

If You Stay

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If You Stay

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Summary

Stiles was alone.

And he thought he would continue like this, alone in his walls, trapped in himself and in Beacon Hills when it seemed that everyone was moving on. Even Scott had left. He was really alone.

He thought he was going to stay like this.

But a stubborn, foolish werewolf had other plans.

Chapter 1: The world

Stiles was alone in his house. He was very alone now.

He couldn't really say when it happened. He knew he was there one moment, and the next he wasn't.

Or maybe he did know. The moment when he, freshly out of high school, fought a Lunar Rift Spirit. It had been very inconvenient for his plans to go to college, but he managed it in the end, especially since the first part was online classes. It fit like a glove. Especially because he had to wait for a storm to finally kill that thing.

It worked pretty well in his favor, yes.

But imagine his surprise when he ended up in the hospital a little later, after his scream of pain saved the ass of one of Scott's new betas, one who was an idiot who shone brighter than the others and fell right into the trap.

But he was still very young. He hadn't even turned fifteen yet, so Stiles stepped in with his baton. And that's why he went to the doctor a little later.

Stiles remembered when it touched him. It felt like the world exploded from the inside—white light, the taste of metal, the smell of ozone burning the air. The younger werewolf saved him when he tackled him, the two of them staring at the creature in the rain. It looked confused, a harpoon lodged in the middle of its chest.

But it stung.

And that was fine. There was nothing new about that. He was still the human of the pack. He didn't have super-healing and he was definitely going to get a nice scar on his neck.

Melissa didn't think it was nice at all and sent him to another doctor. One who knew about everything.

And that, my people, is a good use of the supernatural: Melissa as a nurse, that guy as a doctor, and his dad and Parrish in the police. Dealing with things was very easy.

What wasn't so easy was the doctor—Mr. Li, a general practitioner—looking at him with serious black eyes.

"Partial loss," the doctor said. "About forty percent in the left ear."

Stiles repeated that days later, leaning against Scott's truck. He had bought it after a while, preparing to leave town like most of the group eventually would—college and everything.

"Only forty percent. I still have sixty. I'm basically a Black Friday discount."

Scott gave a weak smile. After a long time he let it go, but Stilinski still caught him looking at the scar with guilt sometimes. He ignored it.

At the next meeting, they were all in the preserve. Stiles always stood on the right side of whoever was speaking. Always. It was automatic now.

It wasn't that bad. He didn't use a hearing aid, but he didn't get too lost either. At first it had been annoying, irritating to get used to, but after so long it was easy to deal with even without anything.

Still, sometimes the wolves got restless and started pacing like trapped animals, circling the meeting, and sometimes they argued too quickly. Sometimes on his bad side.

He missed words in the middle of sentences. Especially when they were shouting. But even his dad did that sometimes, even the superpowered wolves, so he smiled whenever he asked someone to repeat.

One day he saw that little wolf again—the one whose ass he saved and who gave him a faulty ear. The kid muttered something into his bad ear and then stood there for a while, waiting.

“What?” Stiles asked, tilting his head slightly.

The boy sighed. Liam glanced at his phone and smiled a little. Stiles pretended to kick him, but the boy looked annoyed.

“Nothing. It's already passed.”

Already passed.

He nodded and kept walking straight, not even noticing the difference.

Later that night the wind was blowing hard. He could hear the rustling leaves perfectly.

But when someone called his name again—from the wrong side—he didn't answer on purpose, just to see if anyone would notice the mistake, say something like, “Oh right, worse on that side, I shouldn't talk quietly here.”

But no one repeated it.

It was a year later, when he was almost two months away from going to the academy. A new girl had arrived. She was from a species he didn't really know. Everyone was fascinated by meeting someone new, except the younger ones, obsessed with grades and college.

“Human? You're human?” she asked, blue eyes wide as she analyzed him in surprise.

“Yes. Almost unbreakable. You just can't talk very quietly on one side, I don't hear very well out of that ear,” he said, laughing a little.

No one laughed much. Especially when she paused.

“That doesn’t sound very safe for a human.”

After that, they started leaving him out of the more physical parts.

“It’s safer,” Scott explained.

Safer.

He stayed in the car sometimes. Then he stayed at home “coordinating.” But coordinating requires someone to tell you things. And he, alone at home with his books and training, wasn’t anything special.

So they started solving problems without telling him.

At his job, before leaving town, Stiles started noticing weeks going by without being called. And that wasn’t normal for Beacon Hills.

When he was at the bakery, some people from the group came by sometimes, especially the newer and younger ones. It was close to the school.

He noticed through the details: dried blood stains on someone’s collar, poorly closed scratches, the metallic smell in the air when they gathered in the garage.

Scott once had a bandage on, which meant the injury had been big enough to hurt an alpha—another alpha.

“What happened?” he asked once.

“Nothing big.”

Nothing big meant a fight.

Nothing big meant danger.

But Stiles wasn’t the type to let things slide, so he still went to meetings even when he wasn’t invited, at the old loft. Everyone knew that was where they would meet, and he gave his opinions.

Stiles knew a lot about neighboring packs and anticipating danger. He always pushed that point.

“I think if we cross the attacks with the moon phases—”

“We already solved that,” Scott said. Malia, in the corner, nodded almost unconsciously.

“But what if it isn’t territorial, but—”

“Stiles.”

Always his name as the interruption.

Like he was a child.

He kept the laugh dripping with sarcasm and irony in his mouth, smiling at his notes while anger grew in his throat.

After a while, they started talking about things that happened while he wasn't there.

"Yesterday was bad." "They were strong." "It almost went wrong."

Yesterday?

He had been in his room, reorganizing the board, waiting for a message. Going to bed early so he could run now that he was so close to leaving town, but his phone had been on and loud if they needed him, like it always was.

"Did you fight other wolves?" he asked, trying to keep his voice light.

"It's already over," Liam said, waving the air above Stiles's book. "You didn't need to worry."

No. He didn't need to worry.

That night they all stayed in the garage talking. He leaned against the wall, choosing the right side to hear better. They laughed about something, talking and gesturing, especially the younger ones.

Scott watched like a proud alpha.

Stiles didn't catch the whole joke. He didn't even ask.

He stayed there in the corner, like he was part of the shadow.

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Maybe Stiles knew. Maybe he just pretended he didn't, that he couldn't see where this was going. Sitting on the hood of the Jeep, spinning the keys around his finger.

The sky was orange in the late afternoon. And for a few minutes he just watched people leaving school. The distant noise and laughter.

For a second... it seemed normal. Like the beginning of everything, when they were stupid and Stiles was someone at the front, someone who saved many of their lives. Not all of them, but still.

Alone. Alone and forgotten.

"An extra in my own life. What bad luck."

He spun the key again, but slower this time.

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Stiles didn't even know what all of that was anymore. In the end, it was just a memory—a memory he kept, trying to understand where he had started going wrong. Maybe in being a little more fragile?

But he remembered a bit of the end. It was a witch. And Peter didn't even show up to help anymore, busy with his own life.

"I can help."

"You've already done a lot, man. Either way I'm going. I have to deal with my pack's problems. You know how it is."

Stiles gave Scott a sad smile, watching him leave again, Malia tucked under his arm, everyone following him as if he were a light and the rest of them were moths.

Stiles frowned, watching the way they talked, glancing sideways at him as if he were something irrelevant, just a random subject before leaving. Not even a look afterward, laughing with each other as if he didn't matter.

The human felt his chest tighten, the food he hadn't even eaten stuck in the back of his throat. He showed up anyway, went to where the loft was. It hadn't been there for weeks—months maybe. He didn't even have a sense of time anymore. Too busy.

He heard the voices before they saw him.

His heart tightened. They had said there wouldn't be anything, that no one needed to restock anything, that he didn't even need to come close because no one would be there.

But there was.

He was the only one who wasn't in the room where everything was happening.

Stiles, once again, had been reduced to nothing more than a researcher—and now not even that. He had taught people well. Peter could probably do a better job than he ever had, even if he didn't show up often.

Stiles was replaceable.

He could feel it on his skin now, listening to them talk about the witch and her sacrifices. He knew that was it. He had noticed the signs and the three missing people in town—it had been on his father's desk after everything.

"It's okay, Stiles, I have to go." His father's voice had been calm before leaving an hour early.

Lies.

Theo was shouting, pointing at the door in frustration. The back door was open, almost pointing straight at Stiles standing there.

“She’s already killed everyone she needed, Scott. She just needs to complete the sacrifice and then we’re all doomed.”

Scott sighed. Malia stood beside him, almost glued to his side, arms crossed.

“Theo, she said that if we got involved, she’d kill even more innocents,” Malia said seriously.

Theo ran his hands over his face in frustration, anger clear in the shadow of marks across it.

“She’s going to kill more no matter what. We have to stop this.”

“We let her do what she wants, and then she’ll leave,” Scott said, sounding far more alpha than he should have while one of his betas stood there afraid.

