being in their home. His father worked day and night, let one shift bleed into the next and took home more paperwork than was ever necessary for a weekend. He started dinners for his son, reading recipes from a book written in someone else's handwriting, someone who wasn't around anymore.

Usually by eight am, Stiles had finished stirring sauces in pots, taken chicken out of the oven and placed a blanket over his father who had sat on the couch to watch the news and let his head rest for too long.

And in the morning, his dad would pretend he hadn't heard his son slip back through the front door, the tyres of his jeep caked in mud and his eyes a little raw and bleary. The sheriff would let him sleep late on weekends, leave him a stack of waffles or pancakes on the kitchen table.
It's how they worked.

But it was eleven pm and Stiles wasn't tired yet, didn't feel the pull from his bed that made him want to curl into his pillow, close his eyes and just let everything go. So when his dad loosened his tie and asked if he wanted to split a pizza with him, watch that movie that they'd taped the other day, he said yes with a soft smile that he didn't give to a lot of people.

He left his dad on the sofa an hour later, pulled the old, knitted blanket over him and put the empty pizza box in the bin before he went out the kitchen door. He left his keys on the counter, deciding to walk when he realized the air outside was almost as warm as it was at noon. He let it settle over him, let the night fill his lungs and rest on his skin.

Then he started to walk.

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He was there when Lydia got to the top. Like she thought he'd be.

Like she'd hoped he would be.

He was sitting close to the edge, closer than she usually ventured. His legs long and hanging over the side, the heels of his worn shoes scuffing against the sheer cliff face that hung over their town like a balcony.

His back was to her, the same threadbare shirt that she'd seen him in early clung to his broad shoulders, muscles that Lydia was always surprised to find on boys her age. A book lay beside him, looking worn and tattered and when she got a little bit closer she could see dog eared pages and a front cover that said something about creatures and gods.

He didn't seem surprised to see her, didn't startle or jump when she emerged from the shadows that the night brought to them. He simply stared ahead as she sat beside him, arranged herself daintily so her school skirt still covered herself, her legs almost as long as his but her head at just the right height to rest on his shoulder.

Not that she would.

They were both looking out at the sky above town when he finally spoke.

"Hey trouble."

When she bit her lip to hide her smile, he was already staring at her. His eyes were so much more when she was this close.

Honey and whiskey and chocolate and bourbon and amber and gold.

But she ignored them, let them roam over her profile with abandon as she counted the cars that streaked silently down the highway ten miles away. Red ants, yellow ants, bright, white lights going everywhere Lydia wanted to go.

And they sat in silence for a beat, for two, maybe three. Let the night curl around them, soak into their skin, soft and quiet like a blanket of muggy air that came from climbing so high on a July
night. Lydia watched the only cloud in the sky float from east to west and when it broke apart slowly but surely and let more stars come out to play, she turned to the boy.

He was so close. So much more so than she had anticipated when she sat down; and the words her mother had always told her rang in her ears. She tried not to think of how he smelled so sharp and clean, how his hair looked so soft to belong on a boy and how the moles along his jawline was something that looked like it should belong amongst the planets.

"So."

He grinned, slow and careful like he'd scare her away. His knee bumped her own, accidental, rough denim against bare skin.

"You ready to divulge, princess?"

Lydia scoffed, wrinkled her nose and threw his words back at him, "princess?"

The boy leaned back onto one hand, plucked at the burgundy jumper she still wore despite school hours being well and truly over.

"St. Mary's school for girls?" He grinned, "come on now, you can't argue with me on that one. You must be extraordinarily gifted."

Lydia couldn't tell him his voice was mocking or not, if there was a hint of impressed in his tone. So she quirked a brow instead, pulled a foot up until she could pat at the inside of her sock, flashed him a little bit of bright pink plastic that sheathed her well known pocket knife.

He laughed, rich and real and genuine, let his eyes wander up the length of her leg without much shame and Lydia would've been embarrassed if she hadn't noticed the highs of his cheekbones going a little pink under the moonlight.

He cleared his throat, deliberately caught her eyes with his, "okay, Trouble it is."

Lydia smiled back, a little triumphant, a lot proud.

"I'll take that."

He chuckled and something happened, something shifted and the night seemed a little brighter than before, like the planets came out along with the stars, like the moon doubled in size.

"So, it's almost three am," Stiles continued, picked up from where the stranger beside him left off, "what're you doing up here?"

His voice had turned soft like the night, the teasing gone.

The girl kept her gaze steady and looked out ahead, tried not to let her throat get too tight when she replied, "I don't sleep that well anymore."

Stiles hummed in vague agreement, trained his eyes on the passing cars that she seemed to be looking at too.

"I don't like my house, I don't like my parents," she continued, "and I lost someone."

