Dance to the Distortion

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Dance to the Distortion

by Lis (domesticharry)

Summary

Louis accidentally breaks Harry's camera lens and in order to get it fixed, they decide to participate in a romantic couples study. The only issue is that they are not actually couple. Well *that* and the fact they cannot stand each other.
Chapter One

Nestled at the intersection of Dover and Portsmouth Street, was a quaint flower shop called, *Manchester’s Blooms*. It was a simple store, wooden shelves stacked with an assortment of colorful flowers and spinning racks packed with planter seeds. A gentle hum reverberated throughout the glass-paneled space, melodic harmonies pouring from the pavilion of a vintage phonograph. Mindlessly spinning along the jockey was a worn-out onyx record that had already seen its fair amount of years. Sitting by the rotating vinyl, was Harry Styles.

He arched his back and let out a soft moan when the air bubbles along the knots of his spine popped. His fingers extended above his head, nimble digits intertwining with one another while he stretched out the sore muscles. The wooden stool underneath him was unforgiving on his back, every work shift proving to be the main reason why Harry had to take up yoga during his second year of university. Dropping his hands, he picked up the abandoned textbook that laid out next to the register and continued to skim the printed text.

Harry scratched blunt nails against his thigh, eyes continuing to trail over *Paradise Lost*. The material of washed-out overalls chaffed against his skin with the movement, denim gently clinging to the muscles along his thighs. He rested the arch of his foot against a metal ring around the bottom of the stool, his pair of faded pink converse slightly slipping from their lack of traction.

A bell gently chimed above the entrance of the shop, the glass door unceremoniously swinging open as a girl tumbled through. Her petite build was nearly covered by a bulky ceramic pot tucked in her arms. The corner of Harry’s mouth quirked in amusement while he watched his coworker abrasively push her way through the small entrance.

“Don’t worry ‘bout me,” Jules begrudgingly huffed, cropped brown hair hanging limp over her forehead when she heaved the pot onto a nearby table. She glimpsed over her shoulder and narrowed her eyes at Harry, “Managing on my own just fine.”

Harry let out a sharp laugh, closing the book in front of him, “I hear doing things on your own builds character.”

“Well, I hear you can shove your foot up your own arse,” She mumbled under her breath. Jules turned towards Harry and wiped her hands over the green apron tied on her front, eyes locked on the textbook in front of him, “How d’you already have coursework? I thought your first module was today?”

Harry nonchalantly shrugged, “Wanted to get ahead.”

“Harry.”

“What?” He groaned, already knowing where the conversation was leading.

Jules walked over to the counter and rested her forearms against the surface, hazel eyes locked on Harry’s green irises.

“M’ not about to let you spend your last year of uni doing nothing other than coursework and organizing flower arrangements.”

“I signed up for yoga,” Harry grumbled, breaking their eye contact while he fidgeted with the silver band wrapped around his thumb.
“Aren’t there any pretty boys at that studio?” Jules pressed, her finger reaching out to trace the edge of the textbook. “Any that you could… I dunno, take on a date or suck off in the steam room or something?”

“Finding love and a nice cock in a steam room?” Harry asked with an unimpressed look. “Yeah, I think I’ll pass on that porno cliché.”

She groaned and pushed herself upwards, “Was just a suggestion!”

“And a shit one at that,” He snorted, the statement laced with fondness. “Anyways,” Harry roughly ran his fingers through his chestnut curls, the tips of the tendrils brushing against his pecs, “I don’t have time to focus on anything other than uni and work. I gotta –”

“Save money so you can move to big ol’ London and focus on film. Blah, blah, blah,” Jules cut him off, evident that she had heard the excuse multiple times during the past two years.

Harry nodded and pushed himself off the stool, “Exactly.”

“Where you going?” Jules pouted, the humidity causing her hair to stick against her caramel skin.

“Psychology,” Harry adjusted his white Henley, pulling the thin material away from his chest before he slipped the denim straps of his overalls over his shoulders.

Jules folded her arms across her chest once she gave him an obvious once-over, “Doesn’t someone look sweet for their first day.”

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d think you were being genuine,” Harry smirked, shoving his book into a leather bag and sliding it over his shoulder. He cocked his hands on his hips. “Alas, I do.”

“Stop reading Shakespeare, no one still living still says *alas*,” Jules rolled her eyes. She swept her hands towards the exit with and exaggerated grandeur, “Alight, get on out of me mam’s shop. Go make yourself brilliant and all that.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Harry nodded and turned on his heels.

The shop was only a ten-minute walk from the university’s campus and Harry had made the trek through the narrow streets more times than he could count. He popped in white earbuds and settled on a playlist that was a compilation of Bon Iver songs. With his hands shoved in his pockets and airy vocals crooning in his ears, Harry made his way through the congested streets.

Harry mostly kept to himself. Not just in that particular moment, but in general. He avoided the typical montage of students over-exaggeratingly greeting one another after only spending a few weeks apart. To him, those people were just going through motions that were projected upon them instead of being genuine with their actions.

It wasn’t that Harry was socially inept. Frankly, he was far from it. He could hold a conversation just fine and he had the ability to speak his mind to people he barely knew. The point, for him at least, was that he didn’t have intentions on wasting time with interactions that weren’t going to further either himself as an individual or his career as a filmmaker. Trivial conversations were called trivial for a reason and Harry didn’t want any part of it.

Pulling out his mobile, Harry saw he still had about a half hour before class started. Since the weather was remarkably cooperative for late January, students were laying out and playing football on the nearby lawn. After a moment of indecision, Harry shuffled towards a small maple tree, choosing to waste his free time on the mossy ground.
Opening his satchel, he unzipped the bottom compartment and carefully pulled out an a7S II. Turning on the camera, Harry started to thumb through his reel and sort through pictures he took from the weekend prior. Images of graffiti and warehouses filtered through the display, the montage of colors dissipating into each other.

“Oi! Oi!” Harry vaguely heard someone yell.

A crease settled between his eyebrows and he turned his head to the side, chasing the tinny voice that filtered over his music. Without further notice, he was promptly nailed in the face. Not in a subtle-could-have-easily-acted-as-if-it-didn’t-happen way. No, it was a blooming-pain-and-seeing-flecks-of-white-in-his-vision type of way. And that was probably because Harry was brashly impaled by a spiraling football.

“Fuck!” Harry throatily grunted, his hand immediately moving to cover his nose when he heard a slight crunch.

There was a flurry of movement around him when he pulled his hand away, mentally thanking every possible deity that his nose wasn’t bleeding. The relief he felt was immediately plundered into horror as he realized the sound he heard, was the shattering of his new lens. He knocked the football to the side and gaped at the broken equipment in his palms.

“Oh my – Fuck! I’m so sorry!”

Harry’s jaw was slack as he looked up to see a student rushing towards him. The boy’s blue eyes were wide and frantic when he halted by the maple tree. His lip was tugged between his teeth as he anxiously looked between Harry’s dumbstruck expression and the camera. When he started to speak again, Harry numbly plucked his earbuds out.

“Shit,” The boy huffed, his chest ballooning underneath a loose red shirt. He was anxiously shifting his weight from foot to foot, tight black denim stretching over his muscular legs, “I’m so sorry, mate. I –”

“You broke my lens,” Harry bluntly interrupted.

“I – Uh,” He floundered, eyes darting anywhere other than Harry’s face. Eventually, he settled on, “I didn’t mean to.”

Harry snorted and rolled his eyes, “I’d hope not.”

“Right,” He uncomfortable said.

“Well…” Harry drawled out, his eyebrows furrowing together.

The boy froze, his lips parted a touch. He scrubbed a hand over his face, nervously looking back down at the camera as if it would magically repair itself if he stared hard enough.

“I – Uh,” He floundered, eyes darting anywhere other than Harry’s face. Eventually, he settled on, “I didn’t mean to.”

Harry snorted and rolled his eyes, “I’d hope not.”

“Right,” He uncomfortable said.

“Well…” Harry drawled out, his eyebrows furrowing together.

The boy scrunched his nose, “Well, what?”

“Well, aren’t you going to offer to fix it?” Harry cocked an eyebrow, carefully putting the remains of his camera into his bag.

“But,” He started, shutting his mouth into a firm line as he mulled over his words. “I mean technically, I hit you in the face and then you knocked it into your camera...”

Harry pushed himself to his feet, immediately folding his arms over his chest as he stood foot to foot...
with the other student. The other man stood at least four inches shorter than Harry, hitting 5’9 at the most. His brown hair was pushed back into a messy quiff, the tresses parted to the right and barely licking over his prominent cheekbone.

“Are you honestly trying to blame me for this?” Harry narrowed his eyes.

The boy pulled his shoulders back and mirrored Harry’s stance, “M’ trying my best here, mate.”

“Not your mate,” Harry corrected, grabbing the strap of his bag and shouldering it.

“Not polite either,” He mumbled under his breath.

Harry gawked at him, disbelief coating his tone, “Sorry if I’m not feeling all that pleasant given you’ve just destroyed my new lens!”

“It’s not like it was the camera itself!” The boy shifted his weight to the right, setting his hands on the curve of his waist. “So it’s not that bad.”

“Do you have any idea how much equipment costs?” Harry practically shouted, his shoulders heaving as he tried to contain the last spout of his anger. “Any idea at all?”

“Why the fuck would I know that?”

“Unbelievable,” Harry muttered under his breath.

“Look,” The boy’s tongue darted out to wet the plush of his bottom lip before he continued, “I’ll help you get your stupid lens sorted. No need to get stroppy.” He bent over and picked up his football, tucking it under his arm. Flicking his fringe out of his eyes, he rushed out, “How much was it, anyways? Fifty? Sixty quid?”

“Try three-hundred,” Harry humorlessly laughed.

The boy dropped his football and Harry might have found it comical under any other circumstance.

“Three-hundred pounds?! You paid that much for a sodding camera lens?!”

“At least you didn’t break the camera itself,” Harry lifted his eyebrow, the corner of his mouth quirking. “That would have been two-thousand.”

“You couldn’t have picked a less expensive hobby, could you?” The boy gruffed out as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Like football?” Harry scoffed, blatantly unimpressed.

“Oi!” He balked, looking genuinely affronted. “What’s wrong with footie?”

“Forget it,” Harry said with an exasperated sigh. “I’ve got class and I really don’t have time to argue over a stupid sport.” Harry pulled out his own mobile and gestured for the man to take it, “Just put your number in and we can figure it out later.”

The other student hesitantly looked at the extended mobile, “How do I know you’re not gonna use it to track me down and murder me?”

“With just a phone number?”

“You could look it up.”
“Why would I do that?”

“Because you’re angry.”

“And?”

“So… You might use it, find out me location, hack me off in my sleep.”

“Do you honestly think I would do that?”

“Dunno,” The boy narrowed his eyes and gave Harry a once over. “You look like you could be the sort.”

“I’m wearing overalls,” Harry deadpanned.

“Exactly,” He huffed, pulling a confused look from Harry. Gesturing to Harry’s lanky body, he explained, “That’s how they get ya. Looks sweet an innocent, but actually, they’re a serial killer. Waiting to lure you in. I’ve seen it in a documentary.”

Harry let out a surprised laugh, “Are you forgetting the part where you hit me?”

“What’s your point?”

“That’s hardly luring someone in.”

“Oh,” His eyebrows furrowed together, cheeks hollowed. He lolled his head to the side, “You’ve got a point there.”

“I know,” Harry groaned. He pushed his mobile forward, “So, can you just? I really have to go.”

The boy eyed the mobile and let out a defeated sigh, “Fine.”

He tapped his fingers over the screen and smirked to himself before he handed back to Harry with a smug expression. Harry looked at the screen and saw that in favor for adding a name, he chose to just use a football emoticon.

“Really?”

The other boy grinned, “Really.”

Without another word, Harry pocketed his phone and walked away from the other man.

“Lovely chattin’, mate!”

Harry froze and took a deep breath, mentally running through a list of reasons why it would not be acceptable to punch the boy in his face. He rolled his shoulders back and flipped the other boy off over his shoulder, hearing a musical laugh in response.

“Menace,” Harry grumbled to himself.

Momentarily pushing the incident from his mind, Harry walked to Stopford Building. Once he made it to the second level, he double checked a number inscribed on a plaque to the left of the door. Seeing that it matched his syllabus, he walked into the lecture hall.

The room was already mostly packed, earning him a seat towards the back. He shuffled past a gauntlet of students, ignoring monotonous conversations while he stopped at an empty table. Settling
his bag on the floor, Harry got situated in his seat and thrummed his fingers over his knees. After about five minutes of waiting, a man strode into the hall, settling himself at the front of the room.

He was lean, tall in stature, and impeccably young to be teaching at university. Harry pulled out his notebook as the professor presumably began to write his name on a large whiteboard. The last of the students were trickling into the room, settling in the few remaining seats.

“Sorry m’late, professor,” A rushed voice huffed out.

Harry’s eyes snapped towards the front of the room. His mouth went slack as he watched football boy stand in the doorway, his weight slumped against the plaster frame. Involuntarily, Harry’s fingers stiffened their hold around his notebook while he watched the boy look around the room. When their eyes met, a mixture of surprise and exasperation clouded the boy’s expression.

“No problem,” The professor nodded, pulling his thick black hair into a loose ponytail. He gestured to the back of the room, “Find a seat and we’ll get started.”

“Right,” He nodded, eyes frantically darting across the filled desks.

Harry looked around and saw that the only remaining chair was at his table. Knowing exactly what was going to happen, Harry slumped forwards and rested his head on his folded arms. He took three deep breaths as footsteps got louder, mentally willing himself to be the bigger person. Harry lifted his head when the chair to his right slid out from its place, the metal legs noisily scraping against the floor.

“Shit,” The boy winced at the abrasive sound. He tossed his bag on the top of the table with a loud thump, causing a thick textbook to tumble out and clatter onto the ground. The boy huffed under his breath, “Buggering, fuck.”

He sat down and looked over at Harry’s disgruntled expression, “What?”

“You couldn’t be a more disruptive person if you tried,” Harry snipped, turning back to the front to see their professor turning towards the room.

“And you couldn’t be more of a pretentious twat if you tried,” He grumbled, arms folding over his chest.

“Pretentious?” Harry seethed, keeping his voice low.

The boy cocked his eyebrow, his gaze leisurely dragging over Harry’s appearance.

“You heard me.”

“Can I remind you that this is all your fault?”

The boy snorted, “Have a feeling you will regardless.”

Their professor cleared his throat and leaned back against the front table. His ankles crossed and while he rested his palms on the table’s surface. Harry sat higher in his chair, choosing to ignore the pointed scoff from his right.

Looking over the class, the professor started with, “This is introduction to psychology, section thirteen. If that is not the class you have listed on your course schedule, I suggest you leave now.”

Everyone looked around the room to see if anyone would move. When all the students remained
seated, their professor kindly smiled and nodded.

“Excellent,” He pushed himself off the table and slowly paced at the front of the room. “My name is Steven Aoki and I’ll be instructing this introductory course. This is my first-year teaching which means,” He paused as he rolled his fingers through the air, “I’m not much older than all of you.”

He clasped his hands behind his back, “That being said, please don’t call me professor or sir. It’s too formal and this course will be anything but.”

“So he’s one of those,” The boy next to Harry murmured.

Harry decided it was best to ignore him.

“You can call me Steven or Mr. Aoki, whatever you’re more comfortable with,” Their professor continued. “In this class, we will be talking about a few controversial topics. If at any time you become uncomfortable with the material, speak with me privately and we will figure out an alternative. I am here to challenge you and broaden your horizons, not to make you uncomfortable.”

“Doubtful,” The boy scoffed.

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose in favor of giving into the other boy’s antics.

“Since we will be talking about sensitive topics,” Mr. Aoki carried on, oblivious to the semi-silent feud occurring in the back corner of the room, “There will be a zero-tolerance policy for any judgement or disrespectful comments. Is that understood?”

The class mumbled in agreement, pulling a satisfied nod from their professor.

“Great!” Mr. Aoki chirped and pulled out a piece of paper from his bag, resting it on a folder. He positioned a pen over the sheet and looked out over the room, “I’m going to callout roll and when I say your name, tell me your year, what you’re studying, and... Hmm, let’s go with favorite film.”

Harry lightly snorted which caused the boy to his right to look at him with his eyes suspiciously narrowed.

“What’re you on about?”

The corner of Harry’s mouth lifted and he glimpsed at him from the corner of his sightline, “Looks like I’ll be getting your name after all.”

“Oh for fucks sake,” He grumbled, sitting back in his chair with arms folded as if he was a petulant child. When Harry puffed out a laugh, he elbowed Harry in the side, “Shut it.”

“I’ll do my best not to murder you,” Harry quietly said as Mr. Aoki rolled through the roster.

“That’s not funny.”

“Then why are you smiling?”

“Am not.”

Harry rolled his eyes when the boy pointedly turned away to hide his bitten-back grin.

“Harry Styles?” Mr. Aoki called out, his eyes roaming over the crowd.

“Here,” Harry gingerly raised his hand. The rest of the room turned back to face him as he began,
“M’ Harry –”

“Obviously”

Harry continued as if he hadn’t been interrupted by the gremlin at his side, “I’m in my third year and I study film.”

“Of course;” The other boy grumbled.

Harry nonchalantly kicked him in the ankle, eliciting a muffled groan in response.

“Studying film?” Mr. Aoki grinned, lowering his folder and tilting his head to the side. “In that case, I take it my third question will come easy to you?”

“A bit,” Harry nodded, his teeth pressing into bottom lip. “At the moment…I’d probably have to say, *Kill your Darlings*.”

Mr. Aoki nodded in understanding, “Mind if I ask why?”

“Well,” Harry started, acutely aware of the pair of blue eyes that were piercing into him, “From a cinematography stance, the color pallet is gorgeous. It’s also shot non-linear which I’ve always preferred.” He fiddled with the ring around his thumb, “And, um, the topic itself…I dunno, I think it’s powerful. You know, the relationship between Allen and Lucien. Just like, uh, how that basically started the beat movement.”

“*Honestly, me nan talks faster than you. Even when she doesn’t have her teeth in.*”

Harry could feel his jaw clench, fingers digging into the lip of the table as the other boy continued to antagonize him.

“Thank you, Harry,” Mr. Aoki genuinely said, tone polar-opposite of the boy’s next to Harry. “Let’s see…Who do we have next?”

When Mr. Aoki glanced back down at his list, Harry whipped towards his right to rush out, “Are you physically unable to be civil?”

“Me?!” The boy incredulously responded.

“Yes, you!” Harry whisper-shouted.

“You started it when you didn’t accept my apology!”

Harry flicked the boy’s bicep, unable to help his childish response.

“Did – Did you just flick me?” He gaped, the corner of his lips twitching in amusement.

“Yeah, what of it?” Harry purposefully brushed a piece of his hair off his shoulder.

The other boy opened his mouth to respond but snapped it shut when their professor called out, “Louis Tomlinson?”

“That’s me,” The boy begrudging answered.

“Louis Tomlinson, hmm?” Harry quietly mumbled with a smile full of mirth.

Louis quickly swatted him under the table, “Right. I’m in me third year studying sports management
“Typical,” Harry cut in.

“And,” Louis loudly continued over Harry’s interjection, “My favorite film is... Uh, *Grease*.”

Harry’s eyes widened at that, his head gently cocking to the side. When Mr. Aoki carried on with the roster, Louis turned and looked at Harry, his posture already defensive.

“If you give me shit, I’ll kick your arse.”

“Surprisingly,” Harry drawled out, “That might be your only redeeming factor.”

Louis scoffed, “Even giving a compliment, you’re still a twat.”

Harry directed his attention back to the front of the room, pushing Louis’ irritating comments from his mind. That proved to be exponentially difficult since Louis apparently did not have the ability to keep his mouth closed for more than three minutes at a time. Choosing to blatantly ignore him, Harry plucked his pen from the table and opened to a blank sheet in his notebook.

Mr. Aoki went through the course objectives, his voice serving as a monotonous drone as Harry drew. Eventually abstract lines morphed into a greenhouse, his absent-minded ministrations pulling together to create a figure of a woman by plotted pansies.

“That meant to be your girlfriend?” Louis snorted, his knuckle jutting out towards Harry’s picture.

“No,” Harry curtly responded.

“Is it a real person?”

“Yes.”

“S’a bit creepy.”

“It’s really not.”

There was a brief pause and Harry knew that it was too good to last.

“Well?”

Harry dropped his pen and glared at Louis, “What, Louis?”

Louis rolled his eyes, “Who is it?”

“Why do you care?” Harry groaned, mindfully keeping his voice low.

Louis smirked, “Want to give the poor bird a warning not to go out with you.”

Harry slumped his shoulders and closed his book, tension radiating from every molecule in his body. There was something, rather multiple things, that were infuriating about Louis. Usually, Harry had the capability of shrugging off people, not even thinking twice about it before he moved along. The difference was that Harry had never met someone who actively tried to get a rouse out of him. Typically, people stopped talking when he made it clear he would rather be left alone.

“Have I hit a nerve?” Louis pressed on, sounding delighted by possibility. “Let me guess,” He continued, lowering his voice, “You’ve asked her out and she said no. So now your plan is to win
“Alright, class!” Mr. Aoki crowed from the front. “That’s it for today, I’ll see you all on Friday.”

Harry immediately pushed himself out of his chair and gathered his things.

“I’m right, aren’t I?” Louis bragged with a smug tone, taking his time as he gathered his belongings.

“Not even close,” Harry muttered before he hurried out of the room.

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“We have a Code Pineapple!”

Louis shut the door to his shared flat with a rough kick of his foot. The wood rattled in its frame, a sound Louis had grown accustomed to since he moved in at the beginning of summer. He brusquely dropped his bag next to the doorway and toed off his shoes, immediately traipsing through the space to find his flatmate, Niall.

“Lou, if you keep using pineapple, it loses its effect!”

The flat was relatively small, not serving too big of a space given that only two students lived there. Furniture was sparse and eclectic, most hauled from craigslist giveaways and extended family. A kitchen connected to the living room and at the end of a narrow hall, there was a bathroom and two bedrooms. It was painfully simple, smelled slightly of stale cigarettes, and Louis loved every bit of it.

“No, I really mean it this time!” Louis yelled, pouting when he pushed open a window to check the fire escape and didn’t see Niall. He jogged to the center of their living room and climbed on their coffee table. Cupping his hands around his mouth, Louis deeply inhaled and then let out a loud yell, “PINAPPLE!”

There was a sharp clatter from the bathroom and a smatter of swearing. The door flung open and Louis watched as Niall tumbled out with a fluffy blue towel wrapped around his hips. His blonde hair was matted back by water, soap suds still clinging to his milky skin.

“Pineapple?” Niall seriously huffed out on a ragged breath. He blue eyes were manically blown out, “As in, pineapple?”

Louis frantically nodded, “Pineapple.”

“Oh, fuck,” Niall nodded, turning on his heel to rush to his room. “I’m getting the kit!”

“I got my laptop!” Louis shouted, climbing off the table to stand at the island in their kitchen.

He pulled his laptop from his bag and opened it, the screen illuminating as it powered up. Louis could hear Niall frantically thumping around his room, probably hauling on a pair of pants. True to his word, Niall scrambled to the kitchen with a box labeled, Code Pineapple.

Niall flipped open the box and immediately pulled out a yellow pad of sticky-notes, smacking one in the center of the fridge.

“Target?” Niall asked, already positioning his marker over the note.

“Harry Styles.”

“Good name.” Niall began writing Harry’s name on the note, humming out loud, “Almost too good.”
“I know,” Louis rolled his eyes and opened Facebook on his computer. “That’s why he can’t be trusted.”

Niall nodded and slapped another sticky-note on the fridge, “Alright. Where did you encounter Mr. Styles?”

“Encounter?” Louis cackled. “Niall, really?”

“If we’re doing this, you’re gonna let me do it like Criminal Minds,” Niall cocked his hip and set his hands on his waist.


Niall wrote the word “Lawn” and underlined it.

“What time?”

“Around three?”

Niall groaned, “You didn’t check the time?”

“I was distracted!” Louis defensively held up his hands. “He was yelling at me cos I hit him.”

“Louis!” Niall shouted, pegging his marker at Louis’ head. “You can go ‘round hitting suspected serial killers! What the fuck were you thinking?!”

“I didn’t do it on purpose!” Louis kicked his foot against the island. “I accidentally hit him with a football and broke his stupid camera lens.”

“You broke his camera?”

“Just the lens bit.”

Niall cocked his head, “Then what?”

Louis awkwardly scratched the back of his neck, “Well…We argued because he said I have to buy him a new lens.”

“I mean,” Niall floundered for a minute, looking between the sticky-notes on the fridge and Louis, “You broke his shit. Kinda makes sense, mate.”

“Whatever,” Louis grumbled. “He was being a prat.”

“So that makes him a suspected murderer?”

“He asked for my number!” Louis crowed, his hands flailing in front of him. “That’s what all the bad guys do!”

“Or…He just wanted to make sure you were gonna buy him a new lens,” Niall slowly said as if he was speaking to a toddler.

“Or he wanted to kill me,” Louis deadpanned.

Niall’s entire body sagged, “Louis, I don’t think you understand what Code Pineapple is for.”

“Niall,” Louis groaned, feeling the innate need to stomp his foot.
“Hold that thought,” Niall held up his pointer finger. He dug through the box and Louis knew what he was getting before he managed to pull out a crumpled-up sheet of paper.

When Louis and Niall were eight years old, they created: Code Pineapple. They came up with the idea after watching an endless marathon of horror movies that were far too graphic for young boys their age. In general terms, Code Pineapple was only to be enacted if either boy met someone they deemed to be “suspicious” or “dangerous” and that enactment would lead to a self-led investigation.

So far, Louis had enacted Code Pineapple seventeen times.

Niall, none.

“I know what it says,” Louis grumbled, pushing the piece of paper away from him.


Louis shook him off and folded his arms, “But what if I need it?”

“Sucks,” Niall laughed, opening the fridge to grab a water bottle. “Now pull ‘im up, I wanna see what he looks like.”

Louis typed in Harry’s name into the search bar and restlessly shifted his weight from side to side as the page loaded. He scrolled through the first four Harry Styles before he paused over the fifth.

“No. Fucking. Way.”

Niall stepped by Louis’ side and narrowed his eyes as he looked at the thumbnail, his expression an exact mirror of Louis’.

“Is – Is that a dog collar?” Niall gaped, impatiently reaching over Louis to click on Harry’s profile when Louis remained motionless.