No. No, no, no.

Stiles’s mind repeated it over and over. They couldn’t.

Stiles had already told him that this couldn’t happen, that it would attract even more chaos to the city. But Scott hadn’t listened. He didn’t even listen to the beta who knew more about rituals.

“She’s already killed. There’s nothing we can do without getting more innocent blood on our hands. We can’t lose any more of our own.”

Lose any more of our own? Who had they lost?

“Of course there is. She’s going to kill even more,” Theo cut in.

“No. She promised me. We didn’t make a blood pact.”

Stiles gasped quietly in the corner, standing far out in the open area. He hadn’t even heard himself get closer, turning his head slightly to the left to hear even better the nonsense this pack had become.

Liam, in the corner, looked divided, almost lost, glancing between Theo and Derek.

“I already told you, Scott! Blood pacts mean nothing if you—”

“I’m a True Alpha.”

“But you’re not a witch,” Theo shot back, frustrated.

Stiles knew that was true. He had printed it and handed it to Scott—the same paper that had been in the trash by the end of the day. Stiles had only assumed they had crossed the witch off their list.

They had just crossed him off.

Stiles watched, almost crying, anguish tightening his chest.

“Enough.”

The voice cut through the room, and Stiles almost broke down.

His father was there too.

He had said he was at the hospital with Melissa.

Everyone was in the room except Stiles. Poor Stiles, who couldn't hear out of one ear, who was nothing more than a danger because he had once been the Nogitsune. Maybe he could pretend that wasn't true, but in accusations that would always be the first name mentioned.

But Stiles knew better. He wanted to be there. Because thanks to him most of them weren't dead.

For God's sake, he had even accepted Theo after everything.

Theo was more on his side than Scott was.

Stiles had the right to be there. He had lost just like everyone else. He had earned it. He didn't even have powers and still managed to keep up with everyone there as an equal.

But it seemed like he was the only one who saw himself that way.

Stiles wanted to be in that room more than anyone.

And he was still the lowest of the low.

His whiskey-colored eyes passed over each of them before he turned away, unnoticed—even when he tripped slightly on his way out, fighting off the edge of a panic attack.

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It was time for him to stop feeling so sorry for himself.

Witches could eat his intestines and right now he wouldn't care.

And without planning it, when he noticed, he was already inside the first open place he found.

The lights were bright. He wasn't even looking at the women on stage, instead staring at all the bottles behind the bar, analyzing them with his hands in his pockets.

No one asked for ID there.

He remembered the time when his mother died and his father drowned himself in alcohol. Well, his father hadn't died—but it felt almost the same.

Alone in the world, with nothing but deep sadness and guilt sitting in his chest.

Stiles looked at the bottom of his drink. Something strong he would never normally drink, because he took prescription medication.

But screw it.

He tipped the glass back, felt the burn down his throat. He almost wanted to spit it out, but it settled in his stomach and suddenly he felt a little less miserable.

It was only the first one. That was fine.

His mind felt a little clearer.

His heart a little lighter.

And suddenly he decided, deep in his chest, that he would have another.

And another.

And another.

Now there was a bottle in his hand and the world seemed a little funnier. The women prettier. The men more charismatic.

Everything was one big joke.

Especially him.

Stiles felt like another person.

He was drunk, laughing with people in the club he had never seen in his life.

“Now this is living,” he slurred.

Everything looked blurry. The last thing he clearly remembered was being at the bar—and then he was in the bathroom peeing, not even sure if it was the men’s.

And then suddenly his feet were on the stage.

Or the bar.

A stage that was half bar.

And he was dancing.

He didn’t even have his jacket anymore. Where had it gone? Oh right—he had taken it off while some guys shouted and laughed, mimicking stripping like the woman beside him.

Stiles didn’t even remember how he got down from there. He tried to steady himself but nearly fell sideways, the girl in front of him laughing—mostly because he wasn’t trying to touch her half-naked body, he was more busy losing his own balance.

He laughed loudly.

His life was a joke.

He could fall and die right there.

Who cared?

The world was a stupid blur and no one mattered.

Not even him.

He felt his sneaker slip.

That was funny.

Then suddenly he was being pulled away.

By who?

Did it really matter?

That's when he noticed the black jacket.

And that emotionally constipated look staring at him like he was some kind of puzzle.

Stiles knew he was being dragged, set down on the floor away from the stage and closer to the bar again.

Drinks.

He shoved the familiar person aside. Whoever it was had too much strength. He stumbled, nearly falling again but managing to grab one of the stools bolted to the floor.

Stiles squeezed his eyes shut.

"Another!" he slurred.

His voice sounded strange, barely leaving his mouth.

Not funny at all.

"No, Stiles."

"Don't know... you," he mumbled, hiccuping, which only made his body sway more.

Oh God.

The alcohol was coming back up.

Stiles didn't even know when he had made it back to the bathroom, vomiting everything from his stomach. There was a hand on his back and he was grateful for it; he didn't want to slip against the walls again. Keeping his eyes open already felt like too much.

He started laughing when nothing else came up. Just air. And he had to look ridiculous.

Stiles laughed, and laughed, and laughed even more, feeling the world turn bad—very bad—the pain in his chest returning as he became a little more sober, realizing how ridiculous he looked.

And then his laughter turned into crying.

Stiles cried and cried, cried until he didn't even know where he was going, without his jacket and with his eyes closed, feeling like he was one step closer to death.

Just like his father.

He remembered collapsing, exhausted, onto the filthy floor, closing his eyes. Nothing else.

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He was sitting on the floor of a bedroom he didn't even recognize, though it felt familiar somehow. Before he could even wonder if he had been kidnapped, he heard boots approaching. The carpet was soft enough to sleep on.

And yet he still felt like crap.

He didn't even need to open his eyes to know who that strange silence and emotional constipation belonged to.

"What is it, Derek?"

If Derek was surprised, he didn't sound like it. Not that Stiles would have noticed anyway, with everything hurting, the room spinning and the urge to throw up the emptiness in his stomach.

"Go away," Stiles muttered after a while.

The silence was heavy. But there wasn't a single thing in his life that wasn't heavy right now.

"You smell like dissent," Derek's deep voice said, rough and yet calmer than the first time, years ago.

"Oh, so now you're an expert on that? *Hmm, notes of depression. Hints of abandonment. Vintage trauma, 2011 harvest.*"

Stiles had his arms spread out and was pretty sure that if he were on the street he'd be mistaken for a homeless man.

Derek didn't say anything for a long time. Just the silence he always had around him.

“Feeling better?”

This time it was Stiles who stayed quiet.

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It's late.

Stiles is sitting on the kitchen counter, eating cereal straight from the box. He still had two months before leaving for the academy, and he had already finished all his last assignments.

He swings his legs slightly, distracted.

For a few seconds he catches himself thinking it's actually comfortable there. Silence. A quiet house, no shouting or danger. Even his dad had gotten a break; with his son not throwing himself into every possible danger, he had a bigger social life.

Which is why he wasn't there either.

Stiles leans his head back against the wall, closing his eyes, trying to remember the last time the house had been full—if it ever truly had been.

Stiles had always been the social one. Even when it was only Scott, he did everything he could to avoid being left alone. In the end he was an only child. The longest time he'd ever spent alone had been in hospitals with his mother.

Well, that had been long before these past months.

Maybe back when Erica and Boyd were still alive. A little before the alphas arrived. The laughter, the feeling that he wasn't alone and wouldn't be anytime soon, everything filling that space.

After the screams, Lydia's cry when Allison died still echoed in his mind like it had happened yesterday.

He remembered the dreams, the way Erica had looked when she was buried, Derek standing beside Boyd's body.

He closes the cereal box.

He isn't hungry anymore.

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It took at least two full days alone before he saw Derek again.

Stiles had gotten used to it, you know? Being alone. But it still hurt. He liked talking, liked having someone around. So he'd assumed he had imagined Derek after drinking so much.

After all, he had woken up in his own room the next morning.

Derek was there.

Leaning against the doorway. Same closed-off face as always.

Stiles almost laughed. The years had passed and Derek had gotten better—his looks, his demeanor—but apparently the habit of looking like a suspicious stranger lurking around things had stayed with him.

“Here because of the new witch? Peter must’ve told you,” Stiles muttered while typing as fast as he could, even though he kept making mistakes.

“Yes. It seems Peter joined Theo,” Derek said, sounding mysterious.

Stiles snorted loudly without looking away from the computer.

“Poor pack, dealing with that duo.”

Silence settled between them.

Stiles wondered what Derek was smelling. Sadness filling the whole place? Or just his scent, since his father practically didn’t live there anymore.

“That pack?” Derek asked.

Stiles paused for a second, fingers hesitating on the keyboard.

“Either way I’m going. I have to deal with my pack’s problems. You know how it is.”

“Yes. That pack.”

His voice wasn’t loud at all. But to his ears it sounded that way.