He turned at her last words, let his gaze settle on her and watched her throat bob a little before she looked up at the sky and her lips moved again.
"Sometimes I think I can find them up here."

Suddenly the cliff was too small for both of them and an apology was on the tip of Stiles' tongue and he wasn't really sure why. But this girl beside him was slowly losing herself to the night and he watched how her eyes got further and further away from reality.

She stared at the stars until her eyes watered, she stared until she realized that whatever she was thinking in her head wouldn't come true.

So Stiles nodded and held out his hand.

"I'm Stiles. I lost someone too."

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He waited, one beat, two beat, three beat, four. He breathed in and out, slow and unsure. A muscle in his jaw jumped and he could've sworn he saw the girl's eyes light up at his name, how she seemed to store it away for safekeeping.

She licked her lips, once, twice. Took a deep breath and swallowed the sky, the stars, her stubbornness.

She took his hand, her own so much smaller but her grip was fierce and her words were clear when she told him:

"My name's Lydia."
Stiles kicked at a stone on the road and tried really hard not to stare at the girl who was walking beside him.

She was pretty, very pretty. She was pretty in an obvious way, pretty in an unconventional way. Pretty like the stars and pretty like the sun that was rising in front of them.

She looked like the kind of girl that would be gorgeous when she laughed, heart wrenchingly beautiful when she cried.

She looked like the girl next door, a girl from a wet dream and fuck, so much more.

Stiles was staring.

It was almost 6am and Stiles hadn't found out a lot more about the girl. He'd sat next to her through the night, murmured nonsense about the town below and tried so hard to make her smile when she only seemed to grow sad at the stars.

They didn't talk about who they'd lost. They didn't talk about why they weren't asleep. They didn't talk that much at all.

So when the sun started to appear and the world around them turned hazy and pink, the girl stood and Stiles followed, scratching at the back of his neck, clearing his throat nervously before asking:

“Uh, can I walk you home?”

Lydia had looked at him, bright and earnest and wonderfully curious despite the red that rimmed her eyes, tiredness seeping through and making her body heavy. More silence had followed and Stiles had a curse stuck in his throat, ready to be spat out in embarrassment.

But then she said yes.

The girl had sat next to a boy above town all through the night, her bare knees knocking into those of an almost stranger and she had found she hadn't really minded.

Not that much. Not at all.

So she followed him past the trees as the sun rose, watched how he smiled when the wildflowers reached her knees, parted the curtains that the willow tree created and let him lead her back into town.

They didn't talk again until their feet touched tarmac, the silence that the forest and mountains and stars brought broken by traffic lights and early morning commuters.

Magic hour was over.

“Where do you live?”

Stiles started at the sound of her voice, a little rough and scratchy for not speaking for so long. But he smiled when he saw her looking at him shyly, her eyes narrowed to avoid the rising sun.

“Uh, just down Sycamore Drive,” he answered, pointing in the vague direction of his home, “you?”
Lydia brushed her hands over the flowers that grew on the edges of Main Street, the flowerbeds overflowing with tulips of all colours. She let her fingertips graze pastel, petals felt the sun on her skin and the boy's gaze on her face.

“By Mulberry Glade? Just, you know, past the park?”

Stiles smirked a little, his eyes dancing as he let out a cough that hid a laugh.

“By Mulberry Glade or in Mulberry Glade, princess?”

Lydia smiled, looking down at the pavement before shrugging and stepping a little closer to the boy, almost subconsciously, shoulders bumping just for a second.

“Isn't it the same thing?” She asked softly.

He laughed, his hands deep in his pockets so his fingers didn't accidentally brush against her own.

“It's definitely not the same thing. So do you have one of those big houses with the turrets? Is it true they come with an at home butler already there?”

Lydia laughed at his words, louder than she'd spoken all night. Birds chirped around her and somewhere down the street, a bell rang from a shop door being opened.

Stiles missed the night, the darkness, the quiet it brought, but, looking at this girl in the sunlight with a laugh that sounded so sweet, daytime suddenly wasn't as awful as it was yesterday.

“No and no. I don't have a turret,” she told him from beneath her eyelashes, “and we hired Jeffrey when I was five.”

He turned to her, abrupt and eyes a little wide. He stared until she laughed, shaking her head and looking more alive than she had before.

“Trouble,” he told her, grinning.

She hummed in reply; neither agreeing nor denying before tilting her chin up to the sky and letting the sun soak her face.

It was barely seven in the morning and both boy and girl had never felt so awake.

Stiles didn't say anything when they passed by his street, his yard, his front door. He hid his smile with downturned lips, avoided the girls questioning gaze and only explained when her lips parted with an unasked question.

“I said I'd walk you home, right?”

Lydia stopped, feet in the middle of the road and her school skirt from the day before swishing at her thighs. She played with the hem and Stiles tried hard not to look.