Louis’ jaw was ridiculously hung when Niall enlarged Harry’s profile picture, overwhelmingly gobsmacked at the image flooding the screen. It was definitely the same Harry Styles he had met that afternoon, head full of unruly curls and doe-green-eyes. Except this Harry was wearing a red suit. A floral red suit without any shirt underneath. A floral red suit without any shirt underneath and a leather collar wrapped around his ivory neck.

Leaning closer to the screen, Louis was vaguely aware that his irises were probably well blown out. During class, he noticed that Harry had an impressive collection of tattoos on his left arm. It was an eclectic assortment that ranged everything from a tits-out mermaid to a shaded rose. What Louis didn’t expect to find out was that the trail of ink extended to Harry’s upper body and abdomen.

It started with two swallows underneath his collar bones, the birds positioned as if they were flying towards each other. Then there was the imprinted butterfly that rested over Harry’s stomach. Bold and obnoxiously proud from where it showed underneath the opened suit jacket. But of course, as if he wasn’t already obscene enough, there was more. Two more, to be exact. Lining his hip bones were two tattoos of laurel leaves, the branches extending to the waistline of his trousers.

“Who the fuck is this kid?” Louis mumbled under his breath, his eyes never leaving the picture.

Niall exited out of the picture and began digging through tagged photos of Harry. He made a triumphant noise from the back of his throat when he landed on an album that was full of similar photos, all clearly done in a proper studio.
“He’s well fit.”

Louis raised his eyebrow, “I thought you were supposed to be the straight one?”

Niall snorted, “M’ straight, not blind.”

“Yeah,” Louis rolled his eyes and looked back at the screen. He felt his throat slightly constrict when he noticed a barely socially acceptable picture of Harry wearing nothing but the leather collar, “Suppose he it.”

Niall’s eyes were full of mirth as he looked between the screen and Louis, his elbow suggestively digging into Louis’ side.

“You fancy him!” Niall beamed.

“Definitely not,” Louis snorted. He madly gestured towards the photo album, “Just look at him! He’s pretentious.” He groaned and accusingly pointed, “Honestly, who even wears that kind of shit anyways?”

“Apparently, the lads you’re in to,” Niall smirked. With one withering look from Louis, Niall huffed out, “Forget it. M’ gonna go take a nap, I think you’ve aged me at least ten years in the past ten minutes.”

When Niall disappeared into the back, Louis grumbled to himself as he tore off the two sticky-notes from the fridge. He crumbled them and tossed the pieces of paper into the bin. Grabbing his laptop, Louis begrudging trudged to his room.

Louis’ bedroom was relatively plain. Blue sheets and a matching comforter covered a queen-sized bed that was tucked in a corner. The walls were still bare and a floor lamp let off an eerie glow inside the small room. Louis pushed open a rectangular window by his bedside and pulled out a packet of stokes from his back pocket. He sat on his bed and lit one of the fags, inhaling sharply before exhaling smoke outside the window.

With the lit cigarette dangling past the window pane, Louis opened Google. He hesitated for a moment before typing three words into the search bar.

Kill Your Darlings

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“I was wrong and you’re gay.”

Harry hadn’t even finished setting his bag down before Louis decided it was already time to be nuisance in his life. The corners of his lips turned downwards as he looked up to see Louis rounding their table. Louis shrugged off his bag and plopped into his seat, expectantly watching Harry.

“I’m sorry,” Harry shook his head, confusion blatantly covering his voice, “But…What?”

Louis melodramatically huffed as if it was a chore to explain himself, “What I said on Wednesday?”

Harry slowly took his seat, eyes narrowed at the other boy.

“About the girl in the picture?” Louis impatiently tacked on.

“What about her?” Harry asked at a complete loss.
“You don’t like her because you’re gay,” Louis simply put. “I was wrong.”

Harry repeatedly opened and closed his mouth, unable to properly formulate a response.

“Please tell me you’re not having your big gay moment?” Louis rolled his eyes. He pulled out a laptop from his bag and set it on the table, glimpsing at Harry from the corner of his eyes, “M’ not prepared to handle a crisis if it is.”

“What’s wrong with you?” Harry exasperated, his eyes nearly bulged out. He shook his head, “Who handles a situation like that when they’re talking to someone they don’t even know?!”

Louis held up his hands defensively, “I was just –”

“No,” Harry cut him off with a pointed finger. “What if – Alright, what if this was my – Sorry, how did you so eloquently say it?” Harry scoffed, the anger in his gut pushing a boiling point, “Oh, right! ‘Big gay moment?’ What if I was actually going through a sexuality crisis?!”

“Are you?”

“No, but that’s not the point!” Harry groaned, internally wanting to bash his own head against the table in frustration.

“Then what is the point?”

“The point is, you can’t run your mouth like that when you could hurt someone!”

Louis was quiet for a moment, nodding to himself as Harry’s chest was practically heaving from ragged breaths.

“So…You’re not gay?”

“Oh my god,” Harry pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Because I watched that movie of yours, the darlings one,” Louis pushed on as if he wasn’t the most offensive human being, “And it’s very, very, gay.”

Harry snapped his head towards Louis, “You watched it?”

Louis shrugged, a faint blush creeping along his neck, “Yeah? So?”

“And all you got from it…Was that I’m gay?” Harry asked, distaste licking each word he said.

“So I was right!” Louis beamed, the skin by his eyes crinkling. He pushed open the screen of his laptop and mumbled under his breath, “Honestly, I should have known from the collar.”

“Excuse me?”

Louis tugged his bottom lip between his teeth and shook his head, waving Harry off.

“No, no,” Harry pressed, “What was that?”

“You should really make your Facebook private.”

“You looked me up?!” Harry’s eyes widened to a comical degree. He jerkily waved his hands, “Tell me you understand how ironic that is!”
Louis’ fingers rolled over his keyboard as he put in his password, ignoring the way Harry was going positively mental by his side. When Louis didn’t respond, Harry sunk back into his chair and roughly combed his fingers through his hair. He slightly winced as the tresses knotted around the rings that were slipped over his middle and pointer finger.

“So…” Louis drawled out after two minutes.

“Leave me alone.”

“Do you often fancy yourself a collar?”

“Shut up.”

“Or is that just for special occasions?”

“I did it for a friend,” Harry defensively snapped.

Louis crudely held his fist to his mouth and poked his tongue against his cheek. He waggled his eyebrows, “Very good friend, I bet.”

“She is, actually,” Harry cocked his eyebrow. He continued even though he knew he didn’t owe Louis any explanation, “The girl in the picture?” Louis nodded, perking up in his chair with interest. “She’s works with me and needed someone for a project.”

“She does photography?” Louis set his elbow on the table and rested his chin against his palm.

“Fashion design,” Harry corrected. “Speaking of photography,” Harry drawled out, secretly reveling in the understanding that flickered over Louis’ smug expression, “Figure out when you’re going to pay me back?”

“About that…”

“Louis,” Harry warned.

“Good afternoon, class!” Their professor chirped as he strode through the door with an easy smile stretched over his face. “Quick announcement before we get started today.”

Louis winked at Harry before he turned towards the front and effectively ended their conversation. Harry bit back a groan as he looked ahead, his eyebrows pinching together when he saw two new students standing at the front of the room. The other students seemed to have caught on as well, a few straightening their backs in attention.

It was two boys, one stockier than the other. The muscular one had an eager smile on his face and short brown hair that made him look more like a member of the military than a university student. In complete contrast, the other student was lean with a rather nonplussed expression, his black quiff parted to show that the left side of his head was buzzed.

“Gentlemen,” Mr. Aoki gestured between the two students and the class, “Whenever you’re ready.”

“Hi everyone!” Stocky greeted them with an overwhelming amount of pep that Harry couldn’t possibly reciprocate. He pointed to himself first, “I’m Liam Payne and this is –”

“Zayn Malik,” The second student supplied, his countenance infinitely more relaxed.

“We just wanted to take a minute to tell you about a research project that we’re conducting with the university,” Liam said as he started to hand out a small stack of paper to a student in the front row.
There was a murmur rolling through the class as the papers were spread out, people leaning into their friends as they looked over the fliers.

“All of the basic information is on the sheet that’s being passed around now,” Zayn chimed in.

Harry grabbed the remaining pieces of paper from a girl to his left, eyes already skimming over the sheet as he handed the rest to Louis.

The University of Manchester, Department of Psychology

**PAID RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY**

**Romantic Couples Study**

You and your partner are eligible to participate if you:

- Are in a committed, monogamous romantic relationship
- Have been dating at least six months
- Are currently living together
- Are both over the age of 18

For details, contact Liam Payne at: lpayne@um.ac.uk

“We’re selecting five couples for a romantic couples study. The study will last the remainder of the semester and will finish the week before graduation,” Liam said once everyone had gotten a flier. “Ideally, we’re looking for five couples that are different from each other so our research can be well-rounded. So… That includes different genders, sexualities, races, religions, etc.”

“It will be a time commitment, almost like a part-time job,” Zayn carefully explained. “That is why the university has sponsored it as a paid study.”

“How much will the couples be paid?” Came from someone in the middle of the room.

“Hundred-fifty,” Zayn answered. The corner of his mouth twitched upwards when he added, “Per person.”

Louis lifted his head at that as he mumbled, “Holy shit.”

Harry’s eyes widened, nodding to himself as the room began to hum with chatter.

“That being said,” Liam clasped his hands behind his back to get everyone’s attention, “There will be a brief interview process before we decide the five couples so we can decide if you and your partner would be a good fit.”

“Oh no,” Zayn tacked on with a grin.

Liam nodded with a small smile, “Yeah, or not.”

“Any other questions?” Zayn asked, amber eyes raking over the room.

When nobody raised their hands, Liam gave a quick wave to the room, “Great! Thank you for your
time!

Mr. Aoki stepped forward and politely saw them out. He turned to the class and asked them to take out their textbooks, instantly rolling into his lecture since they had already lost a good amount of time due to the announcement. Harry shoved the flier in his bag, his attention settling on the slideshow ahead. Shockingly enough, Louis remained silent, his eyes still locked on the flier.

After an hour of going over the basic premise of case studies, Harry was nearly ready to rip his hair out. All he wanted to do was trudge back to his flat, edit his reel, and have cheap wine. His eyes continued to dance from the ticking clock above the door to the flier that was still clutched in Louis’ hands. His eyebrows pulled together when he looked at Louis, almost worried that he managed to stay quiet for such an extended amount of time.

When their professor dismissed them, Harry shot out of his chair with a speed that genuinely didn’t know he had. He shouldered his bag and without looking back, made his way out of the door. It wasn’t until he was in the stairwell that he heard a thunderous noise rumbling behind him. A crease pinched along his forehead as he turned around.

“What the – Hey!” Harry yelped, eyes wide as Louis barreled into him.

Louis fisted one hand in Harry’s grey jumper and then proceeded to pull him down the stairs. Harry stumbled after the shorter man, knocking into more than just one person as his lanky limbs flailed outwards to get balance.

“For fucks sake!” Harry grumbled, trying to swat Louis’ hand off him. “Lemme go!”

“Keep moving,” Louis instructed, his grip not easing up until they were outside.

Louis guided them towards the side of the building, only letting go once Harry’s back was against a brick wall.

“What the fuck is your problem?!” Harry yelled as he rearranged his now-stretched jumper.

“We have to do the couples study.”

Harry looked at Louis as if he had sprouted an extra limb.

“What?”

“The couples study,” Louis rushed, pulling out the flier from his bag. “We can do it and get the money to fix your camera. Bang-boom, it’s sorted.”

“Are…Are you actually mental?” Harry disbelievingly asked.

Louis swatted him in the shoulder, “Just hear me out, yeah?”

“No,” Harry straightforwardly said, moving to walk around Louis.

“Why not?!” Louis asked, instantly falling into step next to Harry as he walked. “It would be so easy!”

“Did you miss the bit where it’s a couples study?” Harry snorted. He tightened his grip on his bag, “Surely, you’ve heard of the term before.”

“Now is not the time to be a twat, I’m trying to fix things!”
“Then fix it like an adult and earn the money on your own!”

“But –”

“No.”

Louis grabbed Harry’s shoulder and pulled him to a stop. When Harry didn’t turn around, Louis huffed out in annoyance and stepped in front of him. He settled his hands on his hips and jutted his chin upwards, waiting for Harry to look at him.

“Give me one good reason why it wouldn’t work.”

“I don’t like you,” Harry easily answered.

Louis rolled his eyes, “A better reason than that.”

“We’re not a couple, Louis!” Harry exclaimed, irises blown out as he looked over Louis’ face. “We can’t do a couples study because we,” He frantically gestured between the two of them, “Are not dating!”

“That’s why we're gonna lie,” Louis smugly said as if it was the most brilliant suggestion.

Harry folded his arms over his chest, “You want to pretend to be my boyfriend?”

Louis’ nose scrunched in distaste, “Yeah, no. Don’t say it like that.”

“I’m going home,” Harry muttered, starting to take a step forwards.

“Nope,” Louis took a step back and pushed his palm against the front of Harry’s chest. “We’re doing this.”

“No,” Harry removed Louis’ hand from him, “We are not.”

Louis obnoxiously groaned, “I thought you wanted your fuckin’ lens fixed!”

“I do!”

“Then what’s the issue?!”

Harry arched his back so he was eye-level with Louis, “I loathe you.”

“Who even says loathe anymore?” Louis bewildered. When Harry looked at him unimpressed, Louis sighed, “Just…I don’t have time around footie and class to get a job.”

“Not my problem,” Harry snipped.

“Actually, it is if you need the money.”

Harry pressed the heels of his palms against his eyelids, roughly pushing back as he let out a frustrated groan. He scrubbed a hand over his face and looked around at the different students passing them by, all oblivious to the exchange happening in front of them. With his bottom lip trapped between his teeth, Harry’s gaze settled back on Louis’ expectant one.

“The flier said we have to be living together,” Harry weakly argued.

Louis adjusted his bag over his shoulder and countered, “We just have to improvise when they’re
“Improvise?” Harry quirked his eyebrow.

When Louis nodded, Harry looked down at his feet. He scuffed his black boot against the sidewalk and mulled over Louis’ proposition. The only reason he remotely entertained the idea was because he had planned on using the new lens for filming his final thesis. He needed to have a quality reel put together so he had something to show when he moved to London and a good lens was part of that equation.

On the other hand, there were numerous flaws with the remote possibility of them faking a relationship. The most pertinent one being that Harry and Louis didn’t have the ability to act civil with each other. Let alone loving. Harry couldn’t even imagine what sort of consequences there would be if people found out they were lying. He was on a scholarship to attend university and something as idiotic as this could jeopardize everything he worked for.

With that in mind, Harry couldn’t possibly fathom why the following words tumbled out of his mouth.

“If we’re going to do this,” Harry carefully started, watching as a smug expression flitted over Louis’ face, “There is no half-arseing it.”

The corner of Louis’ mouth quirked and he nodded in agreement.

“So we’re doing this?”

“Yeah,” Harry hesitantly nodded. “We’re doing this.”
Chapter Two

Chapter Summary

Quick note because a few people asked. I will update either two or three times a week. Overall, I plan on having this gem be wrapped up in a month.

Catch me on the tumbles if your heart desires, I'm @domestic-harry

-xx Lis

“I think I did something stupid.”

Niall lolled his head against the back of their couch, his neck craned to get a better look at Louis who had just barreled through the front door. He had an opened beer bottle in one hand and a lit spliff teetering in the other. It was a welcomed visual that Louis had seen more often than not on any given Friday.

Turning back towards the episode of Bob’s Burgers playing, Niall took a strong pull from the rolled paper. Louis grumpily crossed his arms over his chest while he watched a puff of smoke spiral into the air.

“I tell you I did something stupid and your response is…Nothing?” Louis petulantly grumbled when Niall didn’t say anything. “Cheers, mate. Real nice.”

“What?” Niall mumbled against the lip of his bottle before tipping it at an angle. He loudly smacked his lips and looked back at Louis with one of his eyebrows lifted, “Was it s’posed tuh surprise me?”

“M’ being serious,” Louis’ bottom lip jutted out, the tip of his trainer resolutely scuffing against the floorboards.

“Enough with the pout,” Niall sighed and rolled his eyes. He patted his lap and gestured Louis over, “Take a pull and let’s hear it.”

After kicking off his shoes, Louis traipsed his way to the couch and unceremoniously dropped himself on Niall’s lap. A whoosh of air and a pained grunt pushed out of Niall’s diaphragm as Louis made himself comfortable. He wound up with the back of his head cushioned against Niall’s thighs, knees bent, and the soles of his feet flat against the couch.

Niall wordlessly passed Louis the spliff, his free fingers moving to card through Louis’ hair as he smoked. Louis deeply inhaled and felt the smoke settle inside his chest before he slowly let it out. Passing the spliff back to Niall, Louis rested his hands on his stomach.

“So…” Niall lightly tugged at a piece of Louis’ hair. “What’d ya do?”

“Remember Harry?” Louis started, his fingers tangling together as he looked up towards Niall.

“Pineapple?”

Louis nodded, “Yeah, that one.”
“You didn’t hit ‘im again, did you?” Niall groaned, his head knocking against the couch’s backing. “Give the poor lad a break, Tommo.”

“I didn’t!” Louis quickly defended himself. “I mean I kinda dragged him down a flight of stairs, but I didn’t hit him again!”

“Louis!” Niall flicked him in the center of his forehead. “The fuck you do that for?!?”

“Right. Well, that wasn’t even the me-doing-something-stupid bit,” Louis flinched, his gaze darting from Niall’s incredulous one to their blank ceiling.

Niall paused with his bottle an inch from his mouth, his eyes narrowing. “Should I be gettin’ prepared for the police to show up?”

“Nothing like that,” Louis whined and plucked the spliff from Niall’s fingers. He took a second hit and said around an exhale, “I mean… I don’t think you could get in police sort of trouble for lying in a case study.”

“Wait, what?” Niall coughed on a sip. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, “What case study?”

Louis took a deep breath before he quickly rushed out, “Harry and I are gonna pretend to be boyfriends for a paid couples study so I can pay him back for the lens.”

Niall was quiet, his forehead pinched for a moment before his skin smoothed out and his jaw slackened. Louis jumped as a sharp rack of laughter ripped through Niall’s throat. He immediately scrambled off his flatmate’s lap, nearly evading the lit end of the spliff when Niall doubled over in laughter. Tucking his knees to his chest, Louis kept a relatively safe distance at the other end of the couch while Niall continued to cackle.

“You – You,” Niall stammered between guffaws, his eyes reduced to thin slits while his cheeks turned ruddy.

Louis groaned and scrubbed a hand over his face, “It’s not that funny!”

That only made Niall laugh harder, his eyelashes clumping together while tears formed. Waiting for him to calm down, Louis carefully took what was left of the spliff and smoked it out. He felt his head begin to get cloudy, his own lips twitching to let out a slip of laughter.

“How d’ya plan on passing as a couple?” Niall eventually managed, his skin flushed to a rosy pigment. “From what you’ve told me, the two of yeh can’t stand each other.”

Louis slumped back into a stack of pillows with a melodramatic wail, “That’s what he said, too.”

“This was your plan?”

“Unfortunately.”

Niall snorted and took a sip of beer before asking, “Are there requirements or summat?”

Louis nodded, “We have to have been dating for at least six months –”

“Not too bad,” Niall interjected, slowly tilting his head side to side while he mulled over the information. “S’ a short enough amount of time that you wouldn’t necessarily know everything about each other.”
“Exactly,” Louis agreed.

“Alright, what else?”

“There’s an interview they do. To, like, make sure we’re legitimate or whatever.”

“Makes sense,” Niall seriously nodded. He rolled his shoulders back, “Just make sure you know the basic shit about each other and all that, uh, relationship stuff. Can’t be too hard.”

“And, um,” Louis picked at the skin by his nailbed, eyes anywhere but on Niall. “There’s sorta kinda one other little bit of a requirement.”

“How little?”

Louis’ voice pitched an octave higher as he dragged out, “Well…”

Niall defeatedly rested his forearms against his knees, “Fucks sake, what else?”

“We’re meant to be living together.”

It was quiet for a moment, the two boys staring back at each other.

And then, it wasn’t.

“How in bloody hell are you going to manage that?!”

Louis held up his hands defensively, “We’re gonna improvise!”

Niall emptied the rest of the beer bottle in a giant swig and then roughly put it on their coffee table. Louis flinched at the brash sound, his bottom lip tugged between his teeth. He watched as Niall pushed himself to his feet and began to pace across the floor with his hands on his hips.

“How can you possibly improvise living with someone?!” Niall flailed his hands.

“I don’t know!” Louis jumped off the couch, feeling panic rise in his gut. “Just like…Pretend whenever the psychology guys are around or somethin’!”

“He’s not gonna be pretend moving in here! I don’t care how pretty he is, he’s not gonna!”

“Wait, you think he’s pretty?”

“Straight, not blind,” Niall reiterated from Wednesday. He quickly ran his fingers through his hair and shook his head, “Anyways, that’s beside the point! He can’t fake live here!”

“He’s not gonna!” Louis argued. He anxiously scratched the back of his neck, “Harry said he lives alone, so…I mean, I can just keep some of my stuff at his place or something so it looks like we live together.”

Niall stopped his pacing to look at Louis, his eyebrows practically raised to his hairline, “Do you have any idea how mental you sound?”

“I’m gonna make it work,” Louis stubbornly said, overlooking the way Niall’s words mirrored Harry’s from earlier.

“Honestly, mate,” Niall shook his head, “What the fuck were you thinking?”
Covering his face with both hands, Louis mumbled, “I have no idea.”

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“Ya know, when I said that you should get involved in other activities…This wasn’t what I meant.”

Harry let out what seemed like his hundredth frustrated groan for the day. His eyes were stubbornly narrowed on a white rose, one hand securing the stem while the other quickly de-thorned the flower with a knife. After his conversation with Louis, he rounded back to the flower shop even though he wasn’t scheduled for a shift. He wordlessly pulled up a stool in the back and started scraping off the sharp thorns while Jules watched him with slight concern.

After five minutes of his ministrations, Jules hesitantly asked him what was wrong. That was all it took for Harry to spout off everything that had happened that week. With every Louis-oriented detail, he gritted his teeth and roughly dragged the knife down stem after stem.

Three buckets of roses later, Harry was still fuming.

“Could be good for you, though.”

“Yeah?” Harry paused his ministrations to look up at Jules who had been pacing in front of him for the past fifteen minutes. He scoffed, “How do you figure that?”

She stopped walking and folded her hands behind her back, “It’ll be good for your people skills.”

Harry rolled his eyes and dropped the manicured rose into a black bucket, “My people skills are fine.”

“You have one friend.”

“Which I’m now reconsidering.”

Jules raised her hands and groaned, “How d’you plan on making a living in the entertainment industry if you hate people?”

Harry frowned at that, “I don’t hate people.”

“Could ‘ave fooled me,” Jules snorted.

“I don’t!” Harry defended himself. He lowered his voice when he tacked on, “I just happen to hate him.”

“Well…Why don’t you use all those feelings an’ stuff,” Jules rolled her fingers in the air, “And use them as inspiration.”

Harry tilted his head to the side, “Inspiration?”

“Yeah,” Jules nodded. “Your inspiration, your muse. Whatever you wanna call it.”

“You think I want to use Louis as my muse?” Harry deadpanned.

“Not want to,” Jules corrected, her weight rocking from foot to foot. “But, you should. You have all this pent up – Whatever – And you should use it for your reel.”

“That’s…” Harry drawled out, his eyes slightly narrowing. “Actually not a bad idea.”
Jules crossed her arms, “Don’t sound so surprised.”

Harry stood up from the stool, his limbs cracking as they stretched out. He scratched his stomach as he looked at the mess around him. As it would appear, taking his frustration out on flowers was probably not the cleanest way of therapy. He pouted to himself and shuffled to get a broom from the supplies closet.

“Give it here,” Jules sighed when Harry returned, hand outstretched to grab the broom from him. “You go and get some sleep for your date tomorrow.”

“Not a date.”

“Fake date. Whatever,” Jules amended and rolled her eyes. “Just make sure the studio is clean.”

“Yes, mum.”

Harry pulled a well-worn leather jacket on top of his white shirt and left Manchester’s Blooms. Burrowing himself into the warm material, he started to walk home. After the seemingly one good day of weather, Manchester had returned to its naturally-unforgiving grey and windy state. Regardless, that didn’t seem to have much of an effect on the inhabitants of the city.

Streets were buzzing with already intoxicated students, everyone choosing alcohol as a gateway to celebrate the first week back after winter holidays. Harry walked past an overflowing pub, keeping his bag held tight as he gently pushed his way through the ununiformed queue. He ducked around a group of guys who sounded as if their slurred vocabulary had been run through a garbage disposal and then spat back out in nonsensical sentences.

One of the boys stumbled back into Harry, his limbs wildly flailing as he grabbed onto Harry’s shoulders to gain balance. Harry’s eyes widened because he suddenly had his hands full of a drunken stranger with a messy blonde quiff.

“Fuckin’ hell, boyo!” Blondie smattered out to the friend who pushed him. “Gonna fuckin’ get me kicked out o’ the soddin’ boozer ‘fore I even get in!”

Harry was frozen in his spot as one of the other boys teetered over with a loose-lipped, toothy smile. He had shaggy red hair and was gently prying the Irishman from Harry, his expression apologetic.

“Sorry ‘bout that!” He winced as the other boy unceremoniously elbowed Harry in the side.

“Shit,” Harry grumbled, his hand covering his lower ribs. He gave a half-hearted smile to the ginger boy, “It’s fine.”

The Irishman turned around his watery blue eyes blowing out as he looked up at Harry.

“You – Yer you!”

Harry took an uneasy step back as a sloppy grin stretched over Blondie’s face. He looked at Ginger who seemed to be just as clueless of what his friend was going on about.

“Um. I’m just – Uh, I’m going to go now,” Harry awkwardly thumbed over his shoulder and took another step back.

When Harry turned around he heard the boy yell, “See you ‘round pretty boy!”

Without looking over his shoulder, Harry quickened his steps and kept his head down. A handful of
lefts and two rights later, Harry stopped outside of his apartment building. He fumbled with his keys, slotting the smaller of the two into the deadbolt. Giving the silver doorknob a slight jiggle, he unlocked the cherry-red door and pushed it open.

Harry lived in a studio on the fifth floor. The top floor, to be exact. His safe haven was tucked behind an olive-green door that was freshly painted when his step-father, Robin, had bought the small complex two years prior. Robin’s interests were split between Harry’s mother and accumulating real-estate. The combination of both led him to not only buy a studio for Harry, but the entire building.