The silence now was heavy, and even so Stiles didn’t take his eyes off the screen, afraid to look at Derek and see pity. It was normal for a wolf to be alone. Not for Stiles—abandoned, poor Stiles.

“They don’t even know what kind of witch she is.”

Stiles turned around in outrage, his chair rolling back from the force of it.

“What do you mean they don’t know what kind of witch she is? It’s obvious. I even sent Scott what kind she was based on—”

Stiles took a deep breath, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“And Peter and Theo are going to face her without knowing?”

“That’s why I came here,” Derek said, as if it were the simplest thing in the world.

Stiles paused, looking directly at Derek for the first time since he came back—if he had really come back.

Derek looked more... domestic somehow. Like he had gone through some very good intensive therapy. His eyes didn't carry that old hatred anymore.

Stiles studied him from head to toe, less tense.

"Just let me finish this thesis and I'll tell you."

Then Stiles was talking too fast about some absurd theory about why the witch had chosen that place, explaining each ritual. He doubted Derek would actually tell anyone, but at least Derek might say, "*No, no. Cover your ears if you hear a ringing.*"

Derek, in return, explained that the witch had appeared at Scott's door and in his room. Each member of the McCall pack had felt something.

Stiles ignored what that implied.

He spun in his chair, ignoring the way his voice was getting hoarse.

It had been a long time since he had talked this much.

"It would make sense that she didn't come after me. What if it's a frequency problem? Like a broken radio. You guys are supernatural stations and I'm... I don't know, badly tuned AM. You know, ever since I partially lost my hearing, maybe she only wants perfectly healthy supernatural bodies."

Derek almost rolled his eyes. Stiles could practically feel it.

"That doesn't make sense."

"Of course it does. You just don't have enough creativity to keep up with my genius."

He turned in his chair with the most smug posture he could manage.

For a second he saw Derek almost smile.

Tiny.

It made him want to kick Derek out of his house.

But he didn't have to.

The wolf left shortly afterward to go talk to his uncle.

Chapter 2: the universe.

Chapter Summary

Derek volta.

Stiles drank again. This time he was at home and his father was on shift, and this time none of the alcohol came back up—and that destroyed whatever was left of him.

It resulted in the worst hangover he had ever had in his life, which was saying a lot for someone who had dealt with werewolves for years and had drunk at parties Lydia threw before nineteen. Not to mention the times he drank secretly with his dad and Scott.

It didn't matter. He was still defeated and still depressed enough not to eat. And no one noticed he hadn't eaten because he had been stuck at home for so long, with nothing.

He didn't leave his bed for at least two days. It was horrible, because he could feel his chest hurting, the sense that his muscles were atrophying, that he should get up—and the only sign of life from him was turning to the other side when, occasionally, something hit his face.

Stiles was more depressed than usual. Maybe it was the hunger, or the fact that he was lonely.

Or both together, and it was pathetic.

He had been stuck for so long, trying to occupy his mind, running from everything he could. It was exhausting. Pretending everything was fine, and now he couldn't even get up and leave the house, trapped in the snare of his empty mind and sleep that never lasted more than an hour.

It took him a week to get out of bed and take a shower.

He was shaking a little while holding onto the bathroom walls, sitting on the toilet when his knees threatened to give out. He only noticed a week had passed because it glowed on the screen of his untouched phone.

No messages.

Stiles ignored it, and drinking water from the shower had helped a lot. Maybe even more because of the medication he remembered he had to take. Thanks to the bottle in his bathroom.

Maybe that was why he felt like he was going to throw up.

And when he closed the small cabinet and saw himself in the mirror, he almost broke it.

Stiles tries to leave. He trips over his own weakness like an idiot, alone with his walls as the only witnesses to how pathetic he could be.

After a war with his clothes, he was leaning against the wall, feeling a little less abominable than he had in a long time. His eyes were closed and he stayed there for a while just listening to the world spinning around him, forgetting to take him along with it.

After a while he felt like he was being watched, and through the slit of his eyelids, a blur of glowing eyes appeared from the corner.

Stiles would have argued if he had the strength for anything. At least he was dressed. Whether the clothes were clean at the moment? That he couldn't guarantee.

But Derek had certainly smelled worse things in all his years of life.

When Stiles decided to move from his spot, his center of gravity betrayed him, pulling him forward, his traitorous knees failing—almost guaranteeing a nice bruise somewhere on his body before he could even think.

But Derek grabbed his arm before the human could fall completely.

And if Stiles tried to swallow that feeling of being a burden, it reached the tip of his throat after that, almost making him vomit.

Even after so long, the warmth of Derek's skin almost made the human lean into it.

"Don't touch me." Stiles sounded more acidic than he meant.

More than he had the right to.

"Then stop falling." Derek cut back at the same level.

Stiles should have stayed quiet, because in the state he was in, more things slipped out of his mouth than should.

But between crying, vomiting words, or vomiting insults, Stiles would choose the last.

"I don't need a babysitter."

Stiles would have snarled if he could.

He wanted to get out of Derek's grip. Wanted to run from everyone and especially from his own mind, which flooded him with feelings he didn't want—feelings he tried to drown while sleeping no more than an hour, burying himself in studies just to disappear from his own head.

Even more so when the grip came with Derek's eyes.

The werewolf tightened his hold on Stiles's arm just a little more as Stiles twisted with the last strength he had. Trying to escape the furnace that was Derek's warm skin, which

reminded him of what he no longer had.

“Go away!” Stiles said through clenched teeth, staring Derek down at the same level. The adrenaline made his legs steady.

“No. You need someone who won’t leave.”

“What does it matter! You did too, didn’t you?!”

That broke more than it should have.

Stiles felt it—felt how Derek’s breathing got stronger, hitting against his body. His eyes finally left where his arm was trapped and met Derek’s eyes, deep and blue.

Almost as blue as the human’s own melancholy.

The younger man stopped. His chest giving shorter breaths. Realizing what he had just said.

The tears he had held back for months filled his eyes, blurring Derek’s image with rivers of hurt the human pretended he didn’t have.

“Why did you say that?” Derek studied him like an enigma, hurt enough for it to show on his face.

“Why do you keep looking at me like I’m a problem to solve?” Stiles snapped angrily.

He was past that age. He was an adult. He could be angry at the other adult man standing there at his heels, reminding him of what he had lost—filling his chest with the urge to get closer, even knowing it could happen again, that Derek could leave.

Derek tilted his head.

“You are a problem,” the werewolf stated, still holding his arm.

Stiles blinked as if he had been slapped.

He opened his mouth to respond when Derek continued, speaking over him.

“I solve problems.”

“I’m not something you can solve, Derek.” His voice sounded almost defeated, too tired, not enough calories left for any of this.

“No. You’re too stubborn to die and too proud to ask for help.”

“I must have followed your advice,” Stiles murmured.

He knew perfectly well the wolf’s ears had caught it; Derek’s deeper frown made that clear.

The silence afterward was suffocating. Enough for Stiles to give up pulling his arm away.

And apparently that was all it took for Derek to finally let go.

“I didn’t ask you to stay,” Stiles said quietly as he returned to his bed, drowning again, sleeping his sadness out of his body.

He turned his back, staring at the wall of his room. His eyes were full of tears and he knew that, from the silence behind him, Derek—with his superpowered nose—would know it too.

So the human was silently begging him to leave.

He stayed like that for a few minutes. Stiles even covered his head, suffocating under the blanket, not even sure if Hale had gone.

He startled when Derek’s voice cut through the tension, still there like some kind of stalker.

“I don’t need you to ask.”

Stiles snorted loudly at that. He even looked back to give the best sarcastic smile he had the strength for.

But he was staring at an empty room, smiling at nothing like the crazy person he felt like over the past few days.

He rolled his eyes and lay back down.

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Stiles didn’t even know how he ended up in the living room. His throat felt like it was closing, and the second thing he noticed was that he had to walk or he would explode—or worse, the feeling of...

He was pacing back and forth, fast, restless.

After a long while he made a dramatic, horrible sound when he looked to the corner and Derek was standing there like some idiotic stalker.

“What the hell are you doing here again? Do you have some sixth sense that tells you whenever I’m at my best moments?” Stiles groaned, covering his eyes in frustration.

After a few moments:

“Are you finished?” Derek asked, sounding so calm it only stirred something sharper in Stiles’s chest.

Maybe he was this irritated because he didn’t know how to deal with people anymore.

Which was ironic. For years he had been known as the more social one between him and Scott.

Stiles turned sharply, staring at Derek's calm, pale eyes. Since when was he so calm? With his *I went to therapy* kind of beauty.

"Finished what? My crisis? My weekly breakdown? Busy schedule, sorry."

Stiles ignored the terrible headache and the way his vision was darkening. Nothing new after days like these—days when he felt worse than when he first learned he could pretend to sleep and stay on the internet all night.

Derek stepped into the room, uncrossing his arms.

"You're getting worse." His sentence came with a frown.

"And you're unbearable." Stiles sounded quieter than he intended. Maybe the headache was worse than he thought.