“You don't have to, you live in this street, don't you?”

Stiles shrugged, ignored the fact that his house was only ten feet away and walked towards the girl, shoes scuffing against concrete, all overly casual.

“I want to.”

“Why?” Lydia asked, voice too soft to be rude, “you hardly know me.”
Stiles licked his lips, nerves itching at the back of his neck for only a second before he looked back out at the empty town in front of them before deciding to be so astoundingly honest.

“I want to,” he told her again.

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When Lydia closed the door behind her and let out the breath she was holding she made sure she couldn’t hear the sounds of her mother swishing around the kitchen. When she didn’t, she turned, placed her forehead on the cool glass and looked back outside to see the back of a tall, dark haired boy walking away from her lawn.

Her eyes were heavy and her body lacked sleep but she knew what the boy looked like when he smiled for real, without the sarcasm, without a smirk, when the sunrise hit his face and they were still surrounded by trees.

When Stiles walked back into his home that morning, the sun was up, his home was empty and there was pancakes sitting on the kitchen countertop. The house smelled like old books and cake batter and home. The living room was the same and when he looked in the mirror then hung above the fireplace, the same sleepy face looked back at him.

Everything was the same.

Except now he knew what the girl called Lydia looked like when the sun came up.

A/N: Hi. I'm extremely sorry for how short this chapter is after such a long wait between updates. It's not my best and I've agonized over it for the better part of three weeks now. So I decided to hit full stop for the last time and try to make it better next chapter. I'm kinda struggling with the plot unfortunately.
“You didn't get her number?”

Stiles huffed, let the wrench he was holding fall to the concrete with a sharp crack and shook his head.

“You're an idiot,” Isaac told him from his perch on top of an old workbench.

Somewhere in the corner, Scott laughed.

“Yeah, I know, I'm well aware, thank you,” Stiles snipped, wiping his oil slick hands on his already covered jeans.

The three boys were sitting in the shadows of Deaton's Auto Shop, the summer sun making the air outside hazy and hot, the sky cloudless and their shirts stick to their skin.

It was a day for fixing old cars, drinking lemonade, watching the town go past them at a pace too slow for their youth. It was a day for talking about girls with strawberry blonde hair and with a liking for the dead of night.

Isaac wiped at his brow, his dirty blonde curls messy and matted in the heat. He flicked his eyes between the two boys who'd become his best friends and rolled them when Stiles huffed in the general direction of his dying engine.

“Did you get her name at least?”

That got a smile from him and Isaac tried not to smirk at how the corner of Stiles’ lips lifted slightly, how his shoulders lost their tension and his eyes lowered to the floor.

“Uh, yeah,” he cleared his throat, his voice rough to combat how soft his eyes had turned, “Lydia.”

“Lydia…?” Scott prompted, waiting for more information, for something else.
Stiles stayed silent.

Isaac laughed, his toes grazing the old, dirty floor as he swung his legs gleefully, “you didn't get her last name either, did you?

“I know where she lives?” Stiles offered instead of a real answer.

“Did you learn that from the phone book or stalker lessons 101?” Isaac asked, quirking a brow.

Stiles scoffed, his face full of offence but when he turned and looked to Scott for back up, the third boy even looked concerned.

“What? Guys, no,” Stiles sighed, “I walked her home last night, well, this morning.”

Stiles busied himself with an old rag and he wiped down the oil that had streaked his forearms, “she uh, she lives in Mulberry Glade,” he continued.

Scott let out a low whistle and Isaac’s brows lifted into his hairline further than before. Both boys continued to stare at their friend, waiting for him to say something else.

But Stiles stayed silent.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Isaac said, holding his hands out in front of him, “you're telling me that you go out at night, skulking around town like a weirdo ‘cause you can't sleep…”

Scott sighed at the boys insensitive words and Stiles rolled his eyes.

“...and you scale small mountains and end up just casually bumping into rich, hot girls?”

Stiles lifted a hand to the back of his neck, awkwardly rubbing at it as he searched the garage for an answer.
“Well, I guess when you put it like that…”

Scott laughed, took a long drag from the bottled lemonade he was holding and clapped his best friend on the shoulder.

Isaac turned to him, grinning that sly way that only he could, before he asked Scott, “she was hot, right? You saw her?”

Scott smiled, soft like the haze that covered the town and he nodded, sharing a look with Stiles that no one else in the world would ever quite be able to decipher.

“She was very pretty, yes.”

Stiles looked smug.

“Alright, okay,” Isaac dropped from the workbench to his feet, flicked at the oil that still marred Stiles’ jaw, “you know her address yeah?”

Stiles nodded, extremely wary of his friends words.

“So we look it up in the town directory, get her landline number and you can call her, solid plan, right?”