Since Harry didn’t “openly” communicate with him, Robin took it upon himself to buy Harry’s affection. Harry didn’t protest and he chose not to explain that the only ounce of affection he had, was divided between Anne (his mother), Gemma (his sister), and Jules. When he explained that methodology to Jules, she scoffed and called him cold-hearted. Harry didn’t readily disagree.

Flicking on a light switch by the front door, the studio was slowly illuminated by rows of copper fairy lights. The white walls were painted with a hazy glow from the miniscule bulbs, effectively enveloping the space in a cozy atmosphere. Draped along the far wall was lines of Devil’s Ivy that grew around two rectangular windows.

A make-shift kitchen morphed into a living room, wooden counterspace acting as a divider between the two. The kitchen appliances were renovated and well-used by Harry since he preferred home cooking to takeaway. A few ceramic bowls were left in the sink and he made a mental note to wash them before Louis came over.

Harry dropped his bag onto a square dining table that was positioned in the center of the kitchen area. He shrugged off his jacket and hung it on the back of one of the four wooden chairs lining the surface. Moving further into the flat, he passed a small staircase that led to a suspended bed. Hung by iron rods, his bed rested in a large glass box that reached half a foot over the surface of his mattress.

Slumping down onto a black couch, Harry toed off his scuffed boots and grabbed a remote off the coffee table. He collapsed on his side, any ambition of working on his reel diminished as he turned on the TV. After a minute into The Great British Bake Off, Harry felt his eyelids start to get heavy. Too lazy to climb into bed, Harry tucked his knees against his chest and fell asleep.

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Louis looked at the mess of clothes that were dumped on his bed, eyes narrowed in concentration as if he was solving world hunger. Groaning in defeat, he poked his head out of his doorway and glanced into Niall’s room. Niall was on his back with a wet rag over his face, continuously mumbling about a hangover that had lasted well through-out the morning and early afternoon.

For once, Louis was thankful that he didn’t go out with his best friend. He had decided spending time with Harry would be a headache enough and it would be self-destructive if he added a hangover to the mix. Niall told him he was being melodramatic. Louis responded that he didn’t know Niall knew words with so many syllables.

“What does someone wear to a conspiracy meeting?” Louis asked, mindful to keep his voice relatively low.


“This isn’t a heist, Niall.”
“Then why does it matter what ya wear?”

“Fair point.”

Louis popped back into his room, folding his arms over his chest. After another five minutes of staring at the mound of comingling fabrics, Louis decided that he shouldn’t give Harry the satisfaction of him looking nice. He smugly grinned to himself as he pulled on a pair of black joggers and a purple Adidas pullover. Slipping on a pair of thick white socks and black trainers, Louis left his room.

“Alright, pray for me,” Louis said, leaning against Niall’s doorway.

Niall slowly moved the rag from his face and raised his head to look at Louis.

“You look a bit shit.”

Louis frowned, “Could say the same for you.”

“Yeah, but…I went out,” Niall grimaced as he pushed himself into a sitting position. “Figured you would wanna look semi-decent for your semi-boyfriend.”

“Why would I do that?” Louis scrunched his nose in disgust. He shook his head and waved Niall off, “Never mind, I’m gonna be late if I stay here listening to you insult me.”

“Just looking out for you!” Niall crowed from his room while Louis walked away.

Louis rolled his eyes and grabbed his keys, wallet, and mobile from the coffee table. He opened his messages and looked at the address Harry had texted him that morning. Opening it on Google Maps, Louis left their flat and started to walk towards Harry’s place. According to the app, it was only a fifteen-minute trek.

When Louis was two streets away from Harry’s place, he hesitated outside of a quaint coffee shop. He looked in through the bay window and saw a small queue, nothing that would take too long if he went in. He contemplated buying two coffees and breakfast sandwiches, but then he realized that he didn’t even know what Harry liked. Not to mention, he didn’t even like Harry nearly enough to buy him breakfast. Frowning to himself, Louis turned away from the shop and kept walking.

He stopped outside of a building that was narrow and tall, his neck craned back as he looked to the top. Walking up to an obnoxiously red door, he tried to twist the doorknob open. When it didn’t budge, Louis dramatically exhaled to himself and pulled out his mobile.

*front door won’t open*

It only took a few seconds before Harry’s reply lit up the screen.

**That’s usually how locks work.**

“Cunting bastard,” Louis gritted out.

He was furiously typing out a snarky response when he heard movement from the other side of the door. Pausing halfway through writing the word *twat*, Louis looked up to see the door being pulled open. Harry’s frame filled the entrance and the corner of his mouth quirked when he looked down at Louis’ illuminated mobile.

Similar to Louis, Harry decided to dress moderately decent for their fake-boyfriend-rendezvous. He
wore black fitted leggings that clung to the long expanse of his legs, the thin material cutting off in the middle of his calves. Even though it was in the middle of winter, Harry’s feet were bare and a loose yellow tank top barely covered his upper body. With his hair knotted into a messy bun, he looked like a west-coast yogi that managed to get lost in England and couldn’t find his way back.

“You’re the worst,” Louis grumbled, pushing his way past Harry.

“Right, come on in,” Harry closed the door behind him. “No need to wait for an invitation like a normal person.”

“This how you treat all your boyfriends?” Louis cocked his hands on his hips and jutted his chin upwards. “Because if you’re still wonderin’ why you’re single…That’d be it, pal.”

“No,” Harry shook his head and started to climb the staircase. He paused and glimpsed over his shoulder, a smirk plastered on his face, “I save that special treatment just for you, darling.”

Louis squawked in disbelief and roughly pinched Harry in his side, “If you ever call me darling again, I’ll have your balls.”

Harry snorted and turned back around without another word. Louis trailed after him with his eyes narrowed at the center of Harry’s broad shoulders, mentally cataloguing different ways he could stage Harry’s death to look like an accident.

“Fucks sake,” Louis whined after they passed the third floor, “Couldn’t you live somewhere with a lift?”

Harry guffawed, the throaty sound reverberating in the stairwell, “For someone who studies sports, I would have thought you’d be up for a bit of physical activity.”

“This isn’t physical activity. This is legitimate torture.”

Harry halted on the fifth floor, just outside of a green door. Stopping with his hand on the doorknob, he looked over at Louis and raised an eyebrow, “You should have studied drama.”

“Actually,” Louis paused, debating if he should continue or not, “I almost did.”

“Really?” Harry’s eyes widened. His hand slipped from the doorknob, “Why didn’t you?”

Louis shrugged and leaned against the doorframe, “Not much money in that field.”

Harry frowned at that, “But you should do what’ll make you happy in the long run.”

“Being able to pay my bills will make me happy in the long run.”

“But what’s the point of anything if you’re stuck doing something you don’t like?”

Louis gave him an exaggerated eyeroll, “People who believe happiness is enough in life, are naïve.”

Harry folded his arms over his chest, “Or passionate.”

“Naively passionate,” Louis scoffed. “Even better.”

Harry opened his mouth to say something else and then snapped it shut, looking unnervingly disappointed in Louis’ response as he opened the door to his flat. Louis brushed it off, not letting Harry’s response bother him as they stepped inside. He kicked off his shoes by the door and froze when he looked into the studio.
“Is – Is your bed hanging in the air?”

“Did you want anything to drink?” Harry ignored Louis’ comment, already pulling out a mug for himself from a cabinet above the sink.

“Are we really gonna pretend that your bed isn’t fuckin’ hovering in the air?!” Louis flailed his hands, his attention still locked on the contraption.

“It’s suspended.”

“And why do you have wildlife sproutin’ off your wall?!”

Harry sighed and rested his hands on the counter, his back arched as he took a deep breath before spinning around. He held up two fingers.

“Two minutes,” Harry emphasized by wiggling his digits, “I’m giving you two minutes to rant about my studio and then you have to shut up.”

Louis mouth curled into a grin, “Do you have a timer?”

“You can’t be serious.”

“I am.”

Harry rolled his eyes and held out his mobile and opened a stopwatch app. With his finger hovering over the button, he gave Louis a weary look before he pressed it.

“Go.”

Louis immediately traipsed to the wall of ivy his fingers reaching out to touch the leaves, “Who the hell picks ivy of all things to hang on a wall?”

“One minute and forty-two seconds.”

He spun around and gestured towards the stack of books resting on a side table, “Of course you have the most pretentious book collection.” Louis picked up the top cover and read the author, “Charles Buk – Uh – What the fuck even is this?!”

“Charles Bukowski,” Harry enunciated. He looked down at his phone, “One minute and thirteen seconds.”

“And what the hell is that supposed to be?!” Louis stopped in front of a large painting mounted on the opposing wall. It was a massive canvas that was a smatter of blues, reds, and oranges. “It looks like a blind dog painted it.”

“Ever heard of abstract art?”

“Pretentious,” Louis accusingly pointed at Harry.

Harry scoffed, “Forty-five seconds.”

Louis flailed his hands towards Harry’s bed, “And that goddamn bed!”

“You’re very focused on that.”

“Why couldn’t you just have it on the ground?” Louis exasperatedly asked as he craned his neck to
look upwards. “Why is everything about you so fuckin’ ridiculous?!”

“My step-father designed it that way,” Harry shrugged and rested his hip against the counter. “It actually makes a lot of sense for space management.”

“Wait, step-dad?” Louis gaped. He vaguely gestured to the entire studio, “He – Does he own this?”


“Hold on,” Louis narrowed his eyes. “I’m not nearly done after that last bit.”

“Too bad,” Harry snipped. He started to run a kettle and looked over his shoulder, “Tea?”

“But –”

“Tea?”

Louis sighed, knowing it was a lost cause to push Harry. He nodded and sat down on the couch, nesting against the armrest. While Harry made them both a mug of tea, Louis continued to look around the studio. There were multiple nick-knacks that detailed the space and Louis felt as if he would never stop finding something new.

After a minute or two, Harry asked, “How do you take it?”

“Bit of milk.”

“Sugar?”

“Did I say sugar?”

Harry groaned, “I was just trying to be polite.”

Louis snorted, “Think we’re past that.”

With two steaming cups in hand, Harry walked over to the couch. He passed one to Louis and then sat as far as possible on the opposite end of the cushions. Louis mumbled a thank you and then lightly blew against the hot liquid.

“We’re not going to be able to make this work if there isn’t a bit of respect between us.”

Louis looked up to see Harry already watching him, his fingers splayed along the back of the couch. “I respect you –”

“You really don’t,” Harry interjected.

Louis continued as if he hadn’t been cut off, “I just don’t like you.”

Harry set his cup down and buried his head in his hands, “This won’t work.”

“It will,” Louis insisted. “We just need to be positive and lie our arses off.”

“Be positive?” Harry deadpanned, dropping his hands so he could send Louis a pointed look. Louis hummed and took a sip from the mug, pleasantly surprised that Harry could make a decent cup of tea.
“So…What now?”

“For the interview bit,” Louis started, lowering his mug, “I think we just need to know the basic stuff ‘bout each other. Probably should come up with a good story, too.”

“Like how we met?” Harry’s brows pinched together.

“Exactly.”

Harry nodded leaned forward to grab a laptop off the coffee table. Turning it on, he opened a blank document and Louis watched as he bluntly titled it: H/L Background

“Very official,” Louis bit back a smile.

“Well…We should write it down so we don’t get mixed up, yeah?” Harry responded, his head cocked to the side as he looked over at Louis.

“S’ a good idea,” Louis agreed, scooting a bit closer towards Harry so he could see the screen better.

Harry turned back towards the screen and murmured, “Thanks.”

Louis nodded, “Alright, so how did we meet?”

“Do you like flowers?”

“What are you going on about?” Louis reared back, completely taken off guard.

Harry shrugged, “I work at a flower shop. So, if you like flowers and you came in one day…We could say that’s how we met.”

“That’s boring.”

“Then you come up with something!” Harry slumped back against the couch, his cheeks tinged pink.

“Don’t get stroppy,” Louis flicked Harry’s thigh. “Just gimme a minute.”

“Fine.”

Louis laid back and folded his hands over his stomach, his eyes lacing over the strings of fairy lights that hung across the ceiling.

“I don’t think it needs to be an exciting story,” Harry grumbled under his breath.

“It does if we want them to pick us,” Louis loll’d his head to the side to look at Harry.

Harry mirrored his position, “You’re over thinking this.”

“Fine,” Louis snuffed, turning back to face forwards. “We met because I was in the flower shop. Great story. Exciting shit.”

“Louis,” Harry exhaled.

“Just write it,” Louis picked at his joggers.

Harry started typing, his fingers hesitating over the keys in the middle of a sentence. Louis’ head
snapped towards him when Harry let out a sigh and finished the last bullet. He leaned closer and felt a grin spread over his face as he read what Harry wrote.

Meeting
• When: April, 2016
• Where: Manchester Blooms
• How: We met when you came in to buy flowers for a blind date that night. You were absolutely useless when it came to knowing anything about flowers so I offered to help. With relentless convincing from me, you left the shop without the flowers and with my number instead.

“Better?” Harry asked.

Louis beamed at him, “Much better.”

Harry grinned and looked back at the screen, “Good.”

“Why did you pick April?”

“We’re supposed to be living together, yeah?” Harry gestured between himself and Louis with his thumb. When Louis nodded, he continued, “I know they said a minimum of six months, but…I would never live with a boyfriend after that short of time.”

Louis smirked, “But ten months is fine?”

“Well we can’t exactly make it too long, now can we?” Harry rolled his eyes. “I thought ten months was reasonable.”

“Maybe we should say five years cos we bicker like an old married couple.”

“If this is what marriage is going to be like, count me out.”

Louis laughed and finished off the rest of his tea with a loud smack of his lips. He tucked his knees to his chest looked at the slew of photographs that were pinned on the bathroom door.

“We should take a picture,” Louis decided.

“What?”

He pointed towards the pictures, “Your hobby is photography stuff, yeah?”

Harry slowly nodded, following Louis’ train of sight, “Technically, film.”

“Now’s not the time to be technical,” Louis scoffed.

Harry laughed at that, “Actually, I think now is the best time to be technical.”

“Whatever,” Louis huffed out on an exhale. He nodded towards the pictures, “If we were dating, you’d have pictures of me on there.”

“Don’t flatter yourself,” Harry snorted.

“You know m’ right,” Louis bragged.

Harry’s bottom lip was trapped between his teeth and Louis could see it written over his pained expression, that he knew Louis’ idea made perfect sense.
“Come on, don’t be a prat,” Louis pressed as pulled out his mobile. He squawked when Harry plucked the device from his fingers, “What the fuck, Harry?! It’s just a picture!”

“If we’re doing this, we’re doing it properly.”

Without further explanation, Harry stood up from the couch and walked towards the kitchen table. Louis scooted forward while he watched Harry open a bag that was rested on a chair. Harry picked up the bag and returned to the couch, settling it on his lap as he unzipped it.

“Oh, no,” Louis shook his head as Harry pulled out a very official looking camera. He cut the air with both of his hands, “Absolutely not.”

“What?” Harry reared back at Louis’ outburst. “This was your idea!”

“Yeah, like a grainy picture taken from me mobile! Not something like that!” Louis smacked Harry’s arm.

“Louis, look at those pictures,” Harry tried to calmly explain, the tone of his voice waverling as he attempted to stay collected. “I wouldn’t hang a picture if it was grainy. It would stand out like a sore thumb.”

“But –”

“You seem plenty confident,” Harry narrowed his eyes. “So…What’s the problem?”

“Um,” Louis gestured to himself as if it was obvious.

“Should I know what that means?”

“I look like shit,” Louis grumbled, folding his arms over his chest like a child.

Harry gave him an obvious once over, his eyes muddled with confusion, “You look okay.”

“I look okay?”

“Yeah…”

“Was that supposed to make me feel better, Harry? Or are you just that shit as consoling others.”

“Oh my god,” Harry scrubbed a hand over his face and stood from the couch. “You said you look like shit, so I said you look fine. What’s the issue here, princess?”

“Princess?!” Louis incredulously shouted. He pushed himself off the couch and stepped in front of Harry, “What guy wants his fake-boyfriend to say that he looks just ‘okay’ before they immortalize a moment together?”

“Oh, Louis,” Harry gently gripped Louis’ shoulders, “I don’t know how else I can possibly break it to you that we are not really dating. None of that applies here.” He scrunched his nose, “And, immortalize? Really?”

Louis swatted him away, “But we have to pretend! Which means that I would never take a high-quality picture looking like a hobo that just managed to get his first pair of trainers!”

“Christ,” Harry muttered to himself while he pinched the bridge of his nose. “Alright, fine,” he lowered his hand and glared at Louis, “No camera.”
Louis’ scowl was instantly replaced with a smug grin.

Harry shook his head in disbelief, “You always get your way, don’t you?”

“Pretty much,” Louis said with an unabashed nod.

“Did you already send the email to Liam for the study?”

“Yeah, why?”

“So it’s too late to back out?”

Louis thwacked him again, “Oh, hush. It’s not that bad.”

Harry grimaced as he rubbed his bicep, “Yeah, it really is.”

“Well, get over it,” Louis breezily said. “We can take the picture tomorrow when I look a bit more like meself.”

“Tomorrow?” Harry frowned. “What’s tomorrow?”

“We’re not ready for an interview,” Louis said as if it was obvious. He folded his arms, “We need to practice.”

Harry did his best not to groan, Louis would give him that much as he watched the muscles of Harry’s jaw clench.

“Did they say when the interview would be?” Harry asked once his face had stopped twitching.

Louis nodded, “They’ll come over Wednesday after class. Figured it would be best since we’re already gonna be together.”

Harry’s eyes widened, “And at what point were you going to mention that?”

“I’m mentioning it now,” Louis cocked his hand on his hip.

“Louis,” Harry let out a frustrated puff of air. He pressed the heels of his palms against his eyelids, his nostrils flaring. “This is my home. A bit of warning and consideration would be appreciated.”

“Fine,” Louis rolled his eyes. “I’m sorry.”

Harry’s hands slid down his face and he peered at Louis, “Very convincing.”

“It’s as good as you’re gonna get from me.”

“I could use a drink,” Harry muttered.

Louis’ eyes lit up, “Wait, that’s not a bad idea.”

“I meant in general. Not at,” Harry paused as he checked his mobile, “Four in the afternoon.”

Louis waved him off, “Time’s just a concept.”

“That’s – No,” Harry shook his head, his countenance filled with bewilderment.

Without preamble, Louis strode towards the fridge and pulled open the shimmery silver appliance.
“Hey!” Harry called after him, quickly on Louis’ heels. “You can’t just go through my stuff!”

“It’s my fake home,” Louis responded as he started to pull out boxed white wine from the bottom shelf. He turned around with a proud grin as he held up the box, “Let’s do it.”

Harry gave him a withering glower, but must have decided that it was best not to argue with Louis on his lack of grounds. He pushed Louis to the side with a bump of his hip and reached towards the cabinet. Grabbing two wineglasses, Harry knocked the door shut and walked back to the couch.

“There’s a good lad,” Louis praised.

“Shut up.”

They settled back in their previous spots on the couch and Louis excitedly bounced in his seat when Harry filled their glasses with a generous amount of wine. Plucking the proffered wine from Harry’s extended hand, they clinked their glasses together. Louis tipped the glass against his mouth and took a generous pull of the sweet wine.

“We should play a game,” Louis decided once he lowered his glass. “Break the ice.”

“If there was ever any ice,” Harry lifted a brow, “I can assure you it’s been broken.”

“You know what I mean,” Louis whined.

“I don’t,” Harry bluntly said.

Louis chose to overlook Harry’s hesitancy, “Never have I ever.”

“No.”

“C’mon,” Louis jutted his foot out to kick Harry’s thigh. “It’ll be good.”

Harry shook his head, “I doubt that game will reveal anything that Liam and Zayn might ask us.”

“Never have I ever,” Louis drawled out, earning himself a pointed glare from Harry, “Been to a music festival.”

Louis could see the tangible hesitancy that flicked over Harry’s expression.

“You have!” Louis crowed, blatantly pleased. He lightly tipped Harry’s glass to his mouth, “Take a sip, babes.”

Harry frowned, “Don’t call me that.”


“Loads,” Harry sarcastically said.

Harry took a sip and Louis took it as a personal win.

“What festival did you go to?” Louis pressed, trying to keep his tone conversational.

Harry looked into his wineglass, eyes trained on the subtle sway of the liquid, “Leeds.”

Louis grinned at that, “That’s on my bucket list.”

The corner of Harry’s mouth slightly quirked, “It was incredible. Gross, but incredible.”
“Yeah, the whole no-showering-thing probably isn’t for me,” Louis grimaced before he took a generous gulp.

Harry looked up at Louis with a glint in his eyes, “Would add to the hobo aesthetic you’ve got going on.”

Louis’ jaw dropped as a surprised laugh pulled from his throat. He poked Harry again with his toe, “Cheeky!”

Harry grinned into his next drink, eyes flickering away from Louis’.

“Alright, your turn.”

“Never have I ever,” Harry’s brows scrunch together before they smoothed out and his eyes widened in delight, “Hit someone with a football.”

“Really?” Louis deadpanned.

Harry bit back a grin as he nodded, leaning forward to tip Louis’ glass in the same manner as Louis had done to him.

Louis pushed him away, “M’ going, hold on.”

He took a sip.

“Never have I ever been out of the country.”

Harry didn’t raise his glass.

“I would have figured you’d be all over that sort of traveler thing,” Louis said in surprise as he rolled his fingers in the air.

“Yeah. I mean, I want to,” Harry fidgeted with the stem of his glass. “I need to save money to move, first. Then I’ll travel”

“You want to move?” Louis frowned, sitting up further. “Where?”

Harry crossed one leg over the other and settled into the couch, “I’ll give you one guess.”

“You study film, yeah?” Louis checked.

“I do,” Harry answered, amusement lacing over his voice.

Louis tugged his bottom lip between his pointer-finger and thumb as he scrutinized Harry as if it would reveal the right answer.

“Alright, film,” Louis mumbled aloud to himself. He tuck his feet underneath him, “LA?”

Harry’s eyes widened to a comical degree, a dimple dipping into his cheek. And, alright, that was a new discovery for Louis.

“Los Angeles?” Harry laughed and shook his head. “Let’s aim a bit more realistically.”

Louis pouted, “Don’t laugh, that’s where all the film people are.”

“Was a good guess,” Harry reassured him before a smirk tugged his lips. “Just the wrong one.”
“Well are you gonna to tell me where?” Louis impatiently huffed.

“Nope.”

“Harry! Come on, that’s how the game is played!”

He snorted, “No it’s not!”

“Please?”

“Fine,” Harry said before he took another gulp. “London.”

“Ah,” Louis winced at himself. “Probably should have guessed that first.”

“Probably,” Harry toothily smiled.

“Whatever,” Louis took a generous sip and then cleared his throat. “Your turn.”

“Never have I ever been in trouble with the law.”

Louis glared at Harry’s almost expectant gaze, “I feel attacked.”

Harry’s head lolled back while he laughed and Louis grumbled to himself as he took a sip.

“What happened?” Harry asked once he calmed down from his fit of laughter.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Louis snipped.

“I would. That’s why I asked.”

Louis rolled his eyes, “During fresher’s week, I might have accidentally stolen a dog.”

Harry jerked forward, nearly choking on wine as he sputtered out, “How do you accidentally steal a dog?!”

“I was absolutely pissed out of me mind,” Louis groaned, embarrassment flushing his cheeks. “All I remember was seeing this little pup in someone’s garden and thinking that I’ve never had a dog before.”

“So you just took him?!” Harry incredulously flailed his hands.

“That’s what I’ve been told,” Louis groaned. He slapped Harry’s chest as another rack of laughter poured out of the boy’s mouth, “St – Stop laughing! S’not funny!”

Louis’ own argument was diminished as he broke off into his own spout of laughter.

Harry wiped a tear from his eye, “Remind me to keep any of my future pets far away from you.”

“Probably for the best,” Louis giggled, finishing his glass on a large gulp.

Leaning forward, Harry re-filled their glasses and passed a full one back to Louis.

“Cheers,” Louis nodded. “Alright, hmm…Never have I ever been walked in on.”

Harry was flushed scarlet as he took a substantial drink from his glass. Louis’ eyes were blown out because a part of him had expected Harry to be inexperienced when it came to sex. It was probably based off the fact that he didn’t seem to enjoy the company of others. Or possibly, it was just Louis’
company he didn’t particularly warm to.

Wiping the back of his hand over his mouth, Harry continued the game, “Never have I ever had a boyfriend.”

Louis held his hand to his chest, “Well that’s just fuckin’ disrespectful.”

Harry rolled his eyes, “A real one.”

“Ah, got me there,” Louis cheers himself and took a large sip. He tilted his head to the side, “Why haven’t you?”

“Never wanted one,” Harry simply said.

“Surely there’s been someone you’ve wanted to date,” Louis pressed.

Harry easily shook his head, seemingly non-bothered, “No.”

“Have you ever liked anyone?”

“No.”

Louis’ eyes widened, “Never? Not even a little crush?”

Harry seemed to find Louis’ bewilderment entertaining, a present grin smacked on his face as he shook his head.

“Are you aromantic?”

“Possibly,” Harry shrugged.

“Interesting,” Louis hummed into his glass. When Harry’s mouth turned downwards, Louis quickly tacked on, “I didn’t mean that in a judgmental way, I swear.”

“Your turn,” Harry said, pushing past Louis’ comment.

“Uh,” Louis drawled out. “Never have I ever…Had a threesome.”

Much to Louis’ surprise, Harry lifted his glass.

“What the fuck?” Louis sat up straighter. “Are you some undercover nympho or summat?”

“You do know a nymphomaniac is a woman, right?” Harry cocked his head to the side.

“That’s – That’s completely aside the point!” Louis stammered.

Harry snorted, “No, Louis. I am not a nympho.”

“I’ll be the judge of that,” Louis chirped without much thought.

When Harry’s eyes widened and his pouty lips parted, Louis realized the connotation of his words. His neck flushed pink and he felt himself choke on an explanation.

“No! I – Shit.”

Harry took another drink and Louis felt frustratingly helpless as he mirrored the action. Sweet white wine was definitely coursing through his blood by that point, happily making itself home as he
started to feel the buzz trill through him. Louis was left in the tipsy mindset where his skin felt heated and his mind slightly fluffy.

“Anyways,” Harry laughed.

“It’s your turn smart arse.”

“Never have I ever been in love.”