Silence cut through Stiles's house again.

It wasn't like he hadn't gotten used to it.

"Maybe you should let me help you."

"I'm not a project, Derek." Stiles scoffed, finally giving up and leaning fully against the back of the couch.

"Good. Because you're not interesting enough to be one." The sentence came out dry. Almost impatient. Almost like years ago.

Stiles froze.

"Ah. Nice. That was good."

He smiled before heading to the kitchen. He could take some medicine. He had to get better. After all, he still had an academy to go to.

"You're alone here. Maybe a change of—"

"With all due respect, Derek, I don't need advice right now."

Stiles took the medicine with his eyes closed, waiting for his brain to stop trying to escape his skull. He tossed the glass carelessly into the sink, swearing it would break.

"But I agree with you. I am going to get out of this damn city."

The silence afterward was stranger. Stiles couldn't really describe what he was feeling—or what Derek was thinking. Though to be fair, he had never been able to do either very well.

"Where will you go?"

This time Stiles scoffed, his sarcasm returning in full force.

He tasted bitterness at the back of his throat, though he couldn't tell if it was emotional or the medicine.

"Does it matter?" Stiles asked, turning around. "You didn't tell me when you left."

Derek made a face that made the human regret his words instantly. But he had been regretting many things these past few days.

Even so, Derek's eyes weren't angry. If anything, he almost looked like he was begging for something.

If it had anything to do with Stiles's pain, he should give up. Stilinski had gone too many hours without sleep to be pleasant right now.

Derek, as always, hid behind silence, watching Stiles and waiting for him to speak.

But Stiles hadn't talked to people in a long time.

Stiles was going to leave. He turned to walk out of the kitchen, but he stopped when he noticed the way Derek's jaw hardened.

"Careful."

It sounded almost like a growl. Stiles tilted his head, confused.

"Or what? Are you going to stare intensely at me until I apologize?"

"You don't know what you're talking about." Derek took a step forward.

Finally showing something other than that look where he analyzed Stiles like he was some kind of aberration.

Stiles's headache had disappeared, replaced by something strange in his chest. Maybe it wasn't healthy to take out his frustrations on the first person who actually cared about him.

But who said he was good at following logic?

"I do know. You need me to be broken. Because then you have something to save. It makes you feel necessary."

He whispered the last part.

Even with super hearing, Derek was less than a step away. He would hear it perfectly well even if he were human. Stiles used the cruelest tone he could manage at that moment.

Which was a lot.

He knew that sooner or later he would hit Derek where it hurt, and even so he still flinched when Derek moved faster than his eyes could follow and grabbed his arm hard.

"Don't turn this into something about me."

That hit Stiles.

The emptiness and helplessness rose up his throat, almost stealing his breath.

The only thing stopping him from leaving was something warmer than anything he had touched in months.

He started pulling his arm away in frustration. Derek was still as strong as he remembered. Not even moving.

The human couldn't even be angry with Derek. It was the consequence of his actions, of his stupid words.

"Let go of me!" he said through clenched teeth, staring Derek straight in the face.

"Stop acting like a child!" Derek snapped back in the same tone, his breath warm and smelling faintly of mint.

Stiles twisted, feeling his chest fill more and more. His vision blurred for a moment with tears.

At some point he struggled again, knowing Derek had seen the tears, his useless effort just like every effort he had made lately.

That made the silence grow heavy.

He kept trying to pull his hand free, even knowing Derek wouldn't let go unless he wanted to. But Stiles was far from rational, trying not to cry in front of anyone.

Especially not Derek after all these years.

The Hale hunted for his gaze, lowering his head slightly to meet the level Stiles was staring at, trying to catch his eyes as they hid downward.

"Do you think you're the only one who's lost things? The only one who knows what it's like to be alone?" Derek sounded hurt.

Stiles barely cared, still pulling until his skin protested.

He couldn't hear this now.

He didn't want to hear this now.

"At least I don't use it as an excuse to intimidate other people," he managed to say, his voice breaking at the end.

"I'm not intimidating you." The other sounded almost offended. As hurt as he was.

"Really? Look at you."

Stiles pointed at Derek's body with his free hand.

“All big, all *I’m the alpha*, invading my space like that’s going to solve anything!”

Derek stepped closer on purpose. Even though he could have just pulled Stiles.

It made the human look up, stopping his attempt to hide. Looking directly into Derek’s beautiful eyes and his frowning expression.

“Maybe it will if you shut the hell up for two seconds.”

Stiles didn’t control it—he laughed right in Derek’s face like it was a very good joke.

Derek studied him even closer.

“Would you rather I leave?”

“I’d rather you stop pretending you care!”

The smile disappeared instantly as he shouted at Derek.

Stiles had to leave.

Derek had to leave.

The werewolf’s breathing changed. The scent of challenge rose into the air and Stiles didn’t need to be a wolf to notice it.

He wanted to hurt Hale.

He had succeeded.

And even so, the taste of dissatisfaction was sour in his mouth.

Stiles was getting tired, so he pulled harder again, remembering the only reason he couldn’t walk away was Derek and his stupid strength.

He jerked his arm more aggressively, feeling that if he stayed there for a few more minutes he would lose it completely.

He felt like a balloon about to burst.

He had held himself together for months not to fall apart—and Derek was going to ruin everything.

“You have no idea what I do for you.”

That stopped Stiles so suddenly he even forgot he needed to breathe.

Derek Hale’s voice was the most emotional Stiles had ever heard. It was hurt. Something more he couldn’t identify.

And suddenly Stiles was fifteen again and had a family.

It felt like nothing had changed as he looked at Derek's wounded face, as if it carried every answer.

He stood there, feeling the anxiety returning to the tip of his throat.

He didn't know how long he stayed there, studying Derek, watching how he looked almost injured because of him.

Another person hurt because of him.

"Let go," he managed to whisper.

"No." Derek said it like a full stop.

Stiles started pulling again. Really pulling now, twisting his wrist.

The difference in strength between them was so big that their struggle looked like a child trying to escape an adult's grip.

Still, Stiles pulled hard, shaking Derek's arm.

His chest felt like it wanted to tear open.

Months of frustration building up. The little food he had eaten threatened to come back up while his skin burned.

His eyes didn't lift even when Derek said something to get his attention.

Not even when he managed to pry several fingers off his arm.

Not even when he felt his arm finally slipping, escaping for a few seconds from Derek's warm, tanned hand.

A line was all he needed to escape Derek.

With the mountain ash, he could draw a line between them.

Stiles didn't need much. Just a few steps and the kitchen door.

He could do this at least once in his life.

But before he even reached the doorway, Derek grabbed him again—this time by both arms.

The sound of frustration that left Stiles was loud as he began struggling, everything in him trying to escape Derek's burning touch.

"Let me go!" he shouted.

The words echoed something that had been in his chest for a long time.

The kind of thought that made him curl up in guilt in his dirty bed.

If anyone cared about his shouting, the police would have been called.

But he knew his father wouldn't come back.

That no one would ask where the younger Stilinski was.

Because no one had asked that question in a long time.

Well—no one except Derek.

Who was still gripping both his arms, pulling him back, fully aware of Stiles's plan.

Derek had always been irritatingly smart when it suited him.

Stiles jerked away again, and Derek's grip shifted as he struggled.

After a moment he felt the cold wall against his back.

"Stop. Now."

Derek turned him like he was nothing more than a wounded animal.

An order, strong and sharp, trying to pull Stiles out of his spiral.

And in the irony of the world, he actually stopped.

Breathing hard like he had run a marathon.

But it was... strangely better than before.

Almost like some of the frustration had been released.

Like punching a punching bag or breaking something just to relieve the pressure in his chest.

Stiles breathed heavily, slowly coming back to himself.

Derek didn't move a muscle.

Stiles closed his eyes.

The two of them stayed there, waiting.

Stiles feeling a little lighter.

A little more himself.

Standing between the wall and the warm body of a Hale he never imagined would come back to him.

For him.

With the back of his head resting against the wall, he kept his eyes closed.

For a long time the only sound in the house was his breathing.

“Better?”

Stilinski clenched his jaw when he came back to the present moment.

He would never admit it, but he was better.

Finally, he opened his eyes.

In front of him, Derek was studying him, something shining in his eyes. Maybe he had taken more from Derek than he could handle.

It was almost the same look of hatred from the beginning of everything.

After so much driving, the only thing he wanted to throw out was how. Derek could have lost a little more of his patience. How Derek’s eyes seemed full of emotion while his chest finally gave them a break. Just fixed on the now.

Or how one of his arms was still being held tightly and the feeling of helplessness seemed more acceptable than ever.

Or that Derek’s other hand, Derek with eyes bright with anger, with his brow furrowed and his jaw tight just like Stiles’, was holding his neck.

Holding his neck from the sides. Because only someone strange like him would notice at that moment.

That Derek Hale knew how to choke someone without squeezing the trachea.