Scott shook his head whilst Stiles looked somewhere between mortified and appalled.

“What? No, are you serious?” He asked.

Isaac shrugged, “what's the big deal, you wanna talk to her again, see her, don't you?”

“Well, yeah, but I'm not gonna call her house, what if her parents answer?”
“Or her butler?” Scott offered helpfully.

“She already told me she doesn't have a butler,” Stiles replied offhandedly, still staring at Isaac in shock.

“You ask them if you can speak to their daughter,” Isaac told him slowly, ignoring Scott's words, “dude, this isn't hard.”

“What if they have, like, five daughters?” Stiles replied, “and besides, when they ask who the hell I am, what am I gonna say?”

“Stiles, you're making this so much more difficult than it ha-”

“Oh, hi there Mrs Lydia, I'm just randomly calling you on your very possible diamond and gold plated phone, during your seven course dinner party, but I'm the guy that your daughter sits with at three in the morning. Outside. In a heavily wooded area. In the dark. Where no one can hear her scr-”

“Okay,” Scott interjected, “I think Stiles has made a valid point.”

Stiles smiled at Isaac, smug and he watched as the boy backed away, eyebrows raised and hands in the air in a rare show of surrender.

“Whatever man, don’t say i’ve never tried to help you and your non existent love life out.”

“It’s not non existent,” Stiles huffed, grabbing the rag that hung from his back pocket and wiping the oil and sweat from his brow, “I just don’t have time to date.”

“No one said anything about dating,” Isaac said as he stepped out of the old garage, squinting back at Stiles as the sun bathed him in gold, “you could just be a normal nineteen year old who’s waiting to go back to college y’know…”

Stiles grimaced as the muscles in his arms strained, the weight of the garage door sticking in it’s old wheels before it whined and fell to the ground, kicking up dust and hot, dry air with it. He made
sure it was locked, took a swig of water from the bottle Scott offered and ignored Isaac.

“...it’s as simple as going to a party, finding a cute girl-”

“Or boy,” Scott interjected.

“...or boy, and taking them home and having some nice, hot, dirty, hormone filled sex,” Isaac explained helpfully, smiling and tugging through his blonde curls as the two elderly women who work in the town’s post office passed them, scowls on their faces.

“Mrs Jefferson, Mrs Adams, lovely day isn’t it?”

“Don’t make me end up in front of your father’s door again, Lahey, you ain’t nothin’ but six foot o’ trouble,” one of them muttered, her eyes watching carefully as the three boys walked past a little faster.

They waited until they turned onto Main Street before they started laughing, heat on their cheeks and Summer on their tongues. One was soft and warm, shades of brown on his skin and eyes, a smile that looked like the beginning of something special. The other was tall and a little lanky, with a smirk that gave him the confidence to pull it all off. The last one was oil slicked and a little messy, purple and pink marring the shadows under his eyes that looked like they were searching for something he would never, ever find.

“Ice cream?” Scott asked.

“Floats?” Isaac offered immediately.

“Romero’s?” Stiles asked.

Lydia huffed again, her skin pretty and flushed under the neon sign that flashed lavender and pink.
The sky outside was blue and cloudless, the sun insistent as it bled through the storefront window and made the waiting customers inside with a heat that made them lazy and slow.

“Can we just go?” the girl asked again, shifting her bag over her shoulder and accidentally jostling the older gentleman behind her. He frowned and she grimaced an apology.

“What? No, look, we’re almost at the front now,” Malia told her, plucking at her school blouse as it stuck to her skin.

“You said that twenty minutes ago,” Lydia responded flatly, tucking a loose wave of hair behind her ear, “my hair is wilting,” she complained.

“Yeah, I know, I know, who would’ve thought it would’ve been this busy?” Malia answered distractedly, her whole body teetering on the tips of her toes as she tried to see past the two people who were still in front of them in the ever growing queue.

“You mean you didn’t expect this many people to be crammed into the only ice cream parlour in the entire town, on the hottest day of the year?”

Lydia did her best to look shocked as Malia turned to face her, hiding a smile behind a scowl. She said nothing to retaliate, instead, taking a lock of her friend’s hair and flicking it across her sunkissed nose.

“Whatever, your hair still looks pretty.”

Lydia hummed her thanks, her hand on Malia’s lower back as she pushed her forward until they were in front of the huge freezer that held the colourful selection of homemade ice cream flavours.

She sighed in pleasure as she pressed her front against the frosted glass, the neon signs above still making her skin and white shirt turn to fuchsia and violet. She greeted Mr Romero with a smile, the man too busy to chat as he showed his youngest daughter how to work the slushie machine.

“What you wanting?” Malia asked, nudging her hip to Lydia’s, “my treat. Father dearest gave me more guilt money than usual this month seeing as he was still doing meetings in Chicago on my birthday.”