Louis didn’t raise his glass.

“Cheers to that,” Harry leaned forwards with his glass tilted towards Louis.

Louis smirked and knocked their glasses together, “Cheers.”

There was a lull between them and Louis racked over different questions that Liam and Zayn might ask them. Obviously, he had never been in that position before where he had to prove the validity of a relationship. How were people tested on being a couple? Was there a grading scale?

“What d’ya think they’re gonna ask us?” Louis asked, turning his head to face Harry.

Harry shrugged, “Your guess is as good as mine.”

“When’s our anniversary?”

“Uh…Well if we met in April,” Harry drawled out, his bottom lip jutted out. He shook his head, “You’re the one with experience here, I have no idea how relationship timelines work.”

“Well I don’t know either!” Louis defensively snuffed. He tried to think back to past experience, “I guess…We probably dated a month or two before he asked?”

Harry looked at him unimpressed, “Are you asking me or telling me?”

Foregoing an answer, Louis took a sip of wine.

“How about,” Harry elongated his drawl as he set his laptop back on the tops of his thighs to open their document, “We say June?”

Louis nodded, “Alright, June.”

“What day?”

“First?”

Harry lifted an eyebrow, “The first? That’s like…The most obvious day.”

“I don’t think they’re gonna question why you asked me on the first!”

“Hold on a minute,” Harry held up his hand. “What makes you think that I’d be the one to ask?”

“You were the one flirting with me at the flower shop.”

“Yeah, but you left with my number.”

“Because you pushed me into canceling my date.”

“You didn’t have to say yes!”
Louis glared at Harry, “Are we really gonna fight about our hypothetical meeting?”

“No,” Harry spat.

Louis stuck his tongue out at Harry, “Good.”

“Great.”

“Excellent.”

“Perfect.”

Harry gritted his teeth, “For once, please, shut the fuck up.”

“And to think,” Louis fake pouted, “We were doing so well.”

“Alright,” Harry grumbled and stood to his feet. He teetered slightly as he pointed to the door, “Think that was enough for one day.”

“Are you kicking me out?” Louis gaped, his chin jutted upwards to look at Harry.

“I am,” Harry nodded. He walked towards the door and hauled it open, “Thanks for drinking my wine. Now please leave.”

Louis gritted his teeth and got off the couch. He made a show of picking up his wineglass and downing the remainder of the wine.

“Y’know,” Louis crowed as he grabbed Harry’s glass, “I’m still parched.”

Harry’s jaw was slack as he watched Louis finish the rest of his wine with an embellished hum. Putting down the glass, Louis obnoxiously beamed at Harry and then strode towards the doorway. He walked straight past Harry and into the corridor. His mind was slightly hazy from the wine, but that didn’t stop him from trotting down the staircase in haste as he heard Harry yell after him.

Once he got outside, he flinched at the fact that it was still bright outside and he was already on his way to being drunk. Fishing out his mobile, Louis stepped away from the door and called Niall.

Niall picked up after two rings, “That was longer than expected.”

“Niall,” Louis whined, scuffing his shoe against the pavement. “Walk me home.”

“Are…Louis, are you drunk?” Niall laughed.


“Alright, alright,” Niall grumbled and Louis could hear him shuffling around on the other line. “Send me the address and I’ll meet ya.”

“Thank you,” Louis cooed.

He hung up and fumbled to send Niall his location.

“Is he coming?”

Louis whipped around, nearly toppling over when he saw Harry towering behind him.

“Fuckin’ hell!” Louis held his hand over his heart as he caught his breath. “Give a man a
warning!”

“You nearly fell down a flight of stairs,” Harry rested his head against the doorframe.

Louis narrowed his eyes, “Were you looking out for my well-being, Styles?”

“No,” Harry scoffed. “I just can’t imagine my step-father would appreciate blood in his stairwell.”

“Dickhead,” Louis grumbled, turning his back to Harry.

“And maybe I wanted to make sure you were okay.”

Louis looked over his shoulder, “Doubtful.”

“I mean it,” Harry faintly shrugged.

“Oh,” Louis dumbly said.

“I mean if you die, who’s going to pay for the lens?”

Louis groaned, “We were having such a nice moment!”

“Oi! Louis!”

Harry was already walking back inside as Niall rounded the corner, Louis’ attention whipping between both people.

“Get home safe. I’ll see you tomorrow, Louis,” Harry said before shutting the door.

Louis was still staring at the door when Niall jogged to his side and immediately wrapped his arm over Louis’ shoulders. Louis fell into his side and let Niall direct them back to their flat.

“So…How’d it go?” Niall asked.

Louis frowned at the question, his mind muddled from the torrential course of events that ranged from every emotion possible. He looked at Niall’s expectant gaze and shook his head, his lips parted a touch.

“I honestly have no idea.”
Chapter Three

Here’s a link to questions I found from other studies. Fill them out and bring your answers when you come over.

*r u serious?*

Yes.

*we can’t just talk about them like…idk…normal people?*

Doubtful.

*have i mentioned ur a twat?*

Not today, no.

*i hate u*

The feeling is mutual.

****

Harry steeled himself with a deep inhale through his nose, his fingers clutched around the doorknob. As he exhaled through his mouth, he pulled open the front door to his building. Before he had a chance to open his mouth, Louis was already pushing himself past Harry with brunt elbows and pointed fingers.

“It’s fuckin’ freezing,” Louis whined, slapping a piece of paper against Harry’s chest. “And ten in the mornin’ is too early for this.”

“Hello, Louis. Lovely to see you, too,” Harry grumbled as he pulled the paper from his chest. His eyebrows knitted together as he looked over the page, “Hold on…You actually did the questions?”

Louis was already trudging up the stairs, his nimble fingers busy unwrapping a maroon scarf from his neck. He paused halfway through a step to glance over his shoulder at Harry, “Don’t look so surprised.”

Harry shrugged and followed two steps behind him, “Didn’t expect you to listen to me.”

“Yeah, well,” Louis huffed and turned back around to continue climbing the steps. “Don’t get used to it.”

“Don’t worry,” Harry scoffed, “I won’t.”

They made their way into Harry’s studio, the soothing fragrance of lavender emanating from a line of candles that burned along the windowsill. Harry grabbed two mugs from the cabinet while Louis tugged off his jacket and got settled on the couch. Starting the kettle, Harry paused when he looked over to see Louis tucking himself against the corner of the couch. His black vans were already kicked off and his jean clad legs were folded to his chest.

Louis eyes were trained on a piece of paper Harry left on the cushion. His tongue darted out in concentration as he read over Harry’s answered question, seemingly determined to absorb all of the
information poured onto the page. He fistad the cuffs of his grey cable-knit jumper, pulling the material over his fingers while he read.

Without thought, Harry grabbed his camera from its perch on the counter. He turned it on and held the sight to his eye. He tapped a miniscule red button and began to film, gently twisted the lens to bring Louis into focus. Underneath the glow of the fairy lights, Louis looked eerily ethereal where he sat. The thick sloop of his eyelashes casted a shadow against his prominent cheekbones and his skin was golden as if he was personified sunshine. From his position behind the lens, Harry could admit that Louis was objectively beautiful.

When the kettle began to impatiently whistle, Louis’ head snapped up towards the kitchen. Harry filmed the dumbfounded expression that painted Louis’ countenance when he noticed the camera. Harry narrowed the sight in against the blue of the other boy’s eyes, capturing the exact moment his cerulean eyes flashed like a lightning rod spearing into the ocean.

“The fuck are you doing?” Louis’ browed pinched while his eyes narrowed, any residual trace of softness diminished into the memory of Harry’s camera.

Tapping the red button once more, Harry sighed and lowered the camera. He turned it off and carefully set it back on the surface. He reached the kettle and made two teas, one with milk and the other with sugar. Louis still had his glare fixated on Harry as he settled across from him, passing over the mug of tea with a splash of milk in it.

“Explain yourself,” Louis demanded before he made any movement to drink his tea.

“You wanted pictures,” Harry shrugged. He blew the steam away from his mug, “I’ll take a still from the video and get it printed.”

“Yeah, but – Wait,” Louis’ shook his head. “Video?”

Harry easily admitted, “My coworker thinks you could make an interesting addition to my reel.”

“What the hell, Harry?!” Louis leaned forward and smacked Harry’s shoulder. His blue eyes bore into Harry’s nonplussed expression, “You can’t just record someone without their permission!” Louis groaned and leaned back, “It’s creepy and a bit fucked.”

“I didn’t think it would be any different than a picture,” Harry exhaled. He rolled his eyes when Louis looked unimpressed by his response. Schooling his expression, he put his hand over his chest and genuinely said, “Alright, you’re right. I should have asked. I’m sorry.”

Louis looked even more overwhelmed that Harry apologized, his eyes widening and his lips furled. He shook his head, “Wait, you’re apologizing that easily?”

“I was wrong.” Harry acknowledged, unsure why Louis was looking at him with an almost pained expression. “Shocking as it might be,” Harry carefully started, “I’m not actually a dick. Or a twat, as you like to call me.”

Louis’ gaze raked over Harry’s face as if he was sizing him up, unsure how to gauge Harry’s response. He eventually nodded and took a sip from his cup. Harry noticed that he had the same staggered expression as the day before; seemingly impressed that Harry could manage a proper brew. He hadn’t decided if Louis’ reaction made him feel insulted or proud.

“So…” Louis drawled out when he set his mug down. He picked up the sheet of paper and tilted his head to the side, “Do you wanna go over them together?”
Harry traced the tip of his finger around the mug and eventually nodded, “Yeah, that works.”

“Allright, question one,” Louis announced with a loud vibrato that left Harry’s ears ringing. “Where is your family from?” His eyes narrowed as he roamed over Harry’s answer, “Cheshire?”

Harry nodded and looked over Louis’ sheet, “Doncaster. Makes sense with the accent.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Louis quickly snipped.

“That… You sound like you’re from Doncaster…” Harry slowly said as if it was the most obvious thing.

Louis had the decency to look a tad embarrassed as his cheeks tinged pink.

“Oh.”

Harry rolled his eyes, “Question two, do you have any siblings?” His eyes widened, “Six?!” He looked up at Louis with a slack jaw, “You have six siblings?!”

Louis nodded, “It’s me, Charlotte, Félicité, Phoebe, Daisy, Ernest, and Doris.”

“Quite the handful,” Harry mumbled as he jotted down the five names next to Louis’ answer. “How old are they?”

“Lottie is eighteen, Fiz is sixteen,” Louis’ nose scrunched in concentration as he continued to rattle off ages, “Phoebe and Daisy are twelve. Ernie and Doris just turned two.”

Harry paused his writing and his head tilted to the side, “Two sets of twins?”

Louis nodded and took a sip from his mug. He looked at Harry’s answer for the same question, “One older sister named Gemma.” His voice lowered as he quietly added, “Pretty name.”

“It is,” Harry agreed.

“Guess your mum stopped trying to get creative after her,” The corner of Louis’ mouth quirked as a glint flickered over his eyes. “Harry is a boring name.”

A flush flooded Harry’s neck and he sat up straighter, “Is not.”

“Unless its short for Harold, it is.”

“It’s not short for anything.”

Louis snorted, “Then it’s boring.”

Harry’s knuckles bulged white as his grip tightened around the pen.

“Look at you,” Louis jeered, sitting up on his haunches. “You get all offended so easily.”

“You are single-handedly trying to ruin my life.”

Louis cackled, “Look who’s bein’ dramatic now!”

“Yeah, well,” Harry grumbled and defensively folded his arms over his chest, “You’re rubbing off on me.”

“You wish,” Louis winked and made a crude gesture with his curled fist.
Harry narrowed his eyes, “You’re worse than a perverted teenager.”

“I’m fun,” Louis daintily placed his palm over his heart. He pointed his index finger at Harry, “You should try it sometime.”

“Pass,” Harry snorted, looking back down at the paper. “What’s your career goal?” Harry mumbled, his eyebrows pinched together in disbelief. He incredulously looked back up at Louis, “Did you seriously put ‘N/A’ for career goal?”

Louis shrugged, “I dunno what I want to do yet.”

“You have no idea?” Harry incredulously asked. “How do you not know? I’ve had mine set out for…Well, years.”

Harry had known that he wanted to enter the film industry since he was a young teen. Probably even before then. Of course, he couldn’t predict every little detail about his future, but at least he knew what he wanted to do. The idea of not knowing was a completely foreign and terrifying concept. And yet, there Louis was, completely unaffected by uncertainty.

“It’s not like I graduate tomorrow,” Louis bristled, his expression souring. He rolled his eyes and picked up his mug, fingers angrily gripping the porcelain, “Lay off your pedestal a bit, mate.”

Harry’s nose scrunched, “I don’t put myself on a pedestal.”

“No, you just put yourself above me,” Louis cocked his eyebrow.

“I never said that,” Harry frowned.

Louis scoffed, “Maybe not directly.”

“I don’t think I’m better than you, Louis,” Harry sincerely said, resting his elbows on top of his knees. He took of his ring and fidgeted with the band of silver between his fingers, “I – We’re just very different.”

“You don’t say,” Louis muttered.

Harry pressed on, ignoring Louis’ tone, “It’s just hard for me, personally, to understand not having a plan.”

Louis’ eyed him curiously, “Are you one of those people who hates spontaneity?”

His gut reaction was to deny it, but Louis already looked as if he knew the answer. Harry minutely lifted his shoulders and looked across the room, locking his attention on the blank television screen.

“Thought so,” Louis mumbled and then quickly pushed himself to his feet. He put the mug down and picked up his scarf, wrapping it back around your neck. Louis glimpsed at Harry, “Well, come on then.”

“What’re you doing?” Harry nervously asked, his skin starting to itch as Louis shrugged on his coat.

“We’re being spontaneous,” Louis declared, resting his hands on his hips.

A surprised laugh shot out of Harry. He shook his head dug his heels into the floorboards.

“No. Definitely not.”
Louis wrapped his slim fingers around Harry’s wrists and roughly pulled backwards. Harry stumbled forwards, nearly knocking Louis over into the coffee table. He wrapped his fingers over Louis’ wrists and stabilized the other boy, both their eyes wide as they locked onto each other. Two inches separated their faces, Louis’ breath fanning over Harry’s neck.

Looking down at their hands still clutched around each other, Harry felt heat prick the tips of his ears. Almost as quickly as they touched, Louis was pulling away and squeezing past Harry’s frame.

“Right,” Louis cleared his throat, slowly pacing backwards towards the door. “Throw on a jacket.”

“No,” Harry shook his head.

“Come on,” Louis whined, his tone pinched and an octave higher than usual. “Just trust me, yeah?”

Harry’s eyes widened, “Trust you?!”

“Yes, Harry,” Louis tugged on his trainers. “Trust,” He huffed as his heel slipped into the shoe, “Something we’re gonna need to work on.”

“But,” Harry tugged on his bottom lip, his other hand folding over his stomach. “What’re we doing?”

Louis picked up Harry’s black pea coat from one of the kitchen chairs and determinedly strode towards Harry. He pushed the material in Harry’s hands and expectantly crossed his arms.

“You’ll see,” Louis vaguely answered. “Now put on the fuckin’ coat. We’re going.”

Harry’s fingers clutched the jacket, not moving a for a moment before he slowly slipped it on. Louis’ mouth curled in satisfaction and then he turned on his heel. He picked up Harry’s camera with more delicacy than Harry knew he was capable of.

“I’ll even make you a compromise,” Louis slid the woven neck strap over his head. He kept a secure hand on the base of the camera and the lens, “I’ll let you film me if you go along with being spontaneous today.”

Harry buttoned his jacket and nervously shifted his weight from his right to his left foot, “But, where are we even going?”

“Harry,” Louis exasperatedly groaned. He opened the front door and tilted his head towards the corridor, “Just go with it.”

With knots in his stomach and a sense of premature regret, Harry ran his fingers through his hair with a sigh.

“Fine.”

Louis beamed, his teeth poking into his bottom lip as Harry put on a pair of boots and followed him out the door. Harry felt himself flinch when Louis skipped a few steps down the stairs, his camera loosely swinging from its place around Louis’ neck. He trailed behind Louis and did his best to bite back comments about the way Louis resembled the neighborhood children that Harry used to babysit.

When they got outside, Harry shoved his hands into his pockets and fell into step by Louis’ side. Louis was practically vibrating with frenetic energy as they walked, his lips tilted in a private smile as they rounded the corner. Harry couldn’t help the butterflies that started to flutter in his abdomen from
Louis’ infectious grandeur. Of course, he would never admit that aloud.

“So,” Harry drawled out when they paused at the bus stop on Harry’s street. He glimpsed at Louis from the corner of his eyes, “Where to?”

Louis smirked at Harry and stepped forward as the bus pulled up, “Pull out your student card.”

The pair shuffled onto the bus and took two empty seats in the middle section. Harry sat by the window and folded his hands in his lap as Louis slid into the aisle seat. The bus jerked as it pulled away from the stop and veered into traffic.

Harry looked out the window, his foot rapidly tapping against the floor as they drove through the city. He felt nerves trilling through him as they passed by the two next stops without Louis saying a word as to where they were going. Suddenly, Louis gripped Harry’s knee and he whipped his head towards the contact.

“Calm down,” Louis mumbled and for once, his tone wasn’t laced with sass. He squeezed Harry’s leg and then pulled his hand away, “M’ not gonna kill you or anything.”

Harry laughed and lightly shouldered Louis, “Very reassuring.”

Louis turned away from him, but Harry could see the corner of his mouth was pulled upwards.

After another ten minutes, Louis stood up and walked towards the front of the bus. Harry scrambled after him, frowning as they stopped in front of Piccadilly Station. When the doors opened, Louis hopped off the bus and flicked Harry’s camera on as he turned around. Louis laughed and aimed the lens towards Harry’s dumbstruck expression as he climbed off the platform.

“You look like a startled deer,” Louis snickered as he took a step backwards.

Harry glared at the lens, “Do you even know what you’re doing?”

Louis shrugged and pulled the sight from his eye. He looked down at the screen, “It’s blinking red… So, I’m either recording or it’s gonna blow up.”

“Give me that before you break it,” Harry sighed and reached out for the camera.

Louis quickly jerked away, “Nope, I get to record this bit.”

“This bit?” Harry grimaced as they closed in on the train station.

“Yes, this bit,” Louis beamed and led the way inside.

Even though Harry had lived in Manchester for the past three years, he had never been inside Piccadilly. The main reason being, he never traveled anywhere. He always figured that he would travel the country when he moved to London and completed his original goal of getting to the city. Standing inside the vast glass dome, Harry wondered why he ever chose to wait.

There were people bustling across the white tiled flooring, pushing their way to and from the different platforms. Harry’s head lolled backwards as he looked up towards the glass paneled ceiling that arched high above the tracks. He was shocked to see just how many people were flooded throughout the space on a Sunday morning. His fingers itched to catalogue every detail of the frenzied travelers.

“You look lost.”
Harry turned away from the flickering names of cities that were being projected on a massive screen. Louis was faced towards him with the camera raised, apparently having been documenting Harry’s overwhelmed state. His legs were spread and his tongue poked out in concentration while he twisted the lens.

“I feel it,” Harry admitted on a quiet laugh.

Louis’ forehead creased, “Have you never been here?”

Harry shook his head, “Never been on a train.”

“What?!” Louis practically yelled, his voice ricocheting throughout the station. “You plan on moving to London to be a big ol’ film maker and you’ve never even been on a train?!!”

“You say that like the two things are even remotely related,” Harry rolled his eyes, unable to stop the laughter that seeped into his tone from Louis’ stunned countenance.

“Well, Harold –”

“Harry.”

“– Today is your lucky day,” Louis pressed on. He grinned up at Harry, “You’re going on your first train.”

Harry frowned, “No, I’m not.”

Louis turned away from him and swiftly strode towards a kiosk, calling over his shoulder, “Oh yes you are!”

“Louis!” Harry scurried after him. Louis was already flicking through train schedules when Harry stopped next to him. “No,” Harry shook his head, “We – I mean. No, we can’t just go on a train!”

“And why not?” Louis chirped, eyes never leaving the screen.

“Because,” Harry huffed, his fingers nervously twisting in his pockets. “We don’t have a plan or –”

Louis cut him off, “One or two?”

“What?” Harry reared back, feeling more than overwhelmed.

“Pick a number,” Louis turned towards Harry. He lifted his eyebrow, “One or two?”

Roughly scrubbing a hand over his face, Harry shook his head, “What’re you going on about?”

“One or two, Harry?” Louis impatiently said.

“Fuck,” Harry groaned. “Uh, I don’t know…Two?”

Louis’ eyes twinkled underneath the florescent lighting, “Excellent choice. I’ve never been to Liverpool.”

“Liverpool?!” Harry shouted, his eyes bulging out as Louis pulled out a credit card and stuck the chip into the kiosk. He swatted Louis’ side, “We’re not going to Liverpool!”

“Actually,” Louis drawled out as two tickets dispensed from the kiosk. He held up the tickets and waved them in front of Harry’s face, “We’re going to Liverpool in about three minutes.”
Louis wrapped his fingers around Harry’s wrist and started to run. Harry stumbled behind him, letting the smaller boy weave through the crowd of people. His heart thundered inside his chest as they sprinted to the platform. A giddy grin found its way on Harry’s face as the train’s whistle pierced throughout the station, signaling that it was about to leave. Louis stopped at the last compartment of the silver train, hauling Harry to a standstill with his hand still firmly gripped around Harry’s wrist.

“Tickets?” A short guard asked, his thick mustache twitching as he watched Harry and Louis’ labored breaths.

“Here,” Louis huffed out, passing over the tickets.

Harry shifted his weight as the guard looked them over and then glimpsed back at the boys. When the guard nodded and passed back the tickets, Harry felt a rush of endorphins surge through his body. He felt light and almost euphoric as he trailed after Louis into the compartment. Honestly, Harry felt younger than he had in years.

Louis let go of Harry’s wrist to walk through the aisle of lushly ruby seats. Harry looked over the rows of passengers, a few wearing bored expressions while others happily chatted with their company. There were two empty seats towards the front of the compartment, Louis choosing the window seat that go around. Harry sat down and thrummed his fingers over his thighs as the train lurched forward.

Angling himself with his back to the window, Louis kicked off his trainers. He pulled his knees to his chest and looked at Harry. His expression was warmer than usual as his eyes raked over Harry’s expression.

“What’s with the look?” Harry slightly narrowed his eyes.

Louis shrugged, “Spontaneity suits you.”

Harry looked down at his lap, feeling his cheeks inexplicably warm with blood rush. His teeth nipped at his bottom lip, embarrassingly tugging his smile back.

Decidedly deflecting the compliment, Harry settled further into his seat and asked, “How long of a ride is it?”

“Should be…” Louis paused as he checked the tickets, “‘Bout fifty minutes.”

“Closer than I thought,” Harry mumbled to himself. He looked outside the window, quiet for a minute before a thought popped into his head. The corners of his mouth dipped, “Hold on, how is it that you can afford two tickets to Liverpool, but not my camera lens?”

“I used me mum’s card.”

“Louis!” Harry admonished. He shook out his hair and gritted out, “You shouldn’t have used her money on this.”

“Calm your tits,” Louis rolled his eyes. “She gives me a travel allowance.”

Harry peered at Louis, “Travel allowance?”

“Was her gift for my final year,” Louis shrugged.
“So you can just go wherever you want,” Harry cocked his eyebrow, “And she’ll pay for it?”

Louis tilted his head from side to side, “Within reason.”

“That’s…Pretty incredible of her,” Harry eventually admitted, feeling himself relax into the cushioned seat.

A fond smile illuminated Louis’ face while he picked at the seam of his jeans, “Yeah. She’s a good mum.”

“You two are close?” Harry carefully asked, his own curiosity getting the best of him.

Louis quickly nodded, “She’s my best friend.” His cheeks flushed and he quickly tacked on, “Y’know…As much as a mum can be anyways.”

“I know what you mean,” Harry quietly hummed. “I’m really close with my mum.”

Louis perked up at that, “Yeah?”

Harry nodded and then laughed out, “She’s one of the few people I can stand.”

“You mean to tell me that you don’t have a bunch of mates?” Louis exaggeratedly gasped, his hands cupping over his mouth in faux-shock. “Well,” Louis scoffed, “That is just news to me.”

“Shut it,” Harry playfully pinched Louis’ shin.

“Never,” Louis toothily grinned. He stretched his foot out and poked Harry’s thigh with his big toe, “Just not a people person, are you?”

Harry heavily sighed, “I don’t see the point in having multiple friends that you don’t really care about.”

“I’m gonna need you to explain a bit more, mate,” Louis pressed, tucking his foot under Harry’s thigh.

Harry looked down at Louis’ foot and he fought back the instinctive urge to push him away.

“A lot of people have multiple friends just for the sake of saying they have multiple friends,” Harry explained. He lamely shrugged one of his shoulders, “I think it’s pointless.”

“Or,” Louis drawled out, wiggling his other foot underneath Harry, “People have multiple friends cos they genuinely enjoy being with a lot of people.”

Harry rolled his eyes, “It’s not likely that you can have a meaningful relationship with multiple people.” He rolled his fingers through the air, “Your attention and energy is too spread out.”

Louis frowned at that, “Not every friend needs to be your best mate, but that doesn’t make them any less meaningful.”

“But, what’s the point of that?” Harry groaned, his hands slightly flailing out. “What’s the point of them being your friend, but not close enough to be your best friend?” He shook his head out, “It’s all just a social construct.”

“Wow, Harry,” Louis gaped at him. He slowly shook his head, “I think that has to be the most pretentious shit to come out of your mouth.”
Harry’s spine stiffened, immediately closing himself off as he turned to face ahead. His jaw locked and he felt a wave of embarrassment that he had even bothered opening up to Louis. It wasn’t as if they were suddenly pals just because Louis was trying to get him out of his shell. They were just practicing for the case study. It was as simple as that.

“Fine,” Harry snipped.

“Harry,” Louis sighed, reaching out to squeeze Harry’s arm.

“What?” Harry flinched away, not bothering to keep the disgust out of his voice.

Louis’ lips pressed into a straight line and he pulled his feet out from under Harry. He shook his head and curled his body towards the window. Harry opened his mouth to say something, but snapped it shut when he realized that there wasn’t anything for him to say.

The train’s engine thrummed a deep hum as they cut through the country, endless green appearing outside the window. After the sharp end of their conversation, neither of them spoke. It took fifteen minutes of silence before Louis was lulled to sleep, his cheek rested flat against the glass. Harry watched him for a few minutes, feeling an unsettling bulb of guilt furrowing in his stomach.