And he was doing that to him right now.

That, unfortunately and embarrassingly, was doing wonders for his dick that hadn’t shown any sign of life in ages, but this was neither the time nor the place.

With Derek’s anger mirroring his own, their breathing almost mixing in that space, and him remembering what he had said to the older man, it would be embarrassing to die with an erection.

Or to get one strangely after a meltdown.

Stiles thought that, in the end, he really was a weirdo who deserved his strange loneliness.

Stiles moved a little, testing the limits of how far he could go.

"Feeling better now?"

Stiles shivered at that and at how he noticed Derek was close.

Very close.

Close on the level of *"I'm going to restrain you so you don't hurt yourself."*

Exclusively close to him, Stiles even turned his face slightly to the left so he wouldn't bump his nose into Derek's face. Or his body pinning him down. He intended to get out of the situation he had gotten himself into.

But there was still a hand on his neck and a semi-erection that was about one second away from becoming a full one.

"I'm great. Can you let me go so we can talk like civilized people?" Stiles had the talent to still sound angry.

But the truth was... well, Stiles wasn't thinking very clearly.

He grew even more confused when he felt Derek's fast, deep breathing right there.

"Now you want to talk like a civilized person? It didn't look like it before." Hale's tone was angry, almost authoritative.

To emphasize his point even more, he pressed in closer, even closer.

The air from his words brushed Stiles' cheek and reached his ear. Almost making him shiver on the spot.

Hahahaha.... Stiles should be freaking out like an idiot, saying something.

But if this continued... then he would get an erection if this didn't stop right now.

His brain turned to jelly and he shifted his gaze, watching Derek's eyes from the side, just centimeters away.

Eyes that weren't even looking into his because they were sliding down somewhere lower than his face... toward his mouth?

Eyes that were traveling too far down...

Just like his own.

"Are you sure we're fighting right now?" Stiles said without thinking.

He was a complete idiot and regretted it the instant the words left his mouth. But well. He didn't have much time to think about his guilt when Derek growled softly and pressed even closer.

Their legs brushing together and, suddenly, his hand was gripping the damn leather jacket that never left the werewolf's body.

Mixed signals. Very hard dick. Thanks...

Stiles was going to pull away, his head assuring him that he would push Derek back as soon as this strange aftermath of his psychotic episode scared the wolf away. He even opened his mouth to defend his honor with facts he would invent on the spot. But just as he prepared himself, he saw Derek lean a little closer from the corner of his eye.

When his nose touched Stiles' left cheek, a shiver climbed up the back of his neck.

Even more when Derek's nose, as warm as the rest of him, traveled to the beginning of his jaw.

Stiles almost closed his eyes. Confused when he felt the way Derek inhaled the air.

When he pulled back, Stiles didn't think before turning his face to look at Derek directly, almost bumping their noses.

His heart was strangely fast, very different from the occasional missed beat of the past few months. His eyes were wide and his gaze must have been extremely confused because the werewolf studied his face. Looking a little less tense than before.

"Now you smell like yourself again."

Stiles frowned in indignation before opening his mouth to start another fight.

But, as if he knew his intentions, Derek moved forward.

And, seeming even stranger than the human, Stiles braced himself for a punch or anything else.

Anything except his lips colliding with Derek's.

Stiles should have paid attention, that he could kiss back because it was the damn Derek Hale and his dick was embarrassingly close to him. And Derek's scent was practically purring, his breath on his cheek.

This was how he imagined his kiss would be, the strength, his hand still on his neck holding his head where Derek wanted it.

His breathing was cut short.

When he came back a little to his body, he felt his teeth clashing.

His trembling hands didn't know whether to push Derek away or grip the leather harder under his fingers, refusing to open his eyes even when he could barely think, his ears echoing with the samba beating inside his heart. So he chose to hold on tightly, as if Stiles' life depended on it.

Stiles was kissing Derek Hale.

Kissing his beautiful face, feeling his warm skin against his, feeling the pit of his stomach heat up, the urge to get closer even though they weren't far apart. But nothing seemed

enough.

It was pure chaos, even more when Derek decided it was a good idea to drag his tongue through Stiles' mouth as if he wanted to know every part of it, as if he wanted to taste him completely.

The human moaned as it sank into him, his heart pounding, feeling more alive than he had in years, feeling everything.

Derek's hand sliding along the back of his neck, his own rising to squeeze Derek's hip, Jesus, the wolf was a furnace. Their mouths collided with urgency. Their tongues with desperate hunger. He felt Derek's tongue scraping against his.

If someone asked him what day it was, he wouldn't understand the question. He had no brain at the moment.

Stiles whimpered softly when he was pushed harder against the cold wall, but he didn't even feel the ice on his back anymore, not when Derek seemed just as desperate for the closeness as he was, the heat of Derek's body crushing against his.

He could bet their lips were swollen within minutes from the pressure and the rough scrape of Derek's teeth.

He was dizzy, very dizzy, holy shit, he had never been this hard in his life.

Using his last strength to support himself against the wall, feeling no more air in his lungs after a while, his fingers tingling as he loosened his grip a little.

Then... something changed.

Slowly, so slowly it was almost impossible to notice at first, the movements became less violent, or maybe he only noticed after his brain shut down for a second.

Derek let out a low growl as his strong leg slid between Stiles' and lifted him up with careful possession. Stiles really didn't know how to react other than needing air.

His eyes filled with tears, tears of what? The firm support at his hip kept them pressed together effortlessly... as if he was holding them while everything around them collapsed.

Stiles let his head fall back the moment he felt it: the safety in Derek's strength. It was so cliché, even more with his mouth trapped between his teeth.

His hand rose to Derek's dark hair and tugged with restrained pain.

How Hale had become his support in the very moment when, if it weren't for him, his arm around Stiles' waist, the way his nose brushed through his hair as if he needed it to live, as if Stilinski were his air.

That was where Derek ended up, his pulse jumping beneath Stiles' open mouth just above the throbbing vein...

Right on the side where he bit the human, making him arch slightly, and then, like a manic werewolf, he inhaled deeply.

Honestly, Stiles didn't need to be a werewolf to know they must smell like pure lust.

Or maybe now, after Derek rubbed his hip against him and brushed his neck along the line of it, he smelled more like Hale than anything he had before.

Stiles felt the tears sliding down his face. Because it was good, having someone to throw his arms over, feeling the werewolf's soft hair against his jaw and cheek, the way Derek held him with more care, or whatever that was before.

Another growl left Hale. Different from the others before: rough, yes, animal, yes... but full of something more. Like a muffled lament.

Stiles shuddered all over when he felt teeth press lightly against his flesh, and it was almost a caress. It was a sign of something he wouldn't have expected in the last month.

"D... Derek..." The name came out in a weak thread, ready to split in two...

But it was more than anything he had done in the past few days.

And no one answered with words. Only a guttural moan surrounded them both as Derek bit lightly, then licked, holding him even tighter.

Chapter 3: Our World

Chapter Summary

Happy! Happy! Happy!

Stiles wakes up from a nightmare.

He didn't remember what it was about, but he knew it was a nightmare. He knew because of the liquid fear in his body, the cold spreading through him, the feeling like he might throw up, and his uneven breathing.

He was a little used to it by now. Nothing as bad as... well, as Allison.

Even so, moving was a challenge, like something might come out and grab him.

Stiles thought about sitting up, pulling his sheet around himself and going back to sleep, but before he even managed to sit, a hand grabbed his wrist.

Stiles jerked a little and turned, coming face to face with Derek. Derek and his dark eyes there, barely open, studying his face.

"Still here?" Stiles murmured, still groggy.

"Yes."

After Stiles and Derek separated...

After Derek pulled back enough for both of them to breathe, it was silently decided that nothing below the waist would be mentioned.

After that, Stiles felt like he was in therapy. A very strange one. They talked while Derek studied him with much warmer eyes, his body far more open and much closer than any therapist would ever stand to a client.

At the end of it all, Derek had a furious expression and Stiles felt like a new person.

Maybe it was because of the make-out session they had, but that didn't matter.

Stiles expected Derek to leave and go do the strange Hale things everyone in that family seemed to do, but no. Instead, he chose to act like a ghost glued to Stiles, following him around and watching the human eat, almost stealing the food Stiles had made.

Following him upstairs, looking over Stiles' shoulder when his dad didn't send a message. It was late and Stiles stared at the last message: "at work, don't wait for me," from a week ago.

When Stiles fell asleep, he expected Derek to leave.

But there he was, lying on his bed, pulling him closer, and, like a mind reader, pulling Stiles' warm blanket over both of them, hiding the human's back.

Stiles practically curled against his chest like an abandoned animal, enjoying the warmth there, especially with the weather in Beacon Hills starting to get colder.

The younger one kept his eyes closed while he felt Derek slowly running a hand along his back, moving up and down beneath the covers, steadying his heart.

"You're shaking," Derek said quietly after a while, pulling Stilinski from his half-asleep state.