Lydia smiled without humour, without warmth, her lip tucked between her teeth as she thought about her own father and the business meetings he attended outside of town. She thought back to that morning, how her mother slept in past seven, which was basically unheard of unless she had taken her sleeping pills. So Lydia had eaten breakfast across the marble island from her father, the
silence stony and so cold compared to the heat that was gathering across their Spanish paved slabs that adorned the front garden.

She watched him spray cologne on his neck at the hallway table, slick back his hair and smooth down his tie. She followed his hand until it curled around a prettily wrapped gift box that was hidden in his coat pocket that hung in the porch, watched how he tucked it into his suit away from peering eyes.

He gave wide berth to her shiny car that sat unused on their driveway, got into his own, new mercedes and sped away for the weekend, a note left on the kitchen table addressed to his wife, Lydia’s mother, saying he would be back Monday, he had meetings out of town, late night conference calls with heads of other companies.

He signed it with his initial and a kiss, signed it with a lie.

Lydia had scrunched it one fist, pushed it to the bottom of the garbage can and made sure her mother had water on her bedside for when she woke up.

Then she went to school.

“Lydia?”

The girl blinked, pushed back her hair with hands that didn’t shake as much as they did that morning, pushed away from the cold glass that was now uncomfortable and smiled at her friend.

“Just a rocket pop, babe, thanks.”

The bell above the door of Romero’s jingled as Scott pushed it open, Stiles and Isaac trailing behind him. The air turned cooler inside, the smell of sugar and fruit taking Stiles back to summers spent younger, smaller, happier.
They shuffled themselves into the long queue, Isaac moaning at the probable long wait and the fact that Stiles looked like he’d just stepped out of a mine.

“I mean at least wash up man, you never know who we’re going to bump into and quite frankly, I will pretend that I don’t know you.”

“You have high hopes for this town, don’t you Lahey?” Scott grinned, “most of the girls around here have either already slept with you or hate you.”

“Or both of the above,” Stiles chimed in, enjoying the cool air that the ceiling fan was blowing across his head.

As Isaac tried to come up with an argument, Stiles tipped his face upwards, letting more artificial, cold air bathe his face. He closed his eyes, let his friends hustle him along the line a little and he smiled when he heard the familiar voice of Mr Romero tell his daughter, Hayden, that the slushie machine need refilled.

His friends were behind him still, talking low and lazy, the way that summer made them all feel. He blinked, looked back around the bustling parlour and at all the pastel colours that were faded with age and love.

At the front of the counter, an elderly man with his young granddaughter moved out of the way, their hands clutching waffle cones piled high with ice cream and sprinkles. In their wake, they left behind a girl that was leaning across the glass front of the freezer, tartan skirt hiked high around her thighs and an ice pop in her hand.

She had hair that was vibrantly familiar, long and in waves that looked like they were cast in a permanent sunset. She moved and her skirt swished, the skin underneath a little too pale for the height of summer but, god, Stiles couldn’t take his eyes off of her.

He swallowed, once, twice.

His eyes found her mouth, watched how she pushed the red, blue and white lolly between her lips, how it stained them cherry.

He swallowed a third time - tried to clear his throat - but it made no difference when his words
came out hushed and hoarse.

“Awh, holy shit.”
CHAPTER SEVEN.

Stiles spun on his heel, pushing himself between Scott and Isaac until he stood behind them, his eyes trained on a pastel pink wall. He was suddenly immensely interested in the menu that he had memorised by his seventh birthday.

“Dude, what’s going on?” Scott nudged at his arm, tugged at his sleeve until his friend turned and eyed him carefully.

“Stiles?”

Isaac had followed suit, looking over his shoulder as the line moved closer to the cashier desk. He frowned, looking at the other two boys in confusion.

“Why does Stilinski look like he’s about to have a panic attack?”

Stiles glared and Isaac finally turned to face him, thankfully blocking out the girl that was still standing over by the front. She had leant over the old, wooden desk, tongue still playing with the popsicle as her skirt flirted dangerously with the underside of her ass.

“We have to go,” Stiles whispered, voice gone to shot, “now.”

“Stiles, what-”

“Now!” He hissed, dragging both boys out of the store by their wrists, only pausing to quickly mumble an apology to Mr Hale, the grumpy guy that lived just on the outskirts of their town, his displeasure at being jostled by them apparent on his face.

The heat slammed into him as he stepped out of the store, settling on his skin the same way the faint pink bush stained the highs of his cheeks. His friends joined him, the soft click of the door ensuring that no one else had followed. His eyes found the flash of strawberry blonde through the frosted glass of the window front, the neon lights making her turn into different shades of pink, Stiles swallowed, flicked his gaze to Scott, to Isaac.

He turned and started walking.