****

“Louis.”

Louis heard his name trickling through a haze of drowsiness, urging him to surface. He sleepily blinked his eyes open, confusion coating his muddled mind as Harry’s figure was brought into clarity. Harry had a hand gently curled over Louis’ knee and he was carefully jostling him.

“Louis,” Harry quietly said as he gestured over his shoulder to the other passengers who were standing. “We’re here.”

He sluggishly nodded and lowered his feet to the floor, Harry’s hand slipping off his leg. Louis put on his trainers while his mind was hopelessly revolving around their last conversation. It wasn’t exactly a secret that he enjoyed challenging Harry and he suspected that the other boy felt the same way. Which was exactly why he didn’t understand the slight sting of guilt that tugged on his stomach from making Harry genuinely upset.

The two waited as the passengers ahead began to file out. Harry had his back turned towards Louis, remaining unnervingly quiet. Louis’ eyes were trained on the space between Harry’s shoulders while he anxiously toyed with the frayed ends of his scarf. Eventually, the line moved and Louis exhaled as he followed Harry outside.

Once Louis stepped onto the platform, he carefully clasped his fingers around Harry’s wrist and led him to the side. Harry easily went, but his nose scrunched in confusion when he looked down at Louis. He quickly let go of Harry and folded his hands behind his back as he rocked back and forth.

“Listen,” Louis sighed, innately needing to clear the air between them seeing as how they were stuck together in an unfamiliar city. He braced himself and rushed out, “I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings.”

Harry quickly exhaled, “You didn’t.”

He immediately looked away, his fingers clutching around his camera as he put his focus on anything aside from Louis. He shrugged and it looked almost disjointed from Louis’ perspective. Louis frowned and did the only the only thing that he could think of.
He closed the distance between them and lifted himself to his toes, his arms snaking around Harry’s neck. Louis tucked his chin over Harry’s shoulder and hugged him, wincing when Harry’s frame went stiff.

“Uh…” Harry uncomfortably sputtered, “What’re you doing?”

“Apologizing,” Louis squeezed Harry tighter to emphasize his words. “Now don’t be a prick, hug me back.”

Harry awkwardly patted Louis on the back, “Um, Louis, this is really unnecessary.”

“Have you never been hugged before? This is a shit hug.”

“I thought you were apologizing,” Harry huffed.

“I am,” Louis whined. He pinched Harry’s shoulder, “Now hug me proper or I won’t let go.”

Harry snorted, but his arms slowly circled Louis’ waist. Louis made a happy noise from the back of his throat as Harry pulled him flush against his chest, his fingers lightly resting over Louis’ sides.

“You’re small,” Harry quietly commented.

Louis felt his cheeks burn crimson, “Am not.”

Harry hummed and let Louis go, taking a step back. The corner of his mouth quirked, “Louis Tomlinson, are you blushing?”

“No,” Louis quickly seethed. He turned away and stomped towards the exit, mumbling to himself, “Tosser.”

“Heard that!” Harry chirped from a few feet behind him.

Louis rolled his eyes and walked outside, looking around for a taxi. He ignored Harry as he strode towards a small back cab, waving at the driver through the window. Looking over his shoulder, he waved Harry over and slid into the back seat. Harry plopped in after him, pulling the door shut behind them.

“Where can I take ye lads?” The cabbie asked, pulling away from the curb.

“Uh…” Harry elongated as he looked between Louis and the driver.

Louis smirked, “We’re playing tourist for the day. Where d’you recommend?”

The cabbie met his eyes in the rearview mirror, “D’ye have anythin’ in mind?”

“Nope,” Louis laughed, looking at Harry from the corner of his eyes.

“Fan o’ The Beatles?”

It only took one glimpse at Harry’s expression for Louis to know the answer to that question.

Louis nodded, “Yeah.”

Harry was doing his best to wipe away his excitement and Louis would be an idiot not to find it slightly endearing. During the past hour, he had seen Harry be more expressive, in a good way, than in any other time they’ve been together. His cheeks were ruddy and his bottom lip was flushed rosy
from being smile-bitten. Golden flecks illuminated his emerald irises and Louis was positive that spontaneity had never agreed better with anyone else in the world.

Turning to look out the window, Louis watched the scenery change as they drove through the streets of the coastline city. It wasn’t a long drive before they wound up one corner away from Mathew Street. Harry insisted that he paid for the ride, passing the cabbie a tenner before exiting the cab.

“Oh my god,” Harry exhaled, his doe-eyes locked on a corner bar across the cobblestone road.

“I gotta admit,” Louis paused, waiting for Harry to look at him, “I know shit all about The Beatles.”

Harry loudly gasped and Louis couldn’t help the loud cackle that shot out of his mouth in response. He seemed genuinely affronted at Louis’ words as if he had personally insulted him.

Louis held up his hands as laughter continued to rumble through him, “I’m sorry!”

“Louis,” Harry groaned, his foot petulantly stomping against the ground. He pointed across the way, “For the love of god, tell me you know what that club is.”

“Oh…” Louis ineluctably drewled out. “One with drinks?”

“I have never been so disappointed to know someone in my entire life,” Harry deadpanned with a straight face.

“Dickhead!” Louis cackled, his fingers immediately jabbing into Harry’s side in protest.

Harry giggled and curled his body away from Louis, a dimple dipping along the corner of his mouth.

“Fine,” Louis folded his arms over his chest, nose turned up in the air. “Tell me ‘bout the bar and why I’m the world’s biggest disappointment.”

“The Cavern Club,” Harry flourished his hands towards the brick building, “Is basically where The Beatles started.”

Louis peered across the street, “They played there?”

Harry seriously nodded, “Made it proper famous.”

“And it’s still a running club?” Louis asked, already taking a few steps towards the building.

“Yeah,” Harry beamed, blatantly passionate about the topic.

“C’mon, let’s go,” Louis jerked his head towards the bar.

“Really?” Harry lifted his weight to the tips of his toes. He quickly schooled his expression when he saw Louis’ amused one, “I mean, like, if you’re not interested…We don’t have to.”

“Harry,” Louis laughed, setting his hand on Harry’s lower back to push him forward. “Not letting you go to this bar would be the same as me taking Christmas away from a kid.” Harry let out a loud laugh at that, spurring Louis on, “Besides, now I wanna see this infamous sacred bar.”

Harry tucked his chin down, but Louis didn’t miss his beam as he mumbled, “Okay.”

A neon sign illuminated the entrance of the club, bathing their skin in a red glow as they passed the bouncer with curt nods. The interior of the space was small and entirely brick, low curved ceilings and dim lighting. Music flowed through the space and Louis was surprised to hear a live band
crooning melodic phrases from the miniscule stage.

“Holy fuck,” Louis breathlessly exhaled, eyebrows raised. He turned towards Harry, “The stage is so bloody small.” Putting his hands on his waist and cocking his hip, Louis narrowed his eyes, “Are you sure they played here?”

Harry gripped Louis’ shoulders and turned him to face a wall that was smattered with pictures of The Beatles performing on the same stage.

“Oh,” Louis dumbly said.

“Believe me now?”

The hair on the back of Louis’ neck stood straight from Harry’s exhale. He turned to his right and nearly backed over when he realized how close Harry’s face was to his. He could see the insistent press of Harry’s dimple where it accompanied his smirk. Louis felt his throat tighten when Harry tiled his head to the side, keeping an inch of space between them.

“Oh, uh,” Louis swallowed before he looked straight ahead. “Yeah.”

Harry laughed and let his hands drop from Louis’ shoulders, taking a clear step backwards. He turned on his camera and began to meander through the space. Louis felt blood rushing in his ears while Harry walked away, completely oblivious to the turmoil spilling inside of Louis’ gut. He promptly stepped around a small group of people and pulled out a chair at the bar.

Louis flagged down the bartender with an almost manic expression. He glimpsed over his shoulder to see Harry tracing his fingers over a wall where people had signed their name onto the brick. With his breath stuck in his throat, Louis spun forward and threw the woman a thankful smile.

“What can I get ye?” She asked, her manicured fingers rested on the lip of the bar.

“What drink fits the situation of realizing that your sworn enemy is actually bloody attractive and you might want to sleep with him, but you can’t cos he’s your pretend boyfriend for a case study?” Louis frantically blurted out.

A startled laugh sputtered out from the barkeep, her back straightening as she looked at Louis with impossibly blown-out eyes.

“Too much?” Louis grimaced.

She shook her head and winked, “Got just what ye need, dearie.”

Louis cradled his head in his hand, groaning to himself as he listened to the sound of her mixing liquids in a metallic shaker. It wasn’t exactly that Louis hadn’t realized Harry was attractive until that moment, it just happened to be the first time he thought anything of it. He mentally wracked through every personality detail that he disliked about Harry, mentally willing his attraction to die in a pit of disdain. Apparently, that tactic was easier said than done.

“One double-shot sidecar for the confused gentleman.”

“Sidecar?” Louis smirked as he looked up and took the drink. He narrowed his eyes, “Was that a drink pun?”

The bartender beamed and feigned nonchalance with a shrug of her shoulders, “Possibly.”
“Of course,” Louis huffed out.

He paid for his drink and then turned in his chair, scanning over the growing crowd. Louis narrowed his eyes when they locked on Harry’s profile. There was a woman by his side, coyly smiling at him as she yammered on about something that Harry was blatantly uninterested in. Harry’s body wasn’t even facing the woman’s, his attention locked on the screen of his camera while she stepped closer. It wasn’t until she placed her hand on Harry’s lower back, that Louis felt the need to practice being Harry’s fake boyfriend.

Louis took a large sip of the potent cocktail and pushed his way through the crowd, stopping next to Harry’s side.

“Got you a drink, babe,” Louis purposefully enunciated, eyes shifting from the woman to Harry.

Harry’s eyebrows pinched together as locked eyes with Louis, “Uh…?”

“You can move along now,” Louis looked around Harry to narrow his eyes at the unwanted specimen of a human being.

“Who are you?” She scoffed, her black hair flicking away from her face.

“His boyfriend,” Louis jutted his thumb towards Harry. He slapped on a sugary smile and blinked up at Harry’s dumbfounded expression, “Isn’t that right, love?”

There was a moment of hesitation before Harry jerkily nodded, “Um, yeah.”

She snorted, “Yeah, right.”

Apparently, it was still enough for her to give up and walk away from the two boys. The minute she was out of ear-shot, Louis thwacked Harry’s shoulder. Harry made a pained sound and nearly knocked Louis’ drink from his hand.

“What was that for?!” Harry whisper-shouted.

“Alright, its sorted,” Louis declared before he took a sip from the glass. He smacked his lips, “We need real-world practice because that was pitiful.”

Harry frowned, “I wasn’t expecting to pretend now!”

“Well,” Louis slightly flailed his hand between them, “Clearly we need it!”

“Fine,” Harry rolled his eyes. He plucked the cocktail from Louis’ fingers and took a sip, “Thanks for the drink, boyfriend.”

“Despicable,” Louis groaned. He pinched the bridge of his nose, “I’ll go get another.” Threateningly pointing his finger at Harry’s chest, Louis tacked on, “No chattin’ up strange women while I’m gone.”

The corner of Harry’s mouth lifted into a smirk, “Is that what you thought was going on?”

“No,” Louis scoffed. “You weren’t even looking at her.”

When Harry opened his mouth to respond, Louis turned on his heel and walked back to the bar. He gave a weak smile to the same bartender from before and gestured for another round. She bit back a laugh and made him a second cocktail.
“I take it, that’s the boy?” She pointedly nodded in the direct Louis came from.

Louis bitterly handed over his card, “Unfortunately.”

“Handsome,” She winked and then ran his card before handing it back.

“Yes,” Louis groaned as he put his card away. He glimpsed across the room and mumbled, “That’s the problem.”

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“Ha – Harry!” Louis cackled, his eyes watery as he tried to pry the sugar packets from Harry’s hands.

“No, really!” Harry whined, holding his hands behind his back. He stumbled slightly, “I really can do it!”

Louis shook his head with a loose-lipped smile, “Don’t believe you.”

Harry frowned, his bottom lip obscene protruding, “What kind of a supportive boyfriend are you?”

Louis cased Harry’s jaw with his hands and gave him a firm pat on the cheek, “The realistic kind.”

“Killin’ my dreams,” Harry continued to pout.

“Fine,” Louis dramatically drawled out, the alcohol flowing in his bloodstream dissipating his usual will to fight Harry. He gestured forwards, “Lemme see it.”

Harry’s brows pulled together in concentration as he held the three packets of sugar in his hand. He spread his stance and slightly bent his knees before he tossed the first satchel into the air. Louis cackled as Harry started to juggle in the middle of the club, his expression painfully proud as he made it a few cycles through before nearly elbowing another man.

When Harry finished with an uncoordinated bow, Louis held his hand over his heart, “How did I ever get s’lucky?”

Harry preened and flicked his hair over his shoulder, “I know, babes. You gotta real winner.”

“Babes?” Louis smirked before he took a long pull from his fourth cocktail.

“Yes,” Harry jerkily nodded. “M’ practicing.”

“Gettin’ cheeky,” Louis prodded Harry’s stomach.

Harry giggled and weakly pushed Louis’ hands away, “Stop touching me!”

“You d’know that boyfriends touch, yeah?” Louis teased, stepping into Harry’s space.

“If I didn’t know any better, Mr. Tomlinson,” Harry folded his arms over his chest, “I’d say you were coming on to me.”

Louis reached out and lightly cupped Harry’s jaw, feeling the way the boy’s muscle clenched under his palm. His thumb pressed into Harry’s bottom lip and he watched Harry’s mouth delicately part as a whoosh of breath escaped. He stepped closer and smirked when Harry’s hands fell to his side, their chests faintly brushing against another. Louis lifted himself onto the balls of his feet and brought his mouth to the shell of Harry’s ear.
“Good thing you don’t know any better,” Louis whispered.

He lowered himself and took a big step backwards, smugly grinning at Harry’s widened pupils. Louis raised his glass and mock-cheered before finishing it off. Harry let out a shaky laugh before he raked his fingers through his hair and drowned the rest of his cocktail. He opened his mouth and Louis watched his lips as they moved to formulate a sentence. Harry must have given up on that particular train of thought because he shook his head and wound up slurring out one of the most general statements.

“I quite like Liverpool.”

Louis fondly rolled his eyes reached out to tug on Harry’s hand, “C’mon genius, we gotta get a cab.”

Harry frowned, “To go home?”

“Well…Yeah,” Louis snorted and continued to tug Harry towards the exit.

Harry generally waved to the room, catching a few pair of eyes before he brashly announced, “I don’t really like you lot, but I love Beatles lots. Ta.”

“Harry!” Louis admonished, slapping his hand over Harry’s mouth in retaliation. Harry was laughing under his palm and stuck out his tongue to lick Louis’ hand. Louis squealed, “Stop it!”

The pair stumbled outside and Louis felt just how intoxicated he was when the breeze hit them. He imagined Harry wasn’t much better off because he was standing much closer to Louis than he ever would have in a sober state. Louis felt Harry’s heat radiate off of him, drenching Louis in warmth as they waited for a cab to pull up.

With a slur of mumbled directions, they managed to climb into a cab and make their way back to the station. Harry sprawled out in the back seat, his long legs stretched to curl over Louis’ thighs. Louis didn’t have the energy to push him off, his inhibitions nearly squashed into oblivion. He settled his hands over Harry’s thigh and drew patterns along his jeans with the tip of his fingers, nonsensically humming aloud while they waited to arrive.

“C’mon, Hazza,” Louis slurred when the cab came to a halt. He repeatedly poked Harry’s leg, “S’time to catch a train. Choo Choo, yeah?”

“Choo,” Harry sleepily mumbled back, his eyelids drooping when he tried to look at Louis. His nose scrunched, “Did you call me Hazza? I don’ have those letters in my name.”

Louis shrugged and pushed Harry off his lap, “Come on, we gotta go.”

Harry nodded and stumbled after Louis as they got out. As out of it as Louis felt, he quickly realized that Harry was even worse off. He slung his arm around Harry’s waist and let out a whoosh of air when Harry slumped his weight onto him. Louis gritted his teeth as he looked around the station, putting in every ounce of effort as he tried to find the correct platform.

Ten minutes and two near death experiences, Louis finally hauled Harry into a window seat on the train. Harry made a happy noise when he was sitting, immediately slouching back against the pane of glass. Louis exhaustedly slumped into the aisle seat and let himself lean onto Harry’s shoulder. He reasoned that after getting them back on the train, he earned it.

“Why are yuh on me,” Harry weakly grumbled.

“Comfy,” Louis mumbled. He faintly slapped Harry’s thigh and tucked himself closer, “Jus go
Harry pulled his arm back and Louis was prepared to let out a petulant whine. He shut his mouth when Harry shifted to wrap it around his chest, resting his palm over Louis’ shoulder.

“Doesn’t mean anything,” Harry said no louder than a whisper.

Louis nodded, “Shut up, Hazza.”

Harry smacked his lips and exhaled, “Kay.”

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“Stop moving.”

Harry winced at the intrusive sound that broke through his alcohol induced sleep. He squeezed his eyes shut and burrowed further into his bed, seeking warmth underneath the thick duvet. A frown tugged his mouth downwards when his feet kicked into something else underneath the covers.

“If you kick me one more time,” A gravelly voice muttered, “I will kill you.”

“Shit,” Harry groaned as he rolled over onto his back, effectively knocking into another body.

“Harry!”

He immediately sat upwards when he realized that he was on top of Louis’ smaller body. Harry scooted back and winced at the immediate headache that jackhammered inside of him. Louis grumpily scrubbed his palms over his eyes and then blinked upwards, the corner of his mouth curling as he gave Harry a once-over. Harry looked down and groaned when he realized that he was just in a pair of black briefs.

“I’m not dressed,” Harry stated the obvious. He put his head in his hands, “I’m not dressed and you’re in my bed.”

Louis made a non-committal sound, “You refused to keep your clothes on.”

“I – ” Harry broke off to exhaustedly shake his head. “How’d we get home?”

“I dragged your lanky arse from the cab and up the stairs,” Louis grumbled. He glared at Harry, “You can thank me by making a fry up.”

“I’m not cooking you breakfast,” Harry snorted.

Louis pushed himself so he was sitting upwards, “You promised me last night that you would.”

Harry narrowed his eyes and searched over Louis’ face, noticing the slight twitch of his lips. He pushed Louis back down with a shove and breathily laughed, “Liar.”

“Almost had you,” Louis held up his thumb and forefinger, leaving a small space between the digits.

Giving Louis a once-over he realized that Louis slept in Harry’s lilac jumper. Louis’ small frame was practically drowned in the soft material, his tanned skin peeking out where the neckline drooped past his collar bones. Judging from the brief moment that Harry was on him, he assumed Louis didn’t bother with wearing joggers over his briefs. Harry pulled his bottom lip between his teeth and looked across the room.
“Fuck,” Harry groaned when he looked at a clock positioned by the settee. He pushed his hair away from his eyes, “We missed class.”

Louis’ eyes widened at that, “Fuckin’ hell, it’s that late?”

“You’re a bad influence,” Harry deadpanned.

“Don’t pretend that you didn’t have a great day,” Louis expectantly cocked his eyebrow.

Harry opened his mouth to retaliate, but closed it when he heard a loud rumble from outside his studio. His eyebrows pinched together when there was a quick knock on the door.

“Expecting someone?” Louis asked.

“No,” Harry frowned as he rolled out of bed.

He climbed down the stairs and walked over to the door with an uneasiness boiling in his gut. Harry hauled the door open and felt his jaw go slack when he recognized the two boys standing with similarly shocked expressions.

“Uh…” Harry drawled out, feeling increasingly uncomfortable that he didn’t think to slip on a shirt before answering.

Liam and Zayn stared back at him, notebooks in their hands as they filled the doorway.

“Harry Styles?” Liam timidly asked, his eyes looking anywhere but Harry’s chest.

“Yeah…?”

“We’re here for, well,” Liam scratched the back of his neck, “The couples study interview?”

Harry turned on his heel and looked over his shoulder to see Louis with his hands clasped over his mouth.

“I thought you said that was Wednesday!” Harry shout-whispered as if Liam and Zayn weren’t directly in front of him.

“I thought it was on the tenth!”

Harry groaned and scrubbed a hand over his face, “Louis, today is the tenth.”

“Uh,” Liam cleared his throat, dragging Harry’s attention back to the front door. “Well, if you two are too busy now, we could –”

“No, that’s alright,” Harry waved him off, knowing he would have felt guilty if he wasted their time. He gestured for them to come in, “Sorry about the confusion.”

Zayn easily grinned, “No worries, mate.”

“Louis,” Harry gritted through his teeth, cocking his head towards the kitchen area. “Want to make them some tea?”

“Shit,” Louis perked up and climbed off the bed, nearly tripping on the duvet. “Yeah, um, I can do that.”

“I’m just gonna…” Harry thumbed towards the bathroom, picking up his jeans and shirt from the day
before off the ground.

Liam nodded and flashed him a small smile, “Go ahead.”

Harry rushed into the bathroom and shut the door behind him. His heart was racing inside of his chest and he could hear Louis’ muffled voice filter through the door. He gripped the lip of the sink and looked at his reflection, wincing at how horrible he looked. Harry brushed his teeth and splashed some water on his face, praying that it would help him look a bit more put together. Quickly pulling on his clothes and gathering his hair into a bun, he took a deep breath and left the bathroom.

Liam and Zayn had pulled up two kitchen chairs in front of the coffee table, both sat with mugs in their hands. Louis was walking over from the kitchen and Harry had to fight off a smug grin that the hem of his jumper hit the middle of Louis’ thighs. He held two more cups of tea in his hands, silently passing one to Harry.

Louis sat in the center of the couch and Harry knew that this was the moment that they had to legitimately look like a happy couple. He settled by Louis and carefully slid his arm along the back of the couch. For a fraction of a second, Louis stilled in his spot, his breathing audibly hitching. Harry let out a relieved exhale when Louis relaxed and leaned into his side.

“So,” Liam excitedly clapped his hands together. He looked between Harry and Louis, “Are you two ready?”

Harry met Louis’ gaze, searching for something that showed he had changed his mind.

“We’re ready,” Louis answered for them.

“Alright,” Liam beamed and looked down at his notebook. “Let’s get started.”
Chapter Four

Chapter Summary

Look at me go, two chapters in two days! I plan on updating one more time this week, either on Friday or Sunday.

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Louis tucked his feet underneath him and huddled into Harry’s side, mentally praising Harry for not instinctively recoiling away from his touch in front of Liam and Zayn. He toyed with the circular handle of the mug and did his best to look as nonchalant as possible, his expression void of any tension. Harry’s arm slid from the back of the couch and onto Louis’ shoulders, his slender fingers barely grazing the jumper that loosely clung to Louis’ frame.

“Before we ask you two any questions,” Zayn started with a flippant gesture between Harry and Louis, “There are a few, uh, warnings, for lack of a better word, that we should tell you about.”

Liam nodded and quickly rushed out, “It’s nothing bad!” His eyes genuinely concerned as he took in Harry’s hesitant expression. “Just that since this is a couples study, it’s naturally going to be very personal.”

“We’re going to be observing and learning about you two as individuals and as a couple,” Zayn tacked on.

“Right,” Liam agreed. He clasped his hands together and leaned forward, “Which means that we’re going to learn a lot of intimate details about your life. And, well, we need to make sure that you two understand that.”

“Intimate,” Harry carefully reiterated and Louis could feel his body slightly tensing next to him.

Louis rested his hand over Harry’s thigh, his thumb lightly rubbing circles into his leg. Harry turned to follow Louis’ ministrations with his bottom lip nervously trapped between his teeth. Trying to silently reassure him, Louis gently squeezed his leg. He watched as Harry’s head subtly nodded before his hand clasped around Louis’ shoulder.

“Interesting,” Zayn mumbled under his breath, eyes carefully trained on Harry and Louis.

Louis flushed and awkwardly cleared his throat, “When you say intimate…”

Liam glimpsed at Zayn before he hesitantly answered, “Intimate as in your strengths and weaknesses as a couple, your sex life, your…”

“Sex life?” Harry promptly cut Liam off, his fingers subconsciously tightening around Louis.

“That’s something you’re going to have to be comfortable with talking about, mate,” Zayn said. He leaned back against the chair and quirked his eyebrow, “Would that be a problem?”

Harry turned to face Louis, “Is that something you’re comfortable with, babe?”
Louis had to bite back a laugh at the mischievous glint that flickered over Harry’s expression. When Harry’s mouth quirked, Louis realized that he was just playing the part of concerned boyfriend. Biting the inside of his cheek to suppress his grin, Louis dug his fingers into Harry’s leg.


“Open being the key word,” Harry muttered under his breath.

Louis’ jaw dropped and without thought, he swatted Harry upside the head, “Cuntin’ dickhead.”

Harry snorted, easily pushing Louis’ hand away while he huffed out, “Princess.”

“Oi!” Louis lurched forward to muss up Harry’s hair. “Am not a princess! Anyways, you’re the one who looks like a bloody carbon copy of Snow White.”

“I do not!” Harry flicked center of the Louis’ forehead. “Hate to break it to you, sweetheart,” His eyes condescendingly narrowed, “But you’re the one with the feminine curves to be a princess.”

“Feminine curves?!” Louis seethed.

Harry smirked, “Have you seen your arse?”

Louis opened his mouth to retaliate when he heard a pen scratching against a piece of paper. He snapped his jaw shut and flinched as he saw Zayn writing in his notebook, the corner of his mouth jaunted into a smirk.

“Sorry,” Louis winced, his hands lowering to wrap around his knees.

“No need to apologize,” Zayn shrugged as he finished writing his sentence. He looked up and grinned, “This is exactly what we want to see.”

“Uh…” Harry awkwardly drawled out, his head lolling to the side.

Zayn sighed when he saw mirrored faces of confusion, “We aren’t looking for a prim and proper couple to observe.”

“It’s not genuine or realistic,” Liam picked up, further explaining.

“Exactly,” Zayn nodded.

“And we need realistic for this to work.”

Zayn nodded again, “Right.”

Louis looked at the two of them as if they were some type of conjoined twin that impulsively had to carry on each other’s through process. Well, a conjoined twin without the being conjoined or actually related bit.

“Are you two a couple?” He asked, genuinely intrigued.

“Louis,” Harry hissed, disapprovingly elbowing Louis in the side.