"Shut up," he managed to mumble, muffled, not sounding serious at all considering the way he buried himself deeper into Derek's chest, slipping an arm around the older man's waist.

Derek brought his face closer to Stiles' hair. The human felt the moment the other breathed in deeply. Stiles decided to ignore that strange dog habit of Derek's, too sleepy to care if he smelled bad.

There, it was as if Stiles didn't need anything else, as if this were some kind of parallel reality.

Stiles chose sleep instead of thinking more. After a while, almost asleep, he murmured:

"You're kind of like a heater with communication issues."

"Sleep." Derek cut him off more harshly than before, lightly smacking the top of his head—just a small touch.

Stiles smiled when the werewolf kept running his hand along his back until the younger man's breathing steadied and he slept better than he had in years.

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Stiles was staring at his suitcase in his room. It sat there in the corner. Last year he had been so happy when he bought it. Now he was leaving town.

That was fine. He could do that.

Leaving the town wasn't even the biggest problem. Having the energy to do it was the worrying part.

He stared at the suitcase the same way he had when he bought it, feeling a presence behind him. He didn't even need to look back to know it was Derek.

For the past few days, it had always been him.

"What is it?"

"I'm leaving town," Stiles said while feeling Derek leaning over his shoulder.

What was that habit of coming in through the window, anyway?

Derek had been around the last few days like a haunting. Hale had even raised one eyebrow when he found Stiles hiding in the bathroom while the two of them listened to his dad walking through the first floor.

The werewolf had the same expression now while analyzing the tired look on Stiles' face.

"Is it okay to ask where you're going now?" Derek asked without a trace of judgment, still studying his face, though Stiles could sense a hint of teasing underneath.

"I got accepted into the police academy. The beginning was online, but now... now I'm leaving."

"How long?"

Stiles shrugged—or at least tried to. In the middle of the movement, Derek draped an arm over him, trapping him in a strange half-embrace.

For Derek, that was a lot. Even if it was much less than the other time.

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A week after walking around like a ghost with another ghost at his heels, Stiles had packed his bags. But it was still early—the message had said at least a month.

They were still in the same place. His room was a mess now.

Stiles really wanted to leave now. He felt anxious, like if he slept one more time in his stupid bed he would start crying. He didn't even know which clothes he would take. Would he leave his computer? His figurines? His books and comics?

Well, he just hoped they would still be there if he ever came back one day.

At least there was that hope.

He sat on the floor feeling his chest grow cold, his eyes burning. He didn't even know how long he had been staring at the wall in front of him. Too long. The sun had gone down and another lonely night had arrived.

Well. Almost.

Because the wall he was staring at was suddenly blocked by two pairs of legs in dark jeans.

He didn't even feel like looking up.

Stiles was sitting on the floor of his bedroom, his back against the bed and facing the blue suitcase as if it were a puzzle. He didn't even blink differently when he heard—and saw from the corner of his eye—Derek deciding to sit beside him in the middle of his crisis.

The human had once asked Derek about that habit he had of touching him all the time. The only answer he got was: “You’re pack.”

Stiles had felt like an idiot afterward.

But then he remembered Erica and Boyd, especially Isaac after he left. And Cora too. Derek didn't really have many people left in the city besides his uncle.

And thinking about hugging Peter was one of his worst nightmares.

So he decided that yes, he could be Derek's pack. He could let Derek do whatever his wolf instincts told him to do, because saving each other's lives several times gave you a level of intimacy where touching was the least of it.

Even after kissing him like there was no tomorrow.

And now he didn't even react anymore when Derek—just as starved for affection as he was—shifted closer at an awkward angle and, without warning, wrapped his arms around Stiles' torso in a clumsy hug that Stiles was sure would make a werewolf's legs go numb quickly.

Derek squeezed him in that hug. He must have been smelling or hearing his emotions, because Hales were creepy like that.

Stiles didn't comment on how it always helped him. It was safe. And even though he made a face, he didn't move within Derek's arms. Instead, he turned slightly and raised an eyebrow.

"Are you restraining me?"

It took a few seconds, and Stiles couldn't even see Derek's face properly when he answered:

"No."

Stiles huffed, still making no effort to leave Hale's arms.

"Feels like you are."

Derek rubbed his face against the side of Stiles' head. Almost an animal gesture. Stiles would compare it to an annoyed cat rubbing against someone, but he would never say that out loud if he wanted to stay there.

"You were tense," the werewolf said out of nowhere, as if that explained his actions.

Stiles let out a small laugh.

"Do you solve everything by rubbing people?"

"It's working, isn't it?" He sounded far too smug for someone resting his head against Stiles', away from the younger man's whiskey-colored eyes. The older one gave a slightly tighter squeeze.

Stiles relaxed against him without having the courage to answer that rhetorical question.

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It took three days and a tracking spell for Stiles to knock on Derek's door with his suitcase beside him.

The suspicious expression on Derek's face turning into surprise was priceless as he studied Stiles like he was a mirage.

"What? Only you can show up unexpectedly at my house?" Stiles joked, even with his voice rough from exhaustion. He hadn't slept in almost three days.

Ironically.

Derek still had that surprised expression, glancing around before finally stepping aside so the human could walk past him into Derek's well-kept house.

"Hm... an actual house. And here I thought I had the wrong place."

"How did you find me?"

Stiles huffed as he dropped onto Derek's very comfortable couch.

"I may be human, but I still have a spark or something. A tracking spell is easy after the... twenty-second attempt." Stiles joked while yawning, fighting the urge to collapse completely into the soft fabric of the couch.

"Spell...?"

"Yeah."

Derek stood there for a moment looking at Stiles—at what were probably his dark circles and exhaustion. They stayed like that for a while in a slightly strange silence while Derek stared at him like he was going to pull information out of him like some kind of Sherlock Holmes.

In the end Derek sighed, almost resigned.

"What are you doing here, Stiles?" he asked, sounding almost suspicious. Still analyzing him.

"You're my pack... right?" He yawned again without taking his eyes off Derek.

As if that actually explained everything—just like Derek had done what felt like ages ago—the werewolf started walking through the house that was so unfamiliar to the human. Stiles dragged his eyes around with the little strength he had left. If he had the energy, he would make fun of Derek for watching what sounded like a dinosaur documentary.

He was making a very obvious effort not to pass out the moment he noticed Derek's scent everywhere. In a house very few people even knew about. It wasn't the pack's house.

It was Derek's.

And that influenced his body a lot, because it immediately decided he was safe now and therefore allowed to pass out.

He tried really hard, but when he noticed, he was already lying on Derek's huge couch, now fighting not to close his eyes instantly.

Which seemed pointless because Hale apparently thought it was a good idea to run his fingers through Stiles' hair in a gentle *cafuné*, like they did this all the time. The movement was slow. Almost instinctive.

The human jumped when he felt something close to him. He opened his eyes to see Derek bent over him, looking at him like nothing about this situation was strange.

"Are you... smelling me?" Stiles grumbled.

Even with the accusing tone, Derek didn't stop. He looked at Stiles like he was the biggest idiot in the world while nudging him so he could sit down on the couch.

Like a rag doll, Stiles let him do it. Not because it was the older man's house, obviously—but because Derek quickly turned into a very comfortable pillow. Specifically his thighs. And Stiles didn't even understand what worry had driven him here in the first place.

"Yes. I'm smelling you. But I'm also marking you."

"That's really weird... you're being very weird. More than your usual weird," Stiles joked, not even having the courage to open his eyes anymore.

They stayed like that for a while, the terrifying sound of a Tyrannosaurus rex somewhere in the background, until Derek broke the silence. He had been doing that a lot lately.

"You're calmer like this," he said as if it were an obvious fact.

Derek shifted closer, as much as he could with Stiles half in his lap. Stiles made a mental note to figure out later why Derek hadn't freaked out about that. For now he just listened to Derek's slow breathing.

"You smell better when you're calm."

Stiles turned red.

"That's... okay, sure."

Stiles was about to say something else—something strange and indirect—but he was too sleepy to even open his mouth. So he decided recovering energy was a better idea.

Derek, however, didn't stop the gentle strokes through his hair.

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Stiles had already learned two things about living with Derek Hale in just a few days.

The first was that the house made strange noises at night.

The second was that Derek appeared behind him out of nowhere.

And that was testing the limits of his sedentary lifestyle, which had left his heart weaker.

This time he was in the kitchen, fighting with the burners of a fancy stove he had no idea how to use, which was seriously interfering with his very good cooking skills.

"You're going to burn the house down," a voice said behind him, much closer than expected.

"JESUS CHRIST!"

Stiles jumped. Actually jumped away like a startled cat. A haunting in the middle of the day?

Derek was standing beside him with his arms crossed as usual, staring at the frying pan like it was a biological weapon. Which was extremely offensive, especially with Stiles standing there clutching his chest and not watching the bacon.

"You appeared out of nowhere!" Stiles accused while turning back to the stove.