There was something so indescribably real about seeing the girl in daylight.

Lydia.

It had only happened twice, once in the barely there haze of the morning light and it was something that made his mouth go dry, his chest tighten. It was something that made him smile, made the world go soft and allowed him to think that the night to follow wouldn’t be as bad as the last.

It was a feeling he didn’t quite want to share.

“Hey.”

The boy stopped and turned, an inch, then two, before realising that his friends hadn’t followed and it wasn’t Scott or Isaac who had spoken.

The voice was a little husky, more shy than he’d heard it before. But the sun was high above them and he realised that they had a bigger audience than ever before so he took a deep breath and turned around completely.
Her lips were cherry red and if Stiles had dared to move close enough, he would have seen how her tongue was stained blue.

If he kissed her right then, she would have tasted like artificial raspberries, all sugar and syrup. But he didn't do either.

She was standing with another girl, one who was taller than her, who looked a little more rough around the edges. Her eyes were guarded and she shifted until part of her body brushed Lydia’s, a sign of protection that Stiles could never have missed.

“Hey, trouble,” Stiles greeted, squinting a little as the sun beat down on all of them a little more relentlessly than before, “straying from the palace?”

Scott and Isaac stood between the exchange, one boy looking more confused and dumbfounded than the other.

The girl smiled, looked at her feet to hide it before taking another suck of her popsicle as it dripped red and blue on the sidewalk. Stiles coughed, folded his arms and tried not to stare.

“Only until mother dearest sends out the search party,” she responded, her eyes only finding him despite the progressively confused looks her friend was sending her. She cocked her hip, looked at the boy from beneath her lashes and tried not to grin as she stage whispered, “god forbid I stay out too late.”

Stiles smothered a laugh behind a raised fist, let his eyes dance over the girl, over that ridiculously short school skirt and revelled in the way she seemingly allowed him to, swaying slightly under the sun and his gaze.

She nudge a shoulder softly into the girl beside her, tilted her chin towards Stiles in a way that was so familiar.

“Malia, this is Stiles, he’s a friend.”

The girl now known as Malia, softened the frown that had graced her pretty features softened slightly, and she lifted her chin at the boy in greeting.

“And this is Scott,” Lydia continued, her smile soft and easy as the other boy smiled right back.

She looked at Isaac, at a loss and Stiles stepped forward, if not a little grudgingly. He moved between his two friends, shouldering Isaac a little harder than necessary in order to stop the boy gawking at the two girls before them.

“This is Isaac,” Stiles told them, his eyes still on Lydia, “we don’t let him out much so I’m giving a preemptive apology to both of you now.”

Isaac scoffed and landed a fist between Stiles’ shoulder blades, pulling a soft groan from his friend and an eye roll from Scott.

“Ladies,” Isaac greeted, “Lovely to meet you both.”

He turned to Stiles with one eyebrow raised in curiosity before he turned back to Lydia.

“Stiles’ friendship circle doesn’t usually extend outside of us, excuse my shock at him meeting a girl,” he smirked and pretended not to hear his friends mumbled curses.
Lydia smiled good naturedly at the ribbing the boys shared between them both, Stiles sending Isaac dirtier looks by the second as Scott admonished both of them with elbows to ribs.

“Especially one as pretty as yourself,” Isaac continued, his hand finding his curls as it always did when he was flirting, “where the hell did he find you?”

Stiles opened his mouth, his eyes narrowed already at his friends typical flirtations, ready to explain that he already told him, that this was Lydia, this was the girl, the one he sat with all night and into morning, on a cliff over this godforsaken town but then-

But then, Lydia answered for him.

“He found me up beside the stars,” she explained so simply, so plainly, a smile on her lips so soft and small that only the boy who mattered saw it.

“Didn’t you, Stiles?”

The boy could do nothing but shuffle his feet, his hands stuck in the pockets of his oil stained jeans and smile at how right the girl was.
Lydia looked different at night, Stiles mused. She was sitting in the cab of his jeep, her arm brushing against his in the heavy night air. The old clock on the dashboard was a little off, but Stiles knew from habit that it was definitely past two in the morning.

He slowed a little as he turned a sharp corner, chanced a look at the sky, the stars. The girl sitting next to him.

In the daylight, with the sun on her, her hair was bright but there was something lacking in her eyes, her smile. There was a rare warmth that leaked from her in the night time, when the stars were in the sky and reflected in her eyes. Magic surrounded her, a mystery wrapped around a young woman's body. She smiled more in the dark, laughed under the blanket of night time.

Lydia. Her. This girl sitting next to him.

•••••••

At half past one in the morning, just as Friday turned into Saturday and Lydia had long left Stiles standing on the sidewalk with his friends, she pushed open her bedroom window and dropped into the night.