“What!” Louis defensively held up his hands. “They get to know about where my cock goes, but I can ask if they’re dating?”
Harry groaned and put his head in his hands, “For the love of god, please stop talking.”

Louis petulantly pouted, “But, I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“It’s alright,” Zayn breathily laughed. “For your information,” He shook his head, “No, we’re not dating.”

“Just good mates,” Liam supplied.

“Right…” Louis narrowed his eyes, not believing a word of it.

Harry leaned back into the couch, his hands folded and rested on his stomach, “Now that’s all cleared up…What’s next?”

“How about you each just tell us a bit about yourselves and then we’ll get to the couple portion,” Liam said, already position his pen over the pad of paper.

“Well, I’m in my third year and I study film,” Harry said, his naturally elongated drawl stretching out the statement for an impressive span of time. He fidgeted with his fingers and looked down at his lap, “M’ from Cheshire and I grew up with my mum and older sister. Mum got married two years ago so now she lives with my step-dad and Gemma is off in London.” Harry shrugged and lamely tacked on, “I work with flowers?”

Louis couldn’t help the fond grin that lifted his lips at Harry’s closing statement. He subtly spread his thighs a few inches, stopping when his knee knocked into Harry’s leg.

“You work with flowers?” Zayn pressed, obviously fighting off an amused grin.

“He works at Manchester Blooms,” Louis supplied, mentally patting himself on the back that he could remember the name of the shop.

Harry’s mouth curled into a gentle smile and he nodded, his arm moving to circle back around Louis’ shoulders. Louis barely fought off a smug expression at the knowledge that he could pass for Harry’s fake boyfriend.

Liam’s eyes brightened in recognition, “Oh is that the shop off of Dover?”

“Yeah!” Harry sat up straighter, seemingly genuinely pleased at Liam’s recognition. “Have you been?”

Liam looked apologetic as he shook his head, “Sorry, I haven’t.”

Harry slightly sagged back, “Oh.”

“Well you should go,” Louis rushed out, not particularly liking the way Harry was instinctively closing himself off.

Harry lightly squeezed Louis’ shoulder, his thumb curling underneath the neckline of the jumper.

Zayn’s eyes were focused on Harry’s hand when he asked, “How about you, Louis?”

“Third year like him,” Louis tilted his head towards Harry. “Studying sports management. Grew up in Donny with me mum and siblings.”

“Six siblings,” Harry clarified, his thumb lightly tapping against Louis’ collar bone.
Louis rolled his eyes, “Yes, six.” He rested his hand on Harry’s knee, “He can’t seem to get past that fact.”

“It’s a lot of babies,” Harry reasoned.

“It is,” Liam agreed. He jotted something down and then looked back up, “Do you work, too?”

Harry snorted and then tried to cover it up with a cough.

“I don’t,” Louis fixed a grin on his face while he subtly dug his elbow into Harry’s gut.

Zayn narrowed his eyes, “Sensitive topic?”

“No,” Harry laughed and shook his head. He cocked his head towards Louis, “I’ve just been trying to convince him to work so he can buy me new film equipment.”

Louis’ eyes lit with mirth as a surprised laugh shot out of his mouth. The corner of Harry’s jaw tensed as he tried to stop his own laughter, his thumb applying a firmer pressure into Louis’ skin.

“He’s trying to make me his film sugar daddy,” Louis jutted his thumb towards Harry.

Harry couldn’t help the brash guffaw that ripped through his throat, his eyes squinted while his tongue slightly poked out of his mouth. Louis beamed at him, genuinely surprised that Harry even had the capability to make that particular sound.

“No the only kind of daddy,” Harry mumbled through a new wrack of laughter.

Louis’ eyes widened and he smacked his palm over Harry’s mouth, “Harry!”

Harry’s breath was coming out in rough pants from under Louis’ hand and he couldn’t help but to laugh at the ridiculousness of the overall situation. Without warning, Harry tucked his head into the cook of Louis’ neck as he calmed himself down. Louis froze when Harry’s nose ran over the junction of his neck. Seeming to realize what he had done, Harry quickly pulled back with flushed cheeks.

“Sorry,” Harry said quiet enough that Louis barely heard it.

Louis weakly flashed him a reassuring grin, his own pulse roughly rabbiting as he looked back at Zayn and Liam. The other two boys were curiously watching them, Liam looking positively pleased and Zayn a bit more inquisitive at their behavior.

“How’d you two meet?” Liam asked after a brief pause.

“At his work,” Louis chirped, feeling more nervous than he had before. “Um, I was coming in to get flowers for a date, actually.”

Liam’s eyes widened as he looked between Harry and Louis, “Really?”

Harry huffed out a laugh, “Really.”

“So…What happened?” Zayn pressed.

“I was picking out flowers and honestly,” Louis threw in a self-depreciative laugh, “I’m a bit shit at knowing what to look for.”

Harry seriously nodded, “Very shit.”
“Oi!” Louis flicked Harry. “I’m telling the story here so you can keep your trap shut.”

“Whatever you say,” Harry snorted.

Louis rolled his eyes, “As I was saying,” he dramatically took a deep breath, “I was looking for flowers for, um, a while.”

“About twenty minutes,” Harry interjected.

Louis narrowed his eyes, “Was not that long.”

“It was,” Harry winked at him, his lips curling into a smug grin.

“Whatever,” Louis grumbled and folded his arms. “He came over and tried to help me pick out flowers.”

Harry placed his hand over his heart, “Charmed him is what I did.”

Louis snorted, “Yeah, sure.”

“Well, it must have worked,” Liam laughed, gesturing between the two of them.

“It did,” Harry assured.

Louis inexplicably blushed and mumbled, “Yeah.”

Zayn had been jotting down notes and paused to ask, “How long have you been together?”

“Met back in April,” Harry answered for them.

Liam nodded as he wrote down the month, “And…When did you two move in together?”

Louis froze, realizing that they never went over that detail. He looked up at Harry and was surprised that the other boy didn’t look like a deer in headlights. His expression was pleasantly blank, almost on the verge of being bored as he remained eye contact with Liam. As it would seem, Harry wasn’t a horrible liar and Louis couldn’t help the uncomfortable feeling in his gut as he made the revelation.

“Well, I’ve been living here the past two years,” Harry slowly drawled out.

Zayn’s brows pulled together, “You never lived in student accommodations?”

Harry curtly shook his head, “No.”

“Why not?” Liam probed, his pen lightly tapping against his chin.

“Not really for me,” Harry shrugged and slightly shifted his weight on the couch.

Apparently, that wasn’t enough of an answer because Liam leaned forward and pressed, “What do you mean?”

“Living with a bunch of strangers,” Harry shook his head and scratched the back of his neck. “Just doesn’t appeal to me.”

Louis shifted closer to Harry until their thighs were flush together.

“You don’t like meeting new people?” Zayn asked, his tone wasn’t unkind but Louis still bristled at the question.
He reached towards Harry’s hand that was draped over his shoulder and laced their fingers together. Harry’s fingers didn’t immediately tangle with his own and Louis heard the quick inhale from the other boy’s nose. After a second, Harry cautiously held his hand back.

“Not particularly,” Harry answered and Louis could tell that he wasn’t trying to be rude, just honest.

“That’s…Um, well,” Liam uncomfortably sputtered as he looked at Zayn for assistance.

“Odd,” Zayn supplied.

Louis broadened his shoulders and narrowed his eyes, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I don’t mean to be offensive,” Zayn rushed, quickly picking up on Louis’ unimpressed tone.

“Sounded a bit offensive, mate,” Louis snipped.

“Louis,” Harry warned, his hand squeezing Louis’. He waited until Louis was looking at him to shake his head, “It’s fine.”

“Look,” Zayn slowly held up his hands as if he was trying to warn off an animal, “We’re all fine here, yeah? Sorry if I overstepped a line.”

Harry pointedly gripped Louis’ fingers, his eyebrows expectantly lifting as he looked at Louis. He sighed and pulled his hand out of Harry’s with a resigned nod. Louis raised his knees to his chest and resolutely hooked his chin over his kneecaps.

“You’re fine,” Louis mumbled as he wrapped his fingers around his ankles.

“He’s quite protective of you,” Liam playfully teased, his eyes landing on Harry.

Harry let out an uneasy laugh, “Uh, yeah. Guess he is.”

“Anyways,” Zayn carefully said, obviously choosing to watch his words, “You were saying you moved here two years ago?”

“Oh, yeah,” Harry nodded, sounding thankful for the change of topic. “I asked Louis to move in during winter holiday.”

“So living together is still new for you two?” Liam checked.

Louis snorted, “You could say that.”

Harry rested his palm between Louis’ shoulder blades, “We’re still adjusting.”

He could hear the smile in Harry’s voice without looking and it nearly set Louis off into another unwarranted fit of laughter. Louis bit back a grin and nodded, not trusting himself to comment.

“How so?” Zayn asked as he continued to write down his observations.

“For starters,” Louis cleared his throat and glared over his shoulder at Harry’s amused expression, “M’ not used to having someone constantly kick me as I’m trying to get some sleep.”

Harry groaned, “I am not that bad.”

“You really are,” Louis scoffed.
“Like I said,” Harry lightly tugged a piece of hair at the nape of Louis’ neck, “We’re adjusting.”

Liam hummed thoughtfully and Louis narrowed his eyes at the continuously moving pen. He couldn’t see what either of them were writing, but he had a gut feeling that it couldn’t have been very promising. Liam and Zayn were still in the studio and Louis was already suspecting that they failed miserably.

“Well,” Liam chirped once he lowered the infuriating pen, “I think we’re all done here.”

Zayn nodded and closed his notebook, “Thanks for taking the time to answer some of our questions.”

“We have a few more interviews to get through, but we’ll let you know by Friday if you’ve been selected for the study,” Liam grinned, his eyes kind as he looked between Harry and Louis.

“Just keep an eye on your email,” Zayn tacked on, standing from the chair.

Louis nodded and pushed himself to a standing position, “Thanks for coming by.”

“Sorry for, um, the confusion earlier,” Harry winced, his fingers gesturing towards the still-rumpled bed.

Zayn waved him off and walked towards the door with Liam in tow, “Don’t worry about it.”

“Sorry we interrupted…” Liam drawled out as he suggestively waggled his eyebrows.

Louis watched as Harry’s skin flushed scarlet from the implication, his jaw going slack.

“S’alright,” Louis smirked, lightly patting Harry on the back. “Happens to the best of us.”

“Um, yeah,” Harry cleared his throat.

With a final wave, Liam and Zayn left the studio. Harry and Louis remained standing still with their bodies faced towards the shut door.

Louis took a deep breath and turned towards Harry, “Well…”

They both looked at each other and after one firm second of bare silence, Harry’s face cracked into a smile as laughter started to bubble out of him. The musical sound was obscenely infectious and Louis immediately found himself groaning as he started to laugh too.

“I – I think they bought it,” Harry stuttered out through breaths.

Louis’ head lolled back as he giggled, his hands folding over the top of his stomach. He wiped his hand over his eyes and shook his head.

“I think we’re quite fucked,” Louis chuckled. He looked at Harry and busted out in another stream of laughter, “Like, truly fucked.”

Harry nodded in agreement and let out a loud sigh as he pulled his shirt off over his head. Louis’ laughter died in his throat as he watched Harry’s shirt lamely drop to the floor.

“I feel disgusting,” Harry grumbled to himself. He paused as he stepped towards the bathroom, looking back towards Louis, “Uh, I’m gonna clean up a bit. So…”

“Right,” Louis nodded and turned away. He cleared his throat and gestured towards the door,
assuming Harry was still looking at him, “I gotta – Y’know. Stuff to do and…Right.”

Without another word, he grabbed his belongings off the kitchen table and exited the flat. He paused outside of the door and looked at the green paint, feeling overwhelmed by the events of the past twenty-four hours. Shakily, he started to walk down the steps towards the exit. He quickly un-locked his mobile and called Niall, impatiently muttering to himself before his flatmate picked up.

“LOUIS WILLIAM TOMLINSON, WHERE THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN?!”

Louis pulled the phone from his ear and groaned as Niall’s voice ricocheted in his head. He gingerly brought it closer and whined, “I think I need a spliff.”

Niall scoffed, “Think you owe me an explanation.”

“That too,” Louis sighed as he pulled open the main door.

“Boy problems?”

Louis looked over his shoulder and towards the staircase, shaking his head before closing the door shut.

“You could say that.”

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Harry stretched his back as videos from his camera uploaded to his computer. He watched the mirage of images flash across the monitor, mindlessly scratching his stomach while he waited. The windows were cracked open to let the night breeze gently sift into the studio. A hum of traffic filtered throughout the space, but it was far from being obtrusive. Once the images downloaded, Harry wrapped a blanket over his shoulders and began editing the videos.

The first clip was the one Harry had shot of Louis sitting on his couch. Harry froze the video when Louis initially looked towards the lens, his expression still un-guarded. His fingers expertly danced over the mouse as he edited the screenshot with practiced ease. While he tweaked the colors of the background, Harry resolutely left the cerulean of Louis’ eyes untouched. He reckoned that detail would never need alteration. When he was satisfied, he saved the shot and added it to an album that he planned on getting printed.

It was a bit odd for Harry to go through the videos Louis had recorded of him. The main reason being, nobody had done it before. He had sat for a shoot with Jules, but it wasn’t the same. It didn’t feel the same. The videos he was watching involved him talking and genuinely laughing at Louis’ commentary. Harry found it to be almost surreal as he sat on the couch, observing himself flit across the screen from Louis’ perspective. He bit back a grin at the acceptance that maybe Louis was right. Spontaneity did agree with him.

After the third video, Harry stopped pausing to edit the shots. He sat with his chin rested on his knees as clips of Louis and himself strutting through Liverpool continued to play. A smile was permanently stretched over his face as their night carried on the screen, both blatantly becoming drunker with each new video.

There were small moments that were captured that Harry hadn’t even been aware of. He closely watched as Louis talked directly into the camera as he held it, his eyes glassy and smile sloppy as he spoke. Louis was rambling about Harry getting them more drinks before he spun the camera back towards Harry.
“Oh my god,” Harry mumbled to himself, his hand moving to cover his mouth.

There he was, drunkenly sauntering towards Louis with two cocktails in hand and a smug grin.

“What’d you get us?” Louis’ voiced chirped.

“To com – Uh, commemorate our boyfriend relationship!” Harry handed one of the drinks to Louis. He winked at lens, “Two sex on tuh beach.”

“No!” Harry groaned as he watched the screen version of himself. He shook his head in disappointment and embarrassment, “Harry, why?”

Apparently, Louis found it to be hilarious. His sharp laughter wrung throughout the video as he settled by Harry’s side and positioned the lens towards the two of them. Harry watched with a dumbfounded expression as Louis nuzzled his head into the crook of Harry’s neck without any inhibition. They messily knocked their glasses together and then promptly downed their drinks. The video ended with Harry’s forehead rested on Louis’ shoulder, his shoulders visibly shaking with laughter.

“Fuck,” Harry exhaled as he thumbed to the next video.

The rest of the videos were just as embarrassing and Harry couldn’t do anything other than watch in disbelief. They were far from incriminating, but he found it impossible to believe that he had acted so carefree with Louis. Not just carefree, but genuinely comfortable. He had never truly felt that way with another person, intoxicated or not.

Eventually, Harry made it to the last video and he groaned when he quickly realized that it was of him sitting in the doorway to the studio.

“Hazza c’mon!” Louis giggled. He reached his toe out and poked Harry in the leg, “Bedtime.”

Harry’s eyelids were heavy as he looked up at Louis, “Are you gonna sleep here?”

“Obviously,” Louis snorted.

“Okay,” Harry easily nodded. He struggled to pull himself up from the ground, “Oh, fuck.”

Louis reached out the hand that wasn’t holding the camera, “Grab on you big ol’ numpty.”

Harry let himself be pulled upwards and he stumbled forward, nearly knocking the camera out of Louis’ hand.

“Ohmygod” Harry slurred out as he gripped the lens. “My baby.”

Louis kicked Harry’s shin, “Yuh better be talkin’ about me.”

Harry dopily smiled and patted Louis on the head, “Clearly.”

“Good,” Louis laughed, taking a step backwards and keeping the camera angled towards Harry.

“Wanna borrow somethin’ to sleep in?” Harry asked, already making his way to a wardrobe tucked by the stairs.

The camera jerked up and down in Louis’ hands as he nodded, “Yeah.”

Harry pulled out the second drawer and hummed as he grabbed a lavender jumper. He held it up
with a questioning look and received a pleased sound from Louis in response.

“Trackie bottoms?” Harry asked, already moving to the bottom drawer.

The camera jerked from left to right in Louis’ grip, “Nuh uh.”

Harry shut the drawers and dangerously swayed as he made it back to Louis’ side. He handed him the jumper and then started stripping his clothes off.

“What’re you gonna wear?” Louis asked, the camera tracking the length of Harry’s legs as he tugged off his jeans.

Harry proudly extended his arms, “Jus’ pants.”

Louis made a pained noise, “Should wear somethin’ else if we’re gonna sleep in the same bed.”

“Who said I’m lettin’ you in my bed?” Harry cocked his hip to the side, hands resting on his soft love handles.

Louis angled the camera to face himself as he happily chirped, “I did.”

“Whatever,” Harry giggled, moving to walk up the staircase.

“Most boys would f– feel privileged, Hazza,” Louis hiccupped as he set the camera down.

Harry made a non-committal noise, “Not like most boys.”

“Don’t I know it,” Louis grumbled, picking up the camera when he was dressed in only Harry’s jumper.

Harry poked his head out and looked down at Louis, beaming at the sight.

“You look so little in my clothes.”

“Do not,” Louis petulantly whined, climbing the stairs with shaky steps.

Harry held the duvet back as Louis clambered into the bed, whimpering when Louis nearly dropped the camera as he laid down. They were side by side underneath the covers, bodies flush against one another. Louis extended his arms above his head and angled the frame to face them.

“Wha now?” Louis slurred, sleep already thickening his voice.

“Now we sleep,” Harry lolled his head to the side so their temples touched.

Louis pouted, his bottom lip obscenely jutted out, “Don’t wanna.”

Harry lightly butted their heads together, “Too bad.”

“Are you gonna cuddle me?” Louis asked, an impish glint flickering over his face.

Harry’s cheeks flushed and he covered his face, his head shaking from side to side.

Louis made an affronted noise, “And why not?”

“I don’t cuddle,” Harry’s voice muffled from underneath his hands.

Louis’ eyes widened to a comic degree and he turned his head to look at Harry.
“Ever?!”

“Nope,” Harry laughed as he mirrored Louis.

Their noses pressed together and Harry’s lips gently tugged upwards when Louis nudge their noses together.

“Well, there’s a first for everything, Hazza,” Louis beamed, their mouths nearly touching as he spoke.

Harry shook his head, both of them giggling as their noses rubbed together.

“Take this,” Louis demanded as he passed Harry the camera. He turned his entire body to the side, “Turn over.”

“Why?” Harry asked even though he was already following Louis’ instructions.

The camera lolled against a pillow as Harry shifted his body. Louis pressed his chest flush against Harry’s back and his arm moved to wrap around Harry’s chest.

“What’re you doing?” Harry sleepily asked, his eyes barely open.

“Cuddlin’ you,” Louis mumbled, his voice nearly indistinguishable.

Harry rested his head against the pillow and sluggishly grinned as soft snores puffed against his shoulder blade. He wrapped his fingers around Louis’ arm and snuggled back into Louis’ chest. His breathing was evening out as sleep pulled him under, but not before he murmured one last sentence.

“I could quite like you.”

Harry gaped at the screen, watching the camera fall from the pillow and record the ceiling until the battery eventually died. His hands were clasped over his mouth as his blacked out memories mocked him in perfect HD quality.

“Fucking, fuck,” He gritted out, his hands roughly scrubbing over his face as his drunken confession replayed inside his head.

Inhaling deeply, Harry attempted to control his racing heartbeat. He harshly bit into his lip as pressed the heels of his palms against his eyelids. A rocky groan tore his throat as white flecks dotted behind his eyes. Harry scrubbed his hands down his face and looked at the screen of his laptop.

He lurched forward and replayed the end of the clip, praying that he heard himself incorrectly.

“I could quite like you.”

Harry slammed his laptop shut and jumped from his seat. He paced across the living room and tugged on his hair as clouded images of Louis plagued his thoughts. Every instinct he had urged him to deny the remote possibility that he could fancy Louis. At the same time, he had physical proof of himself admitting it out loud.

“You were just drunk,” Harry reasoned aloud to himself, well aware that he was on the mental cusp of a breakdown. He nodded, “That’s all it was.”

A car horn sounded from the street and Harry jerked backwards, toppling over onto the couch. His breathing was past the point of ragged as he looked up at the ceiling, fairy lights illuminating his skin. He looked at the table and whimpered when he looked at his neglected laptop.
“Right,” Harry humorlessly laughed to himself. He pulled a pillow over his face and mumbled into the fabric, “I’m completely fucked.”

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Louis stood in front of the bathroom mirror and carefully adjusted his fringe into place. His tongue poked out of his mouth as his eyes narrowed in concentration. He made a pleased squeak when he finally deemed himself to look appropriate.

“It’s a Wednesday. Why are you fussin’ with your hair?”

“Because,” Louis huffed, turning to face Niall who stood in the doorway, “I wanted to look nice.”

Niall rested his weight against the door frame with an evident smirk tugging at his mouth.

“This wouldn’t have anythin’ to do with a certain pretend boyfriend, would it?”

Louis rolled his eyes, “Absolutely not.”

Niall gave him a pointed stare.

“Maybe a smidge,” Louis sighed.

“Ha!” Niall accusingly pointed at him. “Just admit that you like the lad already.”

“I don’t,” Louis snipped, turning away from Niall to adjust the collar of his grey Henley.

“Right,” Niall drawled out. He pushed himself off the wall and took a step back, “Cos it’s not like you rambled about him all of Monday night or anythin’.”

Louis turned his nose up and squeezed past Niall to leave.

“I have no idea what you mean.”

“Oh, c’mon!” Niall groaned, following Louis as he strutted towards the living room. “Just admit it!”

“Nothing to admit, mate,” Louis scoffed, picking up his bag and shouldering it. He yanked the front door open waved over his shoulder, “See you after class.”

“Hopefully you’ll learn some honesty by then!” Niall called after him.

Louis scoffed as he shut the door without giving Niall a response. He started to walk towards campus, his fingers tightly gripped around the straps of his bag. There was thirty minutes before the start of psychology and Louis had been dreading the class since he left Harry’s studio.

The thing was, Louis had no idea what the fuck was going on inside his own head.

He had come to terms with accepting that he found Harry attractive and in all honesty, that made their situation significantly easier on his behalf. The problem was that he was forced to sit next to Harry three times a week, not including the times they were scheming the psychology department, and he had to pretend that he didn’t want to bend Harry over a desk. Or have Harry bend him over a desk. Louis prided himself on being versatile.

When Louis told that sentiment to Niall, all he got in response was a lit spliff and a condom.

Louis pushed through a group of students and found himself scrutinizing them as if they portrayed
Harry’s belief of a corrupt social system. When he caught himself, he roughly shook his head and trudged into the building. He frowned and mentally berated his own thought process that was evidently affected by the time he spent with Harry. It was obscene and pretentious and Louis didn’t want any part of it.

Pushing impure thoughts from his mind, Louis took a deep breath and walked into the classroom. He paused for a fraction of a second when he saw Harry already sat at their table, white headphones popped in his ears and his eyes trained on a textbook. His hair was tangled back into a French braid, the end knotted just over his left collar bone. He wore the same lavender sweater that Louis had slept in and that alone nearly sent Louis into cardiac arrest.

Louis exhaled and walked towards his chair, unceremoniously dragging it back before he sat down. The scraping of metal against tile seemed to startle Harry, his neck jerking as he gaped at Louis.

“Oops,” Louis mumbled, knowing that Harry probably couldn’t hear him with his earbuds in.

Harry rolled his eyes and took out his headphones, “Do you always have to make an entrance?”

Louis frowned, not expecting Harry to immediately be cross with him after everything that happened on Sunday and Monday morning. Something ugly in his gut reared its head, urging him to be as much of a pain as Harry was being.

“Didn’t realize I was sitting next to the queen,” Louis snuffed as he roughly slammed his bag on the table’s surface, “My apologies, your majesty.”

Harry shook his head and looked back down at his book, his jaw taught as his eyes moved over the text.

Louis sat down and folded his arms, instantly feeling antsy.

“What’s got you in a tiff, anyways?” He asked before he could think better of it.

“I’m fine,” Harry monotonously said, his eyes never leaving his book.

“Obviously not,” Louis scoffed. He rested his elbow on the table and gestured between the two of them, “Thought all this would have been done if I’m being honest.”

Harry heavily sighed and closed his book, finally turning towards Louis.

“What are you even talking about?”

Louis frowned, “Just. Well, Y’know…”

“No, I don’t,” Harry quirked his eyebrow. “If I knew, why would I ask?”

“I thought things were okay between us,” Louis defensively squared his shoulders as Harry stared at him with a bored expression.

Harry leaned back in his chair and folded his arms over his stomach, “Why would you think that?”

Louis physically recoiled at that, turning his head to face forwards. He knew that his cheeks were flushed crimson and he hated the remote possibility of giving Harry the satisfaction of him looking weak.

“You thought we would be mates because you slept in my bed?” Harry continued, his voice almost mocking. Louis gritted his teeth as Harry tacked on, “We were drunk. Didn’t change anything,
“Fine,” Louis gritted out, his nails digging into the table.

Mr. Aoki chose that moment to walk in the room and Louis had never felt more appreciative of a teacher’s presence. He numbly sat through the lecture, acutely aware of every miniscule movement that Harry made. Louis’ stomach was constricting itself in knots, pushing himself to the verge of being sick that he even considered that Harry and him had made progress.

Harry blatantly told him that he didn’t like making new friends and that he didn’t like Louis. No, he said that he loathed Louis. So really, why was he remotely surprised at Harry’s tone? One getaway to Liverpool doesn’t mend a broken relationship between two people.

When they were excused, Louis quickly gathered his things and left the classroom. He kept his attention straight ahead, not bothering to look and see if Harry was behind him.

It wouldn’t matter if he was.

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“How’d it go?!”

Harry slumped against the counter, his head nearly ramming into the register as Jules bounded over to him from the entrance. He made a low rumbling sound from his throat that was the furthest from positive affirmation.

Jules frowned at him, “That good, huh?"

“I made it worse,” Harry mumbled.

“What’d you say?"