"I live here."

"Then learn how to make noise!" Stiles pointed the spatula at him with the most threatening authority he could muster, even though he knew Derek could still hear his heart slowly returning to normal. "Humans need warning before very early heart attacks. That could have killed me, you know."

Derek shrugged.

"The smell of smoke warned me. I came before the house turned into ashes."

Stiles looked at the frying pan. Almost missing the irony of Derek saying that.

"This is perfectly acceptable bacon."

"It's black," Derek cut in.

"That's called aggressive caramelization. And it's all your fault with this weird ultra-technological stove that I have no idea whether it's even on or not."

Derek stayed silent for a few seconds before reaching over and grabbing a piece straight from the pan, oil still sizzling, and eating it like it was completely normal.

Stiles stared at him with a frown, more because of the boiling oil than anything else, watching Derek chew and swallow the whole piece.

There was a moment of silence before Derek, with the most serious face in the world, spoke.

"It's bad."

Stiles crossed his arms, breathing out in indignation.

"And you still ate it."

Derek grabbed another piece while walking away from Stiles and his newly exasperated noise.

"I'm hungry."

.

Stiles was sitting at the table in the living room, surrounded by papers from the case Derek was investigating—or solving quickly at the moment. He seemed suspiciously eager to finish it.

"So you plan to solve it and set traps before you leave?"

"That's the plan. I came because Peter called me."

Stiles made a thoughtful sound while looking at the papers spread across Derek's very nice table. Only Derek would have something like this in the living room. If a cop walked in, they'd think he was one of those end-of-the-world conspiracy guys.

In the end, Stilinski made several faces at most of the plans and concluded that werewolves were terrible detectives and someone needed to save that investigation—and the town.

He was laughing at another trap and the way Derek had apparently punched a troll.

That was when a voice appeared behind him.

"Interesting."

Stiles screamed. He screamed like a girl and he really almost died this time, because the only person he expected in a house where only Derek lived was Derek himself—who was right in front of him, buried in files and his own thoughts, completely ignoring the scream.

He spun around in the chair. Peter Hale was standing behind him, perfectly relaxed and apparently delighted to be there.

"JESUS! You people cannot keep doing this!" Stiles shouted, hand pressed to his chest.

Peter looked genuinely entertained, like a sociopath.

"Doing what?" he asked, feigning innocence.

"Appearing like horror movie villains! One of these days I'm going to die." Stiles sighed in relief as the adrenaline slowly left his body.

Peter tilted his head. He still had that expression—and those extremely questionable V-neck shirts.

"Technically I have been a villain."

"Technically you still are... and that is a ridiculous thing to say," Stiles mimicked, watching Peter smile slowly.

The human decided to go back to his files and ignore the zombie psychopath.

Nothing good ever came from someone wearing pants that tight.

"Does Derek know you're messing with his things?" Peter asked, as if Derek wasn't just a few meters away.

Stiles didn't even turn around, staring at yet another hole on the Beacon Hills map.

"Does Derek know his family is terrible at traps?" Stiles cut a piece of paper in half with a black pen, almost wanting to cry out of frustration.

He had tried telling Derek that, but Derek was very good at ignoring his existence—which was funny considering they had been sleeping (just sleeping) in the same bed for at least six days.

Peter raised an eyebrow.

Stiles nearly threw the paper in Peter's face, partly to make him stop staring at him like that and partly to make him stand further away.

"Look at this!" Stiles pointed to the papers now in the older Hale's hand. "Half of these traps are literally holes in the ground."

Peter analyzed them like it was nothing important and placed the paper back on the table.

"It's a classic."

Now the offense was fully visible on Stiles' face again—and this time he had an audience.

"And this one?" Stiles lifted another sheet of paper. "'Wait for the enemy to arrive.' That's not strategy, that's laziness. And I'm pretty sure you're involved in this. Also, what hole do you live in? Because Derek told me you don't even live in the city."

Peter was laughing now. Which was, by far, the exact response Stiles wanted at that moment.

In the corner of the room, Derek was still sitting in the armchair reading the file, ignoring both of them. It almost looked like he wasn't even paying attention.

Maybe Stiles should do the same with him.

"You know," Peter commented, pulling him out of his thoughts and making him turn, "you're surprisingly comfortable for someone staying in a house full of werewolves."

Stiles huffed loudly and went back to writing with such force he was sure the ink would pierce through the paper.

"I survived high school in Beacon Hills."

Peter nodded slowly.

Stiles huffed again at another hole on the page and wrote with all his strength: *light*.

"Dark elves feared light, that's basic! Who wrote that we should punch them?!" Stiles complained loudly. He could practically feel both Hales wanting to roll their eyes. "Also, one day I'm going to start carrying pepper spray in this place. Why do we have so many fairies here? I'm going to use it on the werewolves."

"Against werewolves?" Peter tilted his head, almost amused. "Ambitious."

"So, Derek's house is comfortable?" Peter asked suddenly, as if testing someone. Stiles just didn't know who.

"Of course I'm comfortable. He finally has a house."

Peter watched him for a moment, smiling in that strange way.

"Fair," he said, glancing around the room as if noticing it properly. "Indeed... quite an improvement. For Derek to move on from gutters, abandoned warehouses, and uninhabitable places."

"True," Stiles let out a short laugh, shaking his head. "This is practically emotional progress."

Peter nodded while still analyzing the nephew who stubbornly refused to acknowledge their existence. Something very werewolf-like was probably happening there.

"A big step," he said calmly.

"A giant one," Stiles added.

And that was the moment Derek finally lifted his eyes from the file.

The two of them went silent immediately.

Stiles gave a tight smile and went back to his papers, ignoring the sharp blue gaze now directed at him.

Peter, on the other hand, smiled slowly.

"Were you listening?"

"Unfortunately," Derek said, closing the file slowly and returning to the papers.

.

After a few days, Stiles had jumped forward to give Derek a quick peck.

Don't judge him. After almost two weeks without anything, Stiles had assumed it had been a one-time thing.

He might have been slightly depressed about that, but that was just a detail.

But it had happened again—and he had counted three pecks before Derek disappeared. Derek would appear out of nowhere, kiss him, and leave the house like he didn't want to see Stiles' reaction.

At that moment, Stiles was sitting on the couch. He paused his typing and looked over the top of his notebook.

He was analyzing Derek in the corner, reading one of the books about his latest, relatively calm case. Hale had a small smile while reading.

Yes, pixies could be funny. Especially the harmless ones that liked changing the skin color of werewolves. Maybe Derek was imagining Peter turning literally pink because of a creature the size of his mother.

The human rested his head on his palm.

Did Derek like him? Like, really?

He could probably make a spell that forced Derek to make noise so he'd know exactly when he was about to receive another peck from one of the most handsome men he had ever seen—and his city was definitely not lacking in attractive people.

They were already living together.

Even if it had only been a short time, they were almost... something.

He felt warmth growing in his chest, almost like he was an idiot. He just kept staring, and staring, feeling a stupid smile slowly appear on his face.

"What do you want?" Derek cut in, pulling him out of his thoughts.

"Nothing. You're weird. Maybe I'm studying your antisocial species," Stiles said, sounding extremely childish—like he was pulling Derek's pigtailed in kindergarten just to get his attention.

Stiles thought that after spending so much time there, Derek's previous gloom might have been because of his house and loneliness. He almost felt like his sixteen-year-old self again.

It was hard to feel that way when Derek Hale kept surprising him with kisses.

The werewolf watched him, analyzing the smile on his face, almost convinced. Stiles thought Derek would go back to his book—and he even lowered his eyes—but that was before Derek moved with supernatural speed toward him.

The human had to admit his scream was not particularly masculine, especially when Derek grabbed him and tossed him onto the carpet like it was nothing.

Derek leaned closer, his cheek brushing Stiles' neck and causing ticklish shivers while he scented him, holding Stilinski still. Well, almost still—because his legs were kicking in the air as Stiles burst into laughter trying to get away.

Stiles finally got a brief truce when Derek pulled back, releasing his hands.

His own hand immediately went to his hair, which was now falling into his eyes—very green eyes that matched the color palette of the new Hale house.

"You need to cut your hair," Derek said. His voice was softer than anything Stiles had heard in his twenty years of life.

"After you," Derek replied quietly, brushing his nose lightly against Stiles'.

Stiles' heart skipped a beat.

"Hm... you know I look much better than you with long hair, so let's just ignore that."

Derek analyzed him with disdain, almost like Stiles was nothing impressive at all, and Stiles gasped in indignation before Derek could even finish speaking.

"If that's what you think," Derek said, sounding extremely ironic.

Stiles tried to escape immediately, acting offended.

Since when was he suddenly ugly?

The human yelped while scrambling over Derek, only for Hale to pull him closer like it was the easiest thing in the world, kissing his cheek over and over. Every time he tried to catch Stiles' mouth for a quick apologetic peck, he missed.

Stiles normally wouldn't mind that.