The table lamp in the living room was still on, showing Lydia glimpses of her mother on the sofa through the window, the tv on but silent, a glass of wine poured to the rim, the bottle beside it empty. Her father's car was missing from the driveway but Lydia tried not to notice, so she hopped over the rose bushes instead and walked the streets in the dark.

She made it to the top of the cliff, ducked under an old wire fence that was hardly there anymore, one that did nothing to keep her out. When she passed the willow tree that hung over the cliff side, its leaves and branches swaying up by the clouds, she saw Stiles.

He turned and spotted her, his hands stopping their fidgeting and the moon above them showing what was the beginning of a smile. He let the book he'd been holding close their pages, the words forgotten and his place lost.

When he held out his hand in invitation, one eyebrow lifted and nerves colouring his cheeks, Lydia took one step backwards. Just a small one, invisible to him in the dark.

But when he didn't move, when he just sat patiently and waited for her, she stepped forward, once,
twice.

"Do you, d'you wanna get out of here?" He asked.

Lydia's hand left the safety of the willow tree, the rough bark under her palms replaced with Stiles' own hand instead. She let him pull her closer, closer than they had been during the day. The world tilted a little, shifted on its axis as his breath fell across her face, when the bright hair on the crown of her head brushed his chin, his mouth.

Fear gathered inside her, anxiety and nerves that pooled together with something else that felt like excitement - maybe hope. It was the feeling she got when the sun started to set, when the clouds outside her bedroom window fell away with the light, when the sky turned navy and brought out the tiniest of planets with it.

So she nodded, watched how his lips lifted into a smile, so happy and genuine that it rivalled the stars behind him.

•••••••

Stiles noticed how Lydia hadn't asked where they were going, hadn't done anything other than turn the radio up slightly. The beat and the bass that filled the old jeep was moody and heavy like the night and it filled them with something electric. It sat in their bones and made everything buzz, made the world a little brighter despite the night sky.

So the boy drove out of town, watched how the girl didn't even blink as they passed by the sign that bid them farewell from Beacon Hills and they travelled out into roads that had no street lights. They travelled in the dark and under a blanket of stars, dust and desert beneath them with no sign of anything bigger or better near.

So Lydia looked up, looked to the stars and drew her own patterns between them. Then she looked to the boy next to her, this boy, an almost man, with hair still mussed with sleep that hadn't quite taken him, hands strong and gripping the steering wheel with a determination she had never seen in the day.

His eyes caught hers and she steeled herself, refused to blink or blush and she was rewarded with a grin from him, teeth so white amongst the darkness around them.

When the edges of the horizon turned aquamarine and clouds appeared in shades of amber, Stiles slowed to a stop at the edge of a road than never seemed to end.

He turned to Lydia and smiled, hopped out the jeep and appeared at her door like a gentleman, helping her out into fresh air that smelled like a new day.

He took her hand, gentle and unsure but Lydia simply tangled her fingers in his, let out a breath at how it felt and let him lead her into long grass that brushed the morning dew into her shins.

•••••••
The lake that lay in front of them was an unexpected surprise. The water so still that Lydia was sure the stars above had fallen into it, a mirror of the sky, constellations and all.

They sat on what looked like an old dock, the wooden planks warped and knotted. Their elbows brushed as they slipped off their shoes and dipped their toes, ankles, legs into the lake - watched how they slipped into star speckled waters.

Silence enveloped them like a warm hug, summer creeping back into the dawn, bringing back birds and crickets with freckles and pink shoulders. When the sun turned the water into a rose coloured lagoon, Lydia let her fingers curl over the edge of the dock, held on right before she spoke.

"I lost my best friend," she breathed in, out, in, out, "she was called Allison."

Stiles blinked, placed his hand over Lydia's, this girl that he still barely knew but travelled with in the night, climbed mountains for in the dark, and held on just as tightly.

"Yeah," he cleared his throat, "I, uh, lost my mom."
“It’s okay, no one else is home,” Stiles told the girl, standing in the open front door of his house. Lydia stood on the porch, her red hair dark with rain and her dress clinging to the dip of her waist, the small of her back, the tops of her thighs. She propped her bike against the brick wall, looked at the empty driveway and then back at the boy who was waiting for her patiently.

She hesitated, watched the boys adam’s apple bob in his throat, saw how his fingers tapped nervously against the door handle as he watched her with soft eyes. He was as soaked as she was, their mad dash through the storm was filled with laughter and shouts, jumbled sentences that were hardly heard over the thunder and torrential rain. But they watched each other grin and that was enough.

Lydia didn’t know they’d end up here, on Stiles’ side of town, outside his very empty house. The rain had stopped and the clouds were clearing, the grey lifting from the sky to let the sun back in, the heat licking at their skin. The boy watched a raindrop roll down the side of her neck, disappear past the neckline of her dress.