“Uh…” Harry drawled out, wincing at how blatantly horrible he was to Louis that afternoon.

“Fucks sake, you were meant to ask him over to practice or whatever,” Jules flicked him on the forehead. “How bad could that have possibly gone?” She slightly flailed her hands out, “We even rehearsed the conversation!”

Harry pushed himself upwards and looked anywhere besides Jules expectant stare.

“I may have panicked a bit before class started.”

“Panicked how, exactly?” Jules pressed, her tone suggesting that she already had a rough idea of what Harry had done.

Harry kept his eyes trained on potted succulents along the back wall as he rushed out, “I – You know I’m not good with making new friends.”

“Harry,” Jules sternly said, lifting herself to her toes to grab his chin. She angled his face to look at her, “What did you do?”

“I was a complete dick,” He sighed, wincing at the immediate disapproval that painted her expression.

“A dick as in,” Jules let go of his face to cross her arms, “You were your normal self…Or?”
Harry groaned as he wiped a hand over his face, “A dick as in I snapped at him and asked why he would have thought things would be different between us.”

“Fuckin’ hell,” Jules exasperated and took a step back. She started pacing in front of the till, “You need to apologize.”

“I can’t do that!” Harry panicked.

“Yes you can,” Jules threateningly pointed her index finger at him. “You fancy him and you were a total knob for no reason.”

“I don’t fancy him,” Harry grumpily muttered.

“Save it for someone who hasn’t seen the video,” Jules snorted.

Harry narrowed his eyes, “I was drunk.”

“Even more reason that you meant it,” Jules stopped pacing and rested her hands on her waist. She cocked her head towards the door, “Now go apologize.”

“Doubt he will even want to talk to me,” Harry quietly murmured, looking down at his fingers.

“Never know until you try.”

Harry slowly nodded, “I’ll go after work.”

“No,” Jules huffed and walked behind the counter. She shoved Harry off the stool, nearly toppling him over as she gritted, “You’re gonna go now.”

“Christ!” Harry yelped as he tripped over his own feet, barely catching himself on the lip of the counter. He frantically waved his hands, “What’d you do that for?!”

Jules smugly grinned, “Getting you off your lazy arse.”

“I am not lazy,” Harry glared as he picked up his bag off the floor. He shouldered the leather strap and stepped backwards, “What if he doesn’t want to talk to me?”

“Then you keep apologizing,” She easily shrugged.

Harry lolled his head back with a groan, “This is so fucking infuriating.”

“Your fault for being a cunt.”

“His fault for wrecking my camera.”

“For f*cks sake,” Julie whined, “Just let it go already!”

Harry glared at the petite woman, biting back a retort because he knew it would be useless. He rolled his eyes and walked towards the door, mentally bracing himself for the screaming match that was bound to happen when he showed up at Louis’ door.

“Good luck!” Jules called from behind him.

“I’ll need it,” He mumbled to himself.

He left the shop and pulled out his mobile, thumbing through the short strand of messages between
Louis and himself. His thumb hovered over Louis’ address as he tugged on his bottom lip with his teeth. Resolutely clicking on the automated hyperlink, Harry started to walk towards Louis’ flat.

Deciding not to show up empty handed, Harry ducked in a local coffee shop. After waiting in a short queue, he picked up two teas and an apology cheese Danish before continuing the short trek. With every step closer to Louis’ building, Harry felt more and more uncertain about seeing him. He anxiously fisted a paper bag that had the pasty inside of it and stopped just outside of the door. Harry double-checked Louis’ address and steeled himself as he walked inside.

Louis lived on the third floor in flat 331. Harry climbed the sets of stairs, sliding past a few students as they bounded downstairs towards the exit. He kept the teas close to his chest and muttered out a slew of curse words when they nearly slipped out of his hold. With a slightly dramatic sigh, Harry stopped outside of a plain door that was tucked at the end of the hall on the third floor.

“Alright,” He muttered to himself. “Just be nice.”

Harry rapped his knuckles against the door and took a step back. He heard a slight shuffling from inside the flat and genuinely considered turning on his heel to make a run for it. Shifting his weight from foot to foot, Harry’s eyes widened when he heard the door being unlocked.

“Can I help – Oh.”

Louis stood in the doorway with a confused expression as his eyes landed on Harry. Harry noticed that he had changed his clothes from class, opting for a pair of speckled joggers and an oversized grey hoodie instead of the Henley he wore earlier. His hair was mussed and a pair of black rimmed glasses rested on the bridge of his nose.

“Right,” Louis shortly said, his confusion replaced with impatience as he glared at Harry. “What do you want?”

“I – ” Harry started and then closed his mouth, frowning that he couldn’t verbalize the words lodged in his throat.

“Y’know, I really don’t have time for this,” Louis snapped, moving to close the door.

Harry jutted his foot out and stopped the door from slamming in his face, “No, wait!”

Louis pushed his weight against the door and let out a frustrated grunt when Harry shoved his shoulder into the other side, preventing Louis from shutting it. Harry gritted his teeth and put all of his strength against the door, effectively shoving Louis’ smaller frame backwards.

“What the fuck?!” Louis shouted as Harry unceremoniously toppled inside the flat. He shoved Harry’s shoulder, “Get the hell out of my home!”

Harry’s eyes widened as he arched his body away from Louis, doing his best to keep the cups from spilling all over the floor after he basically forced an entry. He bit back a groan when Louis stomped on his foot, genuinely unsure if it was an accident or not.

“Would you just,” Harry huffed as he turned his back to Louis, avoiding his insistent jabs to his stomach. He set the drinks down on an island in the kitchen and spun on his heel. Gripping Louis’ hands in his own, Harry slightly shook him, “Stop hitting me, I’m trying to apologize!”

“Apologize?!” Louis crowed, yanking his hands from Harry’s grip. “For what exactly?” He shoved Harry backwards, “For being a complete utter twat?” Louis shoved him again, “Or for barging into my flat?”
Harry defensively held up his hands, raising his knee to semi-protect his gut. He darted behind the island when Louis lurched at him. Crouching over, Harry gripped the lip of the surface and wearily looked across the way where Louis had assumed a similar position. Louis looked almost feline-like as he peered at Harry, his mouth curled into a snarl as he slowly circled the table.

“I wanted to apologize,” Harry exhaled and circled the island, keeping Louis far from him, “For how I acted in class.” He winced when Louis scoffed, “And, uh, I guess barging in, too. Sorry.”

“You – You’re such a twat!” Louis sputtered out, his chest heaving as he stopped moving. He settled his hands on his hips, “You were a fuckin’ dickhead for no reason this morning.”

“I know,” Harry roughly exhaled, stopping his own movements. He rested his hands over his chest, “I – You didn’t deserve that.”

Louis rolled his eyes, “No, I didn’t.”

“I’m not good at this whole…” Harry gestured between Louis and himself.

“Fake boyfriend thing?”

“Friend thing,” Harry corrected.

Louis suspiciously eyed Harry, “Friends?”

“Well,” Harry scrubbed a hand over his face, “Yeah? I mean it’s a bit unorthodox, but that’s kind of what this is.”

“How you were this morning was far from acting like my friend,” Louis pointedly raised his eyebrows.

“I know,” Harry easily agreed, resolutely looking down at the table. “I’m just – I’m not good at this,” He softly admitted. Harry looked back up at Louis, “Sunday was…It was pretty fucking great.”

The corner of Louis mouth twitched upwards, “Yeah?”

Harry nodded and took a hesitant step towards Louis, “Yeah.”

“I thought so, too,” Louis quietly said. He shook his head and folded his arms over his chest, “ Doesn’t explain this morning, though.”

“Things between us are just really confusing to me?” Harry stated but it came out as a question.

Louis cocked his head to the side, “What’d you mean?”

“Like…It started off pretty horrible,” Harry laughed, pulling a small chuckle from Louis. He shrugged, “And then we’re fake dating and then we’re actually getting along?” Harry groaned and helplessly grimaced, “I’m just trying to figure it out.”

Louis slumped his weight against the island, looking as resigned as Harry felt.

“It’s all a bit fucked,” Louis sighed, “Isn’t it?”

“A tad,” Harry bit back a grin. He laughed and slowly shook his head, “I mean I’ve only just gotten used to having one friend and she’s been around for two years.”

Louis let out a surprised cackle and chuckled out, “That has to be the saddest thing I’ve ever heard.”
Yeah, well,” Harry shrugged. He reached over, grabbing a travel cup and the pastry, “I wasn’t sure how this whole apology thing was supposed to go…But, I brought tea? And a pastry?”

“Are you asking or telling me,” Louis teased, plucking the cup and brown bag from Harry’s hand. He peeked inside the bag and then looked back at Harry, “Thanks.”

Harry gave him a small smile, “I really am sorry.”

“I know,” Louis nodded and started to walk towards a couch. He looked over his shoulder, “If you do it again, I’ll kick your lanky arse.”

“It won’t,” Harry snorted.

“Good,” Louis chirped as he sat down. When Harry awkwardly looked from the couch to the door, Louis quirked his eyebrow, “Well? Are you gonna sit down?”

Harry nodded and grabbed his tea, hesitating a moment before he sat on the opposite end of the couch. He took a sip and looked around the flat, biting back a grin as the realization that is was completely different than his studio.

“Oh!” Harry exclaimed when he remembered an envelope tucked in his bag. He opened the zipper and pulled out the small package, handing it to Louis, “I printed a few stills to hang in the studio.”

Louis curiously took the envelope and opened it, pulling out three pictures that Harry had edited the night prior. His eyes widened as he looked over the first still, the one of him sitting on Harry’s couch.

“I wanted to make sure you were okay with it,” Harry quietly murmured, his fingers anxiously twisting in his lap.

Louis’ cheeks were tinged pink as he looked at the photograph. He titled his head to the side and muttered, “I don’t look half bad.”

“Rather gorgeous,” Harry exhaled.

Both of their eyes widened at the same time, Louis’ head snapping towards Harry’s dumbfounded expression. Harry gaped back at him, mentally wishing he could run himself over for the careless slip of tongue. A spout of twenty different ways he could fake his death rolled through his mind as Louis’ neck flushed crimson from the comment.

“I – I mean,” Harry stammered, his nails digging into his thigh. He flailed his hand, “Uh, you know. Objectively, from a photographer’s perspective. Um, attractive.”

Louis jerkily nodded, “Right. Course.”

Harry took a large pull of his tea as Louis filed to the second picture. An impossibly large smile tugged at Louis’ mouth while his eyes raked over the still. It was from the club in Liverpool, both boys beaming with pink cocktails raised to their lips. Harry watched as a Louis’ eyes flashed with an iridescent fleck of light while he scrutinized the photo.

Then there was the final picture.

“Oh.”

Harry almost didn’t add the third picture, scared that it revealed something he wasn’t remotely prepared to come to terms with. It was grabbed from the final video of the night when they were
tucked under the comfort of Harry’s duvet. The fairy lights illuminated them in a fine glow, painting their skin gold and warmth. Their eyes were squinted from laughter as their noses pressed together, sleepy grins crooking their mouths upwards.

If Harry didn’t know the situation, he would have thought they were a real couple.

Louis’ jaw was slack while he looked at the picture, his posture uncharacteristically still. As the moments dragged into minutes of silence, Harry felt as if he was about to crawl out of his skin.

“If – If you don’t like it, I can get rid of it,” Harry rushed out, reaching to grab the picture. “I just thought it made us look…Um, well, like a real couple.”

Louis slowly nodded and carefully handed the picture back to Harry. When his eyes met Harry’s, he slightly narrowed them as if he was looking to find something hidden in Harry’s expression. Harry took the pictures and turned away, nervously chewing the inside of his cheek as he slipped them back into the envelope.

“Um,” Louis mumbled, dragging Harry’s attention back to him. He scratched the side of his neck then pointed at the envelope, “You should keep it.”

Harry slotted the envelope back in his bag, “Are you sure?”

Louis’ lips were firmly pressed together as he nodded. There was a lull between them and Harry wasn’t sure if he should stay or go because with every passing second, he felt the blanketed tension growing.

Ping

Both Louis and Harry snapped their attention to Louis’ mobile that rested on the coffee table. Louis lunged forwards and unlocked the device, his eyebrows pulled together as he looked over the screen. Harry turned away and finished off the remainder of his tea.

“Oh my god!”

Harry nearly spat out his tea at Louis’ abrupt exclamation. He choked back a cough, wincing as Louis roughly patted his back. His hand was clenched in a fist as he jaggedly coughed. When he cleared his throat and was sure that he wasn’t going to die, Harry carefully set the cup on the table and looked over towards Louis’ slightly apologetic expression.

“Sorry,” Louis bit back a laugh.

“No you’re not,” Harry playfully rolled his eyes.

“I’m not,” Louis chirped with a smug grin as he straightened his back. “Because…Guess what?”

Harry suspiciously peered at Louis, carefully drawling out, “What?”

Louis practically threw his phone at Harry, “We got it!”

Confusion muddled Harry’s mind until he looked at the screen and realized that it was an email from Liam. His eyes nearly bulged out as Louis sidled next to him to read the message.

Laura Tomlinson and Harry Styles,

After wrapping up interviews, Zayn and I have decided that we would like to offer you two a position in our study. We will be able to go into more detail as the semester continues, but we wanted to give
you a general layout of what the study will entail.

There will be three retreats during the course of the next three months. The retreats will take place in three separate locations, will last a full weekend, and will include the four other couples. It is imperative that you attend each of these retreats as they will be the main basis for our research. Failure to do so will result in immediate removal from the study.

After each retreat, we will conduct post-interviews to gauge your experience as individuals and as a couple. There will also be a final interview at the end of the semester where we give an all-around assessment and receive your feedback of the experience as a whole.

This Friday, we will be hosting a “get to know each other” pre-drinks at our flat. It will give you a chance to meet the other couples and gives all of us an excuse to celebrate the beginning of our study.

Please respond to this email with a confirmation that you are still interested in participating as well as if you can make it Friday evening.

Best,

Liam Payne and Zayn Malik

“We – We actually did it!” Harry laughed, smacking his hand over his mouth in disbelief as he looked up at Louis.

“I know!” Louis was beaming back at him. He shook his head in disbelief, “I can’t believe it.”

“I don’t know how I feel about the retreat bit,” Harry admitted. Louis frowned so he quickly added on, “I mean I’ll do it. I just can’t promise anything when it comes to socializing with the other couples.”

“Wouldn’t expect anything else,” Louis playfully bumped their shoulders together. He looked back down at his mobile, “So…Should I say yes?”

“Do we have to do the drinks thing on Friday?”

“Yes.”

“But –”

“Yes.”

“But what if –”

“We’re going.”

“Fine.”
Friday afternoon brought a compilation of excitement and nerves, both hopelessly bubbling in Louis’ gut as he walked into psychology class. Slung over his shoulder, in addition to his book bag, was a travel duffel. Unable to decide what he wanted to wear for Liam and Zayn’s “get to know each other” drinks, Louis opted to shove most of his wardrobe in the bag and make Harry help him decide what to wear. Harry eyed the duffel as Louis let it unceremoniously drop to the floor with a soft thud.

“Are you legitimately moving in and forgot to mention it?”

“Ha ha,” Louis rolled his eyes. “Aren’t you just a brilliant comedian.”

The crooks of Harry’s mouth jaunted into a grin while he watched Louis sit down with a dramatized sigh.

“Really, though,” Harry gestured towards the discarded bag, “I thought you were just coming over to get ready at mine?”

“I am,” Louis chirped, arching his spine over to pull out his textbook.

Harry’s brows pinched together, “So…Why the duffel?”

“Because, Harry,” Louis exasperated with an unimpressed look, “This is basically our coming out party and we need to look good.”

A bright laugh slipped from Harry’s mouth, his eyes widening, “Coming out party?”

“Exactly,” Louis beamed and mussed Harry’s hair. “Glad you’re catchin’ on.”

Harry swatted Louis’ hand away and cocked his head to the side, “This isn’t meant to be a competition, you know?”

“Of course it is,” Louis exclaimed, his eyes darting towards the front of the room when Mr. Aoki walked in. He lowered his voice, “We need to be the best couple there.”

Harry angled his body closer to Louis, dropping his voice as their professor started lecture, “That’s really not what it’s about, Louis.”

“It is,” Louis insisted. He nudged Harry’s side with his elbow, “I mean we already know we’re gonna be the best-looking couple, but –”

“Louis!” Harry quietly chastised, his laughter removing any chance of malice. His eyes flitted towards the front of the room before he added, “You can’t expect us to be able to out-couple legitimate couples.”

“And why not?” Louis pouted.

“Uh…” Harry confusedly gestured between them with his thumb. “Maybe because we’re not actually together?”

Louis waved him off and opened his textbook, “That’s not here or there.”

“It really is,” Harry snickered, covering his mouth with his hand to try and muffle the sound.
“Have some faith in us.”

Harry scrutinized Louis’ face before giving him a resigned sigh and nodding. Louis smugly grinned to himself as he started to pay attention to the lecture. He jotted down notes about Freud, pausing every few minutes to glimpse at Harry’s notebook. On the corner of his notes, Harry was listlessly doodling in easy pen strokes. Louis found himself frowning when he realized that Harry had stated to sketch his coworker.

“You sure you’re not in love with her?” Louis mumbled under his breath.

“Huh?” Harry’s nose scrunched as he looked up.

Louis pointedly started at the drawing and tilted his chin upwards.

Harry’s eyes illuminated in understanding, “Oh, Jules?”

Jules

Louis felt distaste flooding his chest at the name.

“Yeah,” He snipped, probably sounding a tad harsher than he anticipated.

“Did you forget the part where I said I’ve never been interested in anyone?” Harry murmured under his breath. An impish glint flitted over his expression as he gently leaned into Louis’ side, “Or that I’m gay?”

“Well,” Louis defensively folded his arms over his chest, “You sure do draw her enough.”

Harry set his elbow on the table and rested his chin on his hand, “Is there a problem with that?”

“It’s not platonic,” Louis huffed out, quickly looking towards their professor to make sure he wasn’t attracting attention. Louis peeked at Harry from the corner of his eyes, “I don’t see you drawing anyone else.”

“Is this your way of saying that you want me to draw you?” Harry mischievously peered at Louis.

Louis cheeks flushed as he quickly rushed out, “No.”

“Aww,” Harry lowly cooed. He reached under the table and pinched Louis’ thigh, “Do you want me to draw you like one of my French girls?”

“Is she French?”

“Please tell me you understood the reference.”

“Obviously,” Louis rolled his eyes. “I wasn’t born under a bloody rock.”

Harry shook his head and turned back to his notebook, “Just checking.”

There was a lull between them and Louis gnawed on his bottom lip as Harry started to draw her again. Apparently unable to bite his tongue, Louis continued to press upon the subject.

“I just don’t see what could be so special that you’d wanna draw her every day.”

Harry didn’t bother to stop drawing as he monotonously responded, “I don’t draw her every day.”
Louis was one answer away from stomping his foot like a petulant child.

When Louis didn’t answer, Harry paused his ministrations to offer, “You could come by the shop and meet her.”

“Does she know about…” Louis ineloquently tapered off.

“You taking advantage of a situation to be my boyfriend?” Harry smirked, pulling an affronted sound from Louis. He nodded, “Yeah, she knows about that.”

“Dickhead,” Louis grumbled under his breath.

The rest of the class dragged on without another word between the two. Louis ignored the itch under his skin as Harry continued to draw. He was far from a jealous person and it was a character trait he prided himself on in past relationships. Real relationships. Louis just didn’t understand why Harry felt the need to sketch the same person every single day. Or at least, every other day. Especially when it was the only “friend” he had. For some inexplicable reason, the drawings didn’t bode well with Louis.

“Alright, everyone,” Mr. Aoki happily chirped at the end of lecture. He clasped his hands together, “Have a good weekend and remember to outline chapter three for class on Monday.”

There was a grumbled response from the students before chairs were being pushed back. Louis put his materials away and stood, resting his weight against the table as he waited for Harry to finish packing up. Harry rose from his chair with a lethargic nonchalance that nearly had Louis tearing his hair out.

“Sloths on Xanax move faster than you do,” Louis declared as he took a step backwards towards the exit.

Harry purposefully slowed his next step, “Are we in a hurry?”

“No,” Louis grunted and turned away. “You just have the inability to move at a human pace.”

“And you have the inability to not be dramatic,” Harry countered, falling in step by Louis’ side.

Louis made a non-committal noise and lightly shoved Harry with his shoulder. Harry nudged him and parroted back the same noise. Louis’ mouth threatened to stretch into a grin as he repeated the sound even louder, effectively causing a few stares from other students. He looked up at Harry and challengingly lifted his eyebrows. Harry bit his bottom lip and let out a strangled grunt that was a hybrid between a dying cow and drowning sea lion.

“Oh my god,” Louis cackled, his eyes reduced to squints as he pushed Harry towards the stairs. “Never make that sound again. I’m begging you.”

Naturally, Harry recreated the sound. Only that time, the pained grunt reverberated throughout the stairwell. The echo made a few people stop in place as they whipped around to find the source of the offense noise. Harry just kept walking, pursing his lips into a whistle as if nothing was abnormal. Louis gawked at him with wide eyes, feeling an odd tinge of pride that Harry was slowly emerging from his shell.

“C’mon,” Louis shook his head, wrapping his fingers around Harry’s wrist to pull him outside.

Harry let Louis drag him out of the building with only a slightly disgruntled whine in response. February air whipped around them as they exited into the courtyard, Louis instinctively stepping
closer to Harry’s side. When Louis moved to walk towards Harry’s building, Harry gently gripped his shoulders and directed them in the opposite direction.

“What’re you doing?” Louis frowned, looking over his shoulder towards the street that led to the studio. “The studio s’that way, yeah?”

“We’re making a pit stop,” Harry said as they continued down the sidewalk.

A crease settled along Louis’ forehead, “What?”

“You wanted me to be more spontaneous, yeah?”

Louis saw a flash on uncertainty pass over Harry’s face when he looked down at Louis. His bottom lip was tugged between his teeth and his fingers were toying with the ring nestled along his index finger.

*Harry was trying.*

“Oh,” Louis gasped, genuinely surprised and impossibly endeared at Harry’s effort. He nodded, a toothy grin quickly stretching his lips, “Yeah. I mean, I do.”

Relief sagged Harry’s pinched expression as he turned to face forwards. Harry shoved his hands in his pockets and didn’t offer any further explanation about where they were going. They stopped at the next bus stop and Louis couldn’t help but to stare at Harry as he excitedly shifted his weight from foot to foot.

They clambered on the next bus and sat side by side, a sense of Déjà vu washing over Louis as their shoulders bumped together. Harry was looking out the window with in earnest concentration and Louis didn’t have it in his heart to disrupt him. Instead, he focused on the other passengers as they trotted on and off the bus.

“Get off here,” Harry gestured towards the doors.

Louis got out of his seat and moved towards the exit, pausing in the doorway as they slid open. The pair jumped off the platform and Louis immediately whipped his head around to gather his bearings. It was a quieter part of town that he hadn’t been to, the streets significantly less congested with students.

“Alright, Harold,” Louis turned to Harry with his arms slightly extended by his side, “Where to?”

Harry looked over Louis’ shoulder and nodded towards a collection of buildings behind him. Louis spun around and looked at the series of hole-in-the-wall businesses that were lined next to each other.

“Which one?”

“Take a guess,” Harry exhaled, smile evident in his voice.

Louis scrutinized the shopfronts, not noticing anything out of the ordinary that would have warranted their trip. He breathed out a gentle laugh when he stopped at the last shop on the lane, immediately understanding it was their destination. Suspended over a burgundy door, there was a wooden plaque that was adorned with painted grape vines. On the front window, a sign that read: *Wine tastings every Friday at five!*

Pulling his mobile from his pocket, Louis saw that it was ten minutes until five.
“I found this place a while ago,” Harry quietly said, causing Louis to turn around and look at him. His cheeks were tinged a rosy hue as he admitted, “I’ve wanted to go...But, um.” He uncomfortably scratched the back of his neck, “Thought it’d be a bit weird to go alone?” Harry threw in a self-depreciative laugh, “Even for me.”

Louis felt as if someone had ignited a fire inside his chest, filtering his body with an overwhelming intense heat. Flames clawed their way through his bloodstream and overpowered every other sensation as he stared at Harry. The inexplicably complex boy watched him with painful earnestness, his ivory skin illuminated from a blush that looked as if it had been painted by lush rose petals.

“Well,” Louis softly started as he looped his fingers around Harry’s wrist, “Now you have me.” He cocked his head to the side and took a step backwards, gently pulling Harry with him, “So no more missing out, yeah?”

Harry stepped forward, a hesitant smile lifting his mouth, “Yeah.”

Louis nodded and turned around so Harry couldn’t see the way his face nearly split in half from a fond grin. He let his fingers slip from Harry’s wrist as they crossed the street, not wanting to push his luck by being too tactile. They stopped in front of the wine bar and Louis pulled the door back with excessive grandeur before he gestured for Harry to walk inside.

The inside of the bar was cozy and already quietly buzzing with other patrons. Brick paneled the walls and exposed lightbulbs sporadically hung from the low ceiling. There were small circular tables dotted throughout the bar, providing an almost intimate feel to the space. Harry cocked his head towards a high-top near the window and Louis nodded as he followed.

“I gotta admit, Styles,” Louis smirked as he gestured to the candle in the middle of their table, “If this was a real date, I’d feel proper wooed.”

Harry answering laugh musically trickled through the bar. He shook his head and grabbed one of the menus off the table. Louis followed suit and eyed the different flights of wine that were offered during the tasting, his feet gently swinging as he read. When he accidentally kicked Harry in the shin for the fourth time, Harry clamped Louis’ ankles between his own.

A waitress walked over to them and greeted, “Hello gentlemen, welcome to Porcuwine –”

Louis let out a startled laugh at the name, his hands immediately clamping over his mouth in embarrassment. The middle-aged woman looked slightly taken aback, her blonde curls bouncing against her shoulders as he recoiled. She glimpsed at Harry with a nervous smile, her hands clasping behind her back.

“Sorry about him,” Harry bit back his own grin. He leaned closer to the waitress and fake-whispered, “We don’t do date night that often so he’s not used to behaving in public.”

Her expression softened as she looked between the two of them, easily waving Harry off, “No worries, Dear. I know it’s a bit ridiculous of a name.”

“I love it,” Harry chirped and Louis could tell by Harry’s dimple, that he was being completely genuine in his compliment.

“I’m glad,” The waitress beamed. She pointed at the menu in Harry’s grip, “Are you two interested in doing a tasting?”