But right now he had a role to maintain.

Stilinski was losing what little strength he had left, laughing at how cute Derek was and how he kept losing his own strength while laughing—especially when he could feel Derek's laughter vibrating against his chest.

Eventually he gave up.

Derek kissed his ear lightly, then his cheek, slowly getting closer and closer to his mouth with little kisses.

Stiles had forgiven him long before any of that.

In truth, there had never been anything to forgive.

When Derek's hand slipped into his hair and gently pulled, Stiles had already forgotten he could even speak.

Derek's lips were soft against his.

Derek kissed him like they had never kissed before—deeply, reverently—adoring Stiles as if it were the last time they would ever see each other in the entire world.

As if he were precious.

As if Stiles were worth it.

Derek pulled back slightly, his eyes shining in the dim light with far more calm and affection than Stiles had ever seen before. Then he leaned down to Stiles' neck again, scenting and marking him like he always did now.

It had become routine between them.

Man, he was so into Derek.

.

Honestly, he was getting used to his new life pretty well.

Kissing Derek in random corners of the house was very good for his heart.

And he was also going to therapy.

Although he was starting to suspect Derek's kisses were more effective than the therapy.

Because... have you seen him?

Yes, therapy in another city. Because Stiles was now more than seven towns away from Beacon Hills on his "detective program," as he liked to call it while making finger guns.

And the best part of everything?

Derek Hale had come with him.

With his almost-new Jeep, freshly repaired after all the work he had done on Roscoe.

Derek had shown up a little after they kicked the ass of an omega and then—literally—threw a small box with a ring that almost hit Stiles in the forehead.

And when Stiles stared at the ring in mild terror, Derek had simply said:

"Date me?"

Stiles needed a few minutes.

After that, Peter made a face every time they were near him.

Apparently being pinned against the kitchen counter left traces...

And so did the couch.

And the time Stiles literally came in his pants when Derek heard his quiet noises while he was being jerked off in the hallway.

Yes.

Many things.

But in the end they had been there for a week when Stiles, feeling like he might pass out from exhaustion at any moment, saw a photo of Scott smiling.

His sleep vanished instantly.

The location was on the other side of the damn country.

The caption read: *"Sometimes you just need a change of scenery."*

Stiles' chest tightened.

He gasped softly.

He hadn't spoken to Scott in almost a year, and the first thing he saw was something like that.

"A change of scenery... I bet he doesn't even know I left town too."

The energy in the air shifted.

Derek stopped running his fingers through Stiles' hair.

He looked around when the lights flickered while Stiles opened Scott's profile and realized he had left town entirely to attend college somewhere far away.

The light bulb above them exploded.

They both froze, staring at the shattered glass on the floor.

That nearly scared Stiles to death.

He was naked, for God's sake. Dying like that didn't sound pleasant.

"What the hell was that?"

Stiles' eyes were wide.

Derek was staring at him.

They both hurried to put on shorts before getting up to inspect the broken bulb.

Nothing looked strange.

"What were you doing?" Derek asked.

Stiles gasped indignantly.

"Me? Nothing! I was just seeing that Scott decided to abandon the city. He didn't even check if Peter was still there with Isaac. Like—what kind of alpha move is that?"

He took a breath.

The lights flickered again.

Stiles opened his arms in alarm at the crackle of electricity.

Derek, however, didn't look scared.

He looked concerned.

Mostly concerned while staring at Stiles like he might be responsible.

"I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING!"

The air still hummed with energy as he spoke.

Stiles froze mid-sentence, staring at Derek.

Derek looked just as startled as he was.

Or maybe... realizing something.

Derek looked at him like he was an idiot.

"You did."

Stiles stared at his own hands.

"I... was just... angry," he said slowly.

The lights flickered again in perfect sync with his words.

Silence followed.

Derek stepped closer.

"Do it again."

"That's not how this works! And how do we even know it was me? Nothing happened when we were—"

"Stiles. Just get angry."

Stiles wanted to kick Derek.

Always wanting to investigate things.

Fine.

He would kick the ass of his boyfriend and Scott too. Stupid alpha werewolves.

He felt the same tingling he used to feel when he controlled the mountain sand—but stronger.

The last remaining bulb exploded.

Derek smiled, surprised.

The two stared at each other in silent epiphany until Derek let out a small laugh.

"Interesting."

Stiles' eyes widened as the lights flickered again.

"I exploded things. That is not 'interesting', Derek. We're going to have to pay for that! Imagine the electricity bill!"

.

Stiles was trying to control this new energy with anger.

Because imagine him exploding things while a training sergeant screamed in his ear.

Derek walked around him like he was evaluating something.

And for this lesson, Hale had apparently decided it was a good idea to invite his inconvenient uncle.

Peter watched from a distance, bored.

Stiles, meanwhile, was doing absolutely nothing.

"You two are ridiculous."

"I'm trying!" Stiles snapped, glaring at the lamp.

Spark.

So he was a little powerful.

Not a wizard or anything. Just a human who could explode light bulbs.

That could be useful one day.

"Really. A domestic alpha wolf and an emotionally unstable electric human. Practically housewives. I could knit you both a blanket."

Derek crossed his arms while Stiles groaned and gave up on the lamp.

"Why don't you—"

Energy vibrated at the tips of his fingers.

He walked across the apartment as if nothing would happen.

Stiles tapped two fingers against Peter's back.

The irritation ran down his arm, forming not a barrier but a thin line that cut across Peter's skin.

A small electric shock cracked through the air.

Peter jumped violently.

He stared in disbelief while Stiles looked at his own hand with a satisfied grin.

"What was that?!" Peter exclaimed, hand on his back while stepping away from the human.

"Software update."

Peter glanced at Derek before retreating even further from the younger Stilinski.

Stiles was extremely satisfied with that reaction.

His teenage self that once almost fainted around Peter was also very satisfied.

Stiles stared at his hands in disbelief.

"I shocked his ass."

Derek tilted his head before wrapping an arm around him and laughing softly into his hair.

.

A year and a half is a long time.

Enough time for Derek to accidentally end up with a runaway eleven-year-old beta girl. It was impressive what a child could do when her parents were that dysfunctional.

So Derek had his alpha power back again.

Long story involving Cora and a visit.

Peter stayed in Beacon Hills with Chris and Isaac.

Somehow Jackson returned six months later dragging his boyfriend Ethan with him.

Which shocked Stiles so much he almost spit on Lydia's dark hair.

Stiles stayed away from the city a little longer.

He spent that time helping other towns. Apparently the bigger the city, the more supernatural problems appeared.

He had saved a few werewolf asses.

And one vampire.

But in the end Beacon Hills was still his home.

After a while he shoved the girl out of the room while standing under Derek's arm just so he could finally kiss his boyfriend and his beautiful beard.

His cheek was already burning from that beard when he looked at Derek, who returned the look suspiciously.

"What?"

"Looks like I got reassigned," Stiles said, pushing Derek's hair away from his forehead and kissing it dramatically.

Derek grimaced before licking Stiles' nose, making him yelp and try to escape.

He didn't get far.

Mainly because Lydia slammed something against the wall and told him to shut up.

Stiles glared at the wall.

"You should be thankful I soundproofed these walls with a spell!" Stiles complained while Derek kept kissing his neck.

"Don't change the subject. Where were you assigned?"

Stiles let out a weak laugh before sighing at the boring late-night TV show playing in the background.

"Beacon Hills."

Derek didn't answer immediately.

He just looked at Stiles, noticing the tension in his shoulders.

After almost two years away, Scott returning to their town would make things complicated.

"Do you want to go back?"

Stiles thought for a moment.

"I think so."

Derek nodded like it was simple.

Like Stiles' opinion was the only certainty that mattered.

"Then we'll go back."

Stiles raised an eyebrow.

"We?"

"You think I'm letting an emotionally unstable electric human go back to that town alone?"

Stiles laughed loudly and smacked Derek's shoulder even though the werewolf didn't move a muscle.

He could shock him again.

But that would be mean.

"You love me."

Derek looked at him for a second.

"Yes."

Stiles paused.

Of course.

It really was that simple.

"You're really into me."

Derek rolled his eyes and pushed Stiles onto the carpet.

His little scream was ridiculous.

.

A week later they were inside Stiles' Jeep.

Lydia sat in the back with headphones, ignoring the conversations of the "adults" like any bored pre-teen with dark eyes could.

They were halfway there now, the road stretching forward while another town appeared on the horizon.

Stiles looked out the window, feeling that familiar energy humming under his skin.

It was kind of ridiculous.

But he knew Derek could feel it too.

Especially since Beacon Hills was his family's territory.

The city was still chaos.

Still full of problems.

But now Stiles had more people beside him.

Lydia had started messaging him again nine months earlier, and their relationship had grown stronger after everything.

And he still had Derek.

Yeah.

Very cliché.

But it was true.

After all, it would take a long time before everyone returned.

And Stiles still had to save everyone's asses in that damn town.

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