The air became sticky and unbearable again, heavy with heat and Lydia stepped into the house. Their footsteps echoed on the hallway floorboards, every other step accompanied by the sound of leftover rain hitting the wood as Stiles led Lydia through a kitchen that her mother would have died at the sight of.

Old copper pots and pans hung from a rack above an older stove, each with a mismatched handle. The countertops, clean as they were, held cookery books with missing front covers, pages sticking out with folded corners, a favourite of each of the Stilinski men. A huge pinboard took pride of place by the dining table, a mixture of newspaper clippings, old crime reports and school photos stuck haphazardly to the cork. In one of the corners, in pristine condition and standing out from the rest, was a photo of a pretty, young woman. She was holding a young baby wrapped in a knitted blanket, both of them encircled by the strong arms of a man who looked so very much in love.

Lydia looked away, her cheeks a little pink as if she had found something secret, something she shouldn’t have seen. But when she caught Stiles’ eyes, they were still that soft way she had grown used to, gentle and curious. He smiled and gestured for her to follow.

When she stepped through the doorway leading to the laundry room, he was already holding a towel for her, warm and fluffy like he’d just pulled it from the dryer. She thanked him, used it to dab at the water clinging from her lashes and dripping from her curls and her stomach swooped when they boy wrapped a second one around her shoulders.

It was afternoon and the light in the room was so bright and crisp and Lydia could see every freckle and mole that was scattered across the boys cheeks, on the bridge of his nose, just under his bottom lip. Rainwater had his eyelashes in spikes, his dark hair now almost black and the ends of it curling slightly. He looked like a daydream.

It was afternoon and the light was so bright and crisp and Stiles was so, so close and so very, very real.
She was in his house and he was trying so very hard not to freak out.

But it was mid afternoon and the house was so quiet and the light was so bright and she was so close. She stood wrapped in a fluffy, white towel, the length of it barely hiding her soaking wet dress, the material almost see through, thin and clinging to her skin. Her hair had went a little wild and Stiles revelled in the way the usually carefully constructed curls were now looser and longer, a little wavy in the ends.

His heart skipped a beat when she licked her bottom lip, reminded him how he had done that too and how she tasted like the summer outside, fizzy lemonade and rain. He cleared his throat before speaking, desperate to make sure his voice didn’t crack the same way his sanity was.

She looked like everything he never knew he could have.

“My dad, uh, my dad is at work. He’s the sheriff, uh, yeah…”

Lydia’s lips quirked up in recognition, “yeah? I know him, he used to buy my friends and I slushies in the summer when we were little,”

Stiles grinned.

“I still say hello when I pass him at the coffee shop.”

Lydia curled the towel around her shoulders a little tighter, leant against the worktop that held a laundry basket and a forgotten kitchenaid.

“Stiles Stilinski, huh?” She grinned, her eyes dancing at the idea of having one up on the boy, a point awarded to her in this game that they had started what seemed like an age ago.

“That,” Stiles deadpanned, “is an extremely unfair advantage.”

“You leaked too much information, you gave it up on your own accord.”

The boy took a step towards the girl, the already small room growing infinitely smaller. The heat that the storm pushed out returned, climbing higher towards boiling point.

“What’s your full name, trouble?”

“You still think I’m trouble, huh?” Lydia whispered, her fingers finding the hem of Stiles’ t-shirt, the cotton damp as she twisted into her palms, drew him closer.

The boy swallowed, sucked into her distraction and his question completely forgotten as he struggled to swallow, his eyelashes almost brushing the highs of his cheekbones as he looked down at the girl who was so much smaller than him.

Small in height but bigger than everything else. Larger than life, bigger than the willow tree on the cliff top above town, taller than the wildflowers that grew there, bigger than the day, bigger than the night, bigger than the moon, the sun, the planets.
She was magic.

He held her and he felt it. Under her skin, between the cracks in her ribs, under the flowers printed on her dress. This magic in her, the shift of something amazing in her bones. He wasn’t sure he would’ve ever have gotten to see something like this, like her. In this lifetime or the next.

He wasn’t sure he deserved to.

“Most definitely,” he murmured.

Her fingertips skated across his stomach, light as a feather and a little cool from the downpour they got caught in. His abdominal muscles tensed under her touch and he watched her lips quirk at the feel of it.

Feeling bold, Lydia dropped her palm against his skin, moved forward slightly until her nose was almost against his chest. She could smell the outdoors on him, the rain that clung to his shirt, his skin. Her fingers found the waistband of his jeans and he stilled under her touch, she waited, counted one, two three, four, five, six, before he released the breath he’d been holding.

When he spoke again, his voice was low and rough and it rumbled underneath her palm, rattled his rib cage and her nerves.

“Do you, you wanna go upstairs?”

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