Harry looked across the table to Louis with a hopeful expression.
Louis quickly nodded, “Definitely.”

Harry lightly squeezed Louis’ ankles in his own and then grinned at the waitress, ‘I’d like to try the full bodied red flight, please.”

“Full red,” The waitress mumbled as she jotted it down on a notepad. She looked at Louis, “And for you?”

“I’ll do the…” Louis drawled out as he looked down at his menu once more. He turned back to their waitress, “How’s the aromatic flight?”

“A personal favorite of mine,” She gushed as she held a hand over her chest. “The flight comes with Riesling, Muscat Blanc, Vidal Blanc, Malvasia, and Torrontés.”

Louis offered an appreciative smile, “Sounds great, I’ll have that.”

“Excellent,” She beamed and wrote down Louis’ order. “Did you want any cheese or meat appetizers with your drinks?”

Louis expectantly looked at Harry, giving him a shrug as if to tell him that it was his choice.

“A cheese and cracker platter would be lovely, thank you,” Harry politely said as he handed over his menu.

“Thank you,” Louis followed suit as he gave her his menu.

She gave them a quick grin, “I’ll have that right out for you two.”

The waitress walked away and Louis was acutely aware that his ankles were still hooked with Harry’s underneath the table. Even the smallest of contact between the two of them set Louis in overdrive. Since his revelation in Liverpool, Louis still hadn’t gotten the whole “attraction” thing under control. When he was with Harry, there was a frenetic buzz in his veins that drew him in closer. Louis found it unbelievably inconvenient since he was still attempting to be Harry’s friend first and foremost.

“What do you think the other couples will be like?” Harry wondered aloud, his finger lazily drawing circles on the top of the table. “I mean,” He paused and his nose wrinkled, “They said they wanted a diverse group, right?”

“I’m assuming we’re the token gays,” Louis mused. He shrugged, “I have no idea what else they’ve got.”

Harry’s head rocked back as he laughed, his eyes pinching shut as he lolled back forward.

“Token gays?”

Louis seriously nodded, “Homosexuals are key to every study, Harold.”

Harry schooled his expression, “Oh, of course.” He flicked his fingers in the air and rolled his eyes, “How foolish of me.”

“Very foolish,” Louis agreed, attempting to keep a collected exterior.

Harry leaned back against his chair and let his legs part. Louis’ ankles freely swung underneath the table and he did his best to extinguish the part of him that had gotten used to touching Harry. He mentally berated himself because he truly needed to get a grip if he was meant to last the following
three months.

“Fuck,” Louis exhaled to himself as it truly sunk in how long the study would last.

“Alright?”

Louis snapped his eyes upwards to meet Harry’s concerned face. His head was slightly angled to the side as he looked back at Louis.

“Yeah,” Louis quickly waved him off. “Actually,” He carefully drawled out, “I do have a question.”

There was a pause between them before Harry let out a quick laugh.

“Was that you asking for permission?”

“Well. Yeah.”

Harry rested his hands over his stomach, “When have you ever asked me permission to say something?”

“Excellent point,” Louis chirped.

“So?”

Louis took a deep breath before he rush out, “If you don’t like to meet new people, how did you end up a nympho?”

Harry’s jaw dropped and Louis was sure that he could probably count all of Harry’s bottom teeth if he wanted to.

“Are – Are you serious?” Harry sputtered in disbelief.

Louis defensively held up his hands, “It’s a good question!”

“Alright, first off,” Harry held up his pointer finger. “I am not a nymphomaniac.”

“Sure, Casanova,” Louis snorted.

Harry frowned at that, “I’ll have you know, I’ve only had sex with four people.”

“Really?” Louis raised himself in his chair, his curiosity far past being intrigued.

“Why do you look so surprised?”

“I’m not! I mean, maybe a bit.”

“You thought I was a slag?” Harry pressed, his eyes narrowing as his mouth pressed into a firm line.

Louis immediately panicked, already seeing Harry close himself off.

“No, no, no,” Louis quickly rattled off, his eyes wide in earnest. He shook his head, “I didn’t think that, honest.”

Harry slightly relaxed in his chair but his expression remained stony.
“Harry,” Louis gently urged, “I didn’t – I don’t mean to be a prick.”

“You don’t know me,” Harry clearly enunciated.

His words hit Louis as if he was thrown into a bath filled with ice. It made his chest uncomfortable ache, but he knew that it was the truth. Louis didn’t know Harry.

“I know,” Louis mumbled as he looked down at his hands in his lap. He peeked up at Harry when he quietly added, “I’d like to, though.”

“Yeah, for a project,” Harry muttered, his jaw clenching as he looked out the window.

“No,” Louis slowly shook his head. He sighed, “Not just for some stupid case study.”

Harry scrutinized Louis as he leaned forward to rest his elbows against the table. It was almost unnerving the way he stared at Louis with an unparalleled and almost abrasive amount of concentration. Louis hesitantly reached across the table, his fingers pausing an inch from Harry’s arm. He sighed and let his hand fall against the surface.

“Is it that hard for you to believe that I genuinely want to know you?”

Harry didn’t miss a beat before he answered, “Yes.”

Louis’ nails dug into the table as he helplessly asked, “Why?”

“People don’t want to get to know someone unless they’re getting something from it,” Harry shrugged, his eyes downcast.

“If you really believe that –”

“I do,”

Louis gestured between the two of them, “Then what are we doing here?”

Harry faltered at that, his head jerking upwards as he stared at Louis. He looked like a deer caught in headlights, emerald irises blown out in a mixture of confusion and fear.

“I –” Harry cut himself off, his mouth turning downwards into a frown. “I don’t know,” Harry quietly admitted. He ran his fingers through his hair, a nervous tick that Louis had picked up on, “I didn’t think about it.”

“Good!” Louis loudly exclaimed, wincing when a few heads turned their way. He leaned forward and lowered his voice, “You wanted to come to this bar and you didn’t want to be alone. So, you brought me because we both know that when we’re not bickering, we can have a pretty fuckin’ good time together.”

Harry picked at a chip along the table, “You make it sound easy.”

“Sometimes,” Louis sighed as his head tilted to the side to catch Harry’s eye, “It is that simple.”

“Maybe,” Harry mumbled.

“When you came over on Wednesday,” Louis waited until Harry looked back at him, “You said that we were friends. That’s what it felt like, yeah?”

Harry hesitated for a moment before he curtly nodded.
“Then stop fighting me on it when I say I just want to know you,” Louis sternly put, making sure to put force in his voice so Harry would understand. “That’s what friends do.”

“Alright, dears?”

Harry and Louis snapped their heads towards their returning waitress, Louis temporarily forgetting that they were in a far too public place for an intense conversation. He leaned back and smiled up at the waitress as she carefully slid their flights in front of them. She placed the cheese platter in the center of the table and took a step backwards.


“Thank you,” Harry nodded, his voice noticeably weaker than before.

She must have picked up on the change between them because she offered a gentle smile before nodding and turning away. Louis looked down at the small wooden board set in front of him, five miniature glasses on wine positioned in circular divots. Written in chalk in front of each divot, was the individual names of wine.

“Uh, Louis?”

Louis paused, his hand frozen from where it was reaching out to the Malvasia. Harry slid his hands off the table and tugged his bottom lip between his teeth, pinching the skin into a cherry pigment.

“Yeah?” Louis carefully responded.

“Thanks,” Harry exhaled, his eyes flitting from the tabletop to Louis. “For, um,” He slightly shrugged, “Coming here.”

Louis knew that was Harry’s best attempt at an apology for his reaction. He let a smile slowly twist his lips as he picked up a glass and motioned for Harry to do the same.

“To unorthodox friendship,” Louis declared, slightly tipping the lip of his glass towards Harry.

A dimple caved into Harry’s cheek as he clinked their glasses together, “To unorthodox friendship.”

Louis lifted his glass to his mouth and looked at Harry over the rim as he took a small sip. The white wine tasted sweet against his tongue, perking up his taste buds while is trickled down his throat. He made a pleased hum and set the glass back down.

“Good?” Harry asked after his first sip.

“Very,” Louis beamed. He jutted his chin upwards, “Yours?”

“It’s good,” Harry grinned, leaning forward to spread some cheese on a cracker. He held the cracker out to Louis, “Want to try it?”

Louis suspiciously eyed the soft cheese, “What is it?”

“Burrata,” Harry jutted it closer. “Trust me, it’s good.”

“You haven’t even tried it!” Louis laughed, shaking his head when Harry pushed it closer.

“I’ve had Burrata before,” Harry rolled his eyes. “Fine,” He grunted when Louis still looked unconvinced. He took a bite of the cracker and exaggeratedly hummed, “Hmm, scrumptious!”
Louis was laughing into his palm and shook his head, “You sound straight out of a bad seventies porno.”

Harry almost spit out the cracker, nearly choking as he laughed. He covered his mouth while his shoulders shook, cheeks beautifully ruddy underneath the soft glow of the lights.

When he swallowed, Harry cleared his throat and narrowed his eyes, “Do you frequent vintage porn?”

“Nah,” Louis picked up the Riesling and took a small sip. He made a noise from the back of his throat and pointed at Harry, “Although, I do like how it’s a bit more genuine.”

“Genuine?” Harry parroted back with a smirk, finishing off the first glass of Merlot.

Louis nodded, “Most vintage porn was just shot at home so, it makes it feel more authentic.”

“You sound like you have a lot of experience,” Harry teased.

“I’ve dabbled,” Louis nonchalantly admitted, tilting his glass back to his mouth.

Harry nodded and then shrugged, “I’ve filmed a couple before.”

Louis sputtered out the last dreg of wine, consequently sending the liquid to unceremoniously dribble down his front. He didn’t even move to wipe it away as he gaped at Harry. The other boy’s eyes were gleaming as he laughed at Louis’ dumfounded expression. Louis didn’t even move when Harry leaned forward with a napkin, lightly dabbing the excess wine that caught his chin.

“You – What?!” Louis flapped his hands in front of himself, causing Harry to erupt in laughter. He threateningly pointed at Harry, “Explain yourself right now.”

Harry shrugged and started to pick up another cracker, “That’s kind of how the threesome happened.”

“Forget the bloody cheese for a moment!” Louis swatted the cracker from Harry’s hand. He leaned forward and swatted Harry upside the head, “I need details. I need an outline. A play by play.”

“You want the details?” Harry suggestively quirked his eyebrow.

Louis’ nose scrunched in distaste, “Not in that way you perv.”

Harry snorted and took a gulp from his Malbec.

“Oh c’mon,” Louis groaned. “I know there’s got to be a good story here.”

The corner of Harry’s mouth jaunted into a private smile as he looked down at the table.

“I knew it!” Louis crowed, kicking Harry’s shin under the table.

“Fine,” Harry sighed as if it was the most inconvenient matter to discuss. He took a large sip and smacked his lips, “They approached me in the editing lounge at campus –”

“These are other students?!”

Harry nodded, “Yeah.”

“Would I know them?” Louis perked up in his seat. “Are they in our year?”
“Maybe?” Harry squinted and rolled his head to the side. “And yes.”

“This is too good,” Louis rubbed his hands together. “What’re their names?”

Harry laughed and shook his head, “I’m not telling you.”

Louis incredulously gasped, “And why the fuck not?”

“They’re not out,” Harry shrugged. He took another gulp and cleared his throat, “You might know them and it wouldn’t be right for me to out them.”

“But,” Louis childishly huffed, “I won’t tell anyone.”

Harry gave him an unimpressed look.

“I won’t tell anyone besides Niall,” Louis corrected.

“Nope,” Harry sliced his hands through the air. “Not telling.”

“Whatever,” Louis impatiently grumbled. “Wait,” His eyebrows pulled together in confusion, “If they’re not out... Why did they come up to you?”

“Apparently,” Harry scratched the back of his neck, “They saw me at a gay bar and recognized me.”

“Which one?”

“Element.”

Louis nodded in recognition and then frowned, “You go to gay bars?”

“You wanted to know how I get laid without really talking to people,” Harry pointedly lifted an eyebrow. He held out both of his palms, “There you have it.”

“Simple, yet effective,” Louis airily mused.

“Exactly.”

“Hold on,” Louis narrowed his eyes as mirth painted over his expression, “Element is a karaoke bar.”

Harry’s cheeks flushed and leaned forward to grab his next taster. He tilted it back and downed the glass, effectively confirming Louis’ suspicions.

“Oh my god.”

“Louis, shut up.”

“You like karaoke?!” Louis cackled as if it was a massive revelation.

Harry groaned, “I never said that.”

“You gotta tell me,” Louis beamed at Harry’s scowl, “What’s your song?”

“I’m not telling you anything,” Harry crossed his arms.

“Please,” Louis rolled his eyes, “It’s not that embarrassing.”
“Do you like karaoke?”

“Obviously,” Louis easily scoffed. “I wanted to study drama,” He flippantly flicked his fingers in the air, “Karaoke was practically made for me.”

“I Will Survive.”

“Excuse me?” Louis cocked his head to the side.

Harry’s cheeks were beet red as he clarified, “That’s my song.”

Louis covered his face and groaned, “Harry, that has to be the most over-done karaoke song!”

“It’s a classic for a reason, Louis!” Harry insisted as laughter rolled through him.

“Oh, you poor gay cliché,” Louis laughed out, his head lolled back as tears stung his eyes.

Harry snorted and picked up another glass, “That’s real rich coming from the guy who wanted to study drama.”

Louis went through another fit of laughter as he nodded, “You – You’ve got me there.”

“Wait, what’s your song?” Harry pressed.

He didn’t even bat an eye when he responded with, “I Feel Like a Woman.”

There was a pregnant pause between them, neither cracking before they both erupted into raucous laughter.

“You can never judge me again,” Harry cackled. He vigorously shook his head, “Ever again, Tomlinson.”

“Whatever, let’s go back to the threesomes,” Louis chuckled as he picked up the third glass. He tilted the wine towards Harry, “Don’t think you distracted me.”

“Damnit,” Harry puffed out on a laugh. “Basically, they found me on campus and asked if I could film a private video for them.” Harry shrugged, “Offered me good money, so I said yes.”

“Why didn’t they just prop up a camera themselves like a normal person?”

Harry looked at Louis with open curiosity, “Is that something you’ve done?”

“No,” Louis snorted. He squared his shoulders and snuffed, “I already know I look great during sex, don’t need a camera to reassure me.”

“Confident,” Harry smirked against his glass. He shrugged, “I don’t know why they didn’t. I didn’t ask that many questions.

Louis looked at Harry in disbelief, “Two guys asked you film them fucking and you didn’t ask questions?”

Harry simply shrugged, “Basically.”

“And how’d it go from you filming it,” Louis narrowed his eyes, “To guest starring.”

“I filmed the first round,” Harry blushed, his eyes darting away from Louis’ attentive stare. He raised
his shoulders and then slumped, “And then they asked if I would be interested in the second.”

“Harold,” Louis admonished, his eyes practically bulging out of his head, “Did it occur to you that the whole thing was just a set up?”

Harry folded his hands behind his head and cheekily grinned, “I was flattered.”

“Oh my god!” Louis leaned over and smacked Harry on the chest. “I take back what I said,” Louis huffed out, “You are a total slag.”

“Made for a good story, apparently,” Harry responded, seeming to grab a handle on the insincerity of Louis’ comment. “What about you?” He asked before taking a sip. “Do you have any good stories?”

“M’ afraid you’ve definitely taken the cock cake with that one.”

“Come on,” Harry pressed. “Just one story?”

“Alright, let’s see,” Louis drawled out as he wracked his brain for something remotely as interesting. “Oh!” His eyes widened and Harry excitedly beamed in response. He groaned at the memory, “Niall and I accidentally ended up in a sex club once.”

A startled laugh spat out of Harry’s mouth, “How could you have possibly made that mistake?!”

“It was my birthday and Niall thought he found a male strip club,” Louis told him, his own smile growing as Harry continued to laugh. “Turns out,” Louis shrugged with his hands in the air, “It was a fetish club.”

“Fuck,” Harry’s eyes were reduced to small slits. He wiped a hand over his face, “Well? Did you stay?”

Louis covered his face in embarrassment as he nodded. Harry let out a sharp guffaw that was far too loud for the small wine bar.

“Out with the details,” Harry beamed, blatantly more comfortable than he had ever been with Louis. He rested his chin on his hand, “I know you’ve got some.”

“Niall ran off to sign me up for somethin’, reassuring me that it would basically be the same as getting a lap dance.”

“Oh no, Niall,” Harry groaned.

“Turns out,” Louis chuckled and took an encouraging swig from his last wine glass, “Getting spanked in front of a room full of men in leather is nothing like a lap dance.”

Louis wasn’t sure if he could classify the noise that came out of Harry’s mouth as a laugh. It was abrasive and cut through every other conversation that had been occurring in the bar. He looked positively juvenile as his eyes were barely held open and a toothy smile plastered across his face. Harry’s pink tongue poked out of his mouth and Louis found himself completely unabashed by his story because it caused Harry to look like that. He caused Harry to look like that.

There was a part of Louis that felt compelled to make Harry look that carefree every single day.

****

“Should we bring something?” Harry asked over his shoulder, looking to Louis who was still staring at the mound of clothes he brought with him.
Louis dazedly lifted his head, “Hmm?”

Harry grabbed a wine bottle from the top of the fridge, “Isn’t that the polite thing to do?”

“What, like a host gift?” Louis’ nose scrunched. When Harry nodded, Louis shook his head, “I don’t think it’s that formal of a thing.”

“Oh,” Harry nipped his bottom lip and put the bottle back.

“But,” Louis quickly rushed out, taking a step towards Harry, “You could bring it for us to drink.” He quirked his mouth, “Polite enough to drink our own booze, but not too polite to bring a gift.”

“I like the way you think,” Harry felt himself smile as he grabbed the bottle and set it on the kitchen table. He rested against the surface and checked his mobile, “We should get going soon.”

Louis petulantly whined from the back of his throat and Harry genuinely wondered if he was going to stomp his foot. He pushed himself off the table and walked over the pile of clothes.

“Want help?”

“Maybe.”

Harry breathed out a laugh and started to rummage through what Louis brought with him. He picked up black jeans and held them over his shoulder for Louis to take. When Louis took them, Harry continued to sift through his clothes. He made a pleased sound as he set a pair of laced brown suede boots to the side.

“I quite like those,” Harry mumbled under his breath.

I quite like you.

Harry frowned and shook his own words out of his head. He thumbed through the shirts and heard Louis getting changed into the jeans behind him.

“I actually have something that I think would look good with that,” Harry told him as he stood upright.

“You don’t have to lend me clothes,” Louis huffed as Harry moved towards his wardrobe.

“I don’t have to,” Harry agreed as he looked for something in particular. He made a triumphant sound, pulled out a thin black jumper, and turned to Louis, “But, I think this would look nice.”

Louis zipped his jeans and closed the distance between them. He grabbed the jumper from Harry and lightly fisted the material.

“This is gonna look massive on me,” Louis looked up at Harry, one of his eyebrows raised.

“Like I said,” Harry shrugged and slid his hands in his pockets, “I think it will look nice.”

There was stagnant silence between them as they looked at each other. Harry found himself wanting to rock forward and close the distance, wanting to let himself be selfish and just touch Louis. A more prominent part of him wanted to show Louis that he could be his friend. Friends didn’t kiss each other.

Harry turned back to wardrobe and grabbed the hem of his white shirt. He pulled it off his frame and reached his hands over his head, arching his spine to the side as he stretched his back.
“When did you get your first one?”

“Huh?” Harry twirled around, his hands still above his head.

Louis let out a gentle laugh as he gestured to Harry’s upper body.

“The tattoos,” He clarified and rocked his weight onto his left foot. “When did you get your first?”

“Oh.” Harry dropped his hands, slightly flushing at the way Louis’ eyes raked over his abdomen. “Waited until I was eighteen.”

“How old are you now?”

“Twenty-one.”

Louis shook his head in disbelief, “How the fuck did you manage to get all those in the span of three years?”

“Four,” Harry corrected.

“Whatever,” Louis waved him off and pulled Harry’s jumper over his head.

Harry bit back a grin as Louis repeatedly cuffed the material until his wrists were visible. Louis was right, the jumper was massive on him. He turned back to face the wardrobe, worried that it would be painfully visible how endeared he was at the way Louis looked in his clothes. He looked dainty and soft. Harry shook his head and reminded himself that he was also obscenely unobtainable.

“Did you ever think about getting a tattoo?” Harry asked as he pulled out a plaint onyx blouse. He slipped his arms into the flimsy material and buttoned it up, leaving the top three buttons undone.

“Yeah, just don’t have the money right now.”

Harry pulled off his jeans and slipped on a pair of fitted black trousers that were lined with thin white pinstripes.

“What do you want to get?”

When Louis didn’t respond, Harry glimpsed towards his right to see Louis watching him with his lips parted a touch. His eyelids were heavier than usual as he looked at Harry through his eyelashes. Harry straightened his back and fully turned to face Louis, his heart jackhammering when Louis took a calculated step forward.

Louis didn’t stop until he stood directly in front of Harry. Without saying a word, Louis reached forward and the pads of his fingers brushed over Harry’s sternum. Harry knew that he was holding his breath as his hands clenched by his side, refusing to move any other muscle. Louis’ beryl irises raked over his exposed skin, lethargically dragging from his collar bones to his stomach.

He exhaled when Louis fastened the third button, his dexterous fingers working in a fluid movement. Harry felt something burrowing in the cavity of his chest, something that had never been woken before as Louis’ touch grazed him. It was unnerving and inexplicably welcoming as it reared its curiosity onto the mere concept of Louis. Harry’s body wanted to lure Louis into him, encapsulate him in the electric trills that he found himself drowning in.

“Shouldn’t show too much skin in public.”

Before his words settled in Harry’s head, Louis stepped back and turned on his heel. Harry watched
Louis grab his boots and walk directly towards the kitchen table. Louis sat on a chair and started to pull on the shoes without another glimpse towards Harry. The same fingers that were on Harry’s skin were now focused on woven laces as they tied small knots.

“Um, okay,” Harry eventually stammered.

He could feel his hands tremor while slipped on a pair of leather boots, putting all of his energy on the mundane movement instead of the enigma that sat across the room. Harry grabbed a long onyx pea coat off a silver trimmed rack and pulled it over the blouse, his eyes continuously flitting back to Louis. His bottom lip trapped between his teeth while he fumbled through a collection of rings that sat in a ceramic dish. He slipped on a silver band that was embedded with an opal, the glimmering mineral mocking him as it reflected similar iridescent flecks that Harry had seen in Louis’ gaze.

Synapse firings speared through every nerve of his body when Louis stood from the kitchen chair and caught Harry’s gaze. Neurotransmissions released an electricity that Harry wasn’t aware that he was capable of experiencing. The strings of his heart were pulled taught when Louis gently cocked his head to the side, playing Harry like a worn fiddle with one look.

“Ready?” Louis slipped his mobile into one pocket and his wallet in the other.

Harry jerkily nodded, “Yeah.”

Grabbing the bottle of wine and his belongings, Harry held the front door open for Louis. They walked down the steps in comfortable silence, or he assumed it was comfortable for Louis since he started to nonsensically hum under his breath. Harry on the other hand felt as if he was descending into the numbing comfort of a cerulean sea while he watched Louis trot down the stairs.

“I could quite like you.”

Louis looked to him once they were outside, “Should we just leg it?”

Harry nodded and took a left, slowing his pace as Louis fell into step by his side. Given that it was a Friday evening, there was an impressive amount of students buzzing through the streets. A few had already started to hydrate with alcoholic beverages, stumbling and bumbling as they meandered to their destinations. The energy of the other people seemed to be infectious as Louis started to slightly bounce with excitement as he walked.

The edges of Harry’s mouth were gently pulled upwards as he looked at Louis out of the corner of his eyes. Louis was a human embodiment of lightning. He exuberated light and uncertainty while he darted his weight from foot to foot, never falling into a consistent gait as they walked. Everything about him was electric and Harry mused that if Louis was lightning, he was the slow rumble of thunder that was bound to follow behind him.

They stopped in front of Liam and Zayn’s building, giving each other uneasy grins before hauling the front door open. The pair lived on the second floor so it was a quick trek up the steps before they halted outside of a tan door. Muted conversations filtered from the apartment along with the heavy thrum of music. Harry had been so focused on Louis that he hadn’t mentally prepared for the night ahead.

“Don’t be worried, yeah?”

Harry looked at Louis and realized that his hesitancy was probably more transparent than he would have liked.

“Just don’t expect me to talk too much,” Harry tried to joke, but both of them knew that it was the
“That’s fine,” Louis gently nudged his elbow into Harry’s side with a mischievous grin, “We both know I can barely shut up, so it’ll work out.”

Harry looked at the earnestness reflected back at him and without preemptive, he pulled Louis into a hug. He curled his arms around Louis’ shoulders and tucked his chin on top of his head. The surprised sound Louis made verbalized Harry’s own feelings. He wasn’t sure the last time he initiated a hug with anybody. Potentially before his father left. When the shock seemed to wear off, Louis circled his arms around Harry’s waist and gave him a tight squeeze.

“Thanks,” Harry mumbled before he pulled away.

Louis seemed to understand that Harry was about to be thrown outside of his comfort zone and for once, he was grateful to have someone by his side. A soft smile stretched across Louis’ face and he gave Harry a small nod. Louis turned to the door and quickly rapped his knuckles against the door.

The door swung open to reveal Liam holding a beer bottle, an easy grin plastered on his face as he looked between Louis and Harry.

“Hi!” Liam beamed, seeming almost surprised at their presence even though Louis had told him that they would be in attendance.

“S’that them?” Zayn called from inside the flat before me materialized by Liam’s side.

“Sorry we’re a bit late,” Louis apologetically smiled. “Harry’s fault.”

Harry snapped his head to Louis, “Was not!”

“S’all good,” Zayn loosely grinned, his eyes red-rimmed.

“Are you smacked?” Louis asked, seeming to forget social acceptability.

“Louis!” Harry admonished with a groan.

Liam let out a heart guffaw, “Zayn would say no, but yeah. He definitely is.”

Zayn easily shrugged and gestured for them to enter the flat. Harry let Louis go in first before walking inside. There was a few people dotted throughout the space and Harry assumed they were the other couples in the study.

“Everyone,” Liam grandly announced, cutting through the smatter of conversation, “This is Harry and Louis.”

Harry awkwardly waved to the room when their attention fell onto them.

“Hi!” Louis brightly chirped, unaffected by being the center of attention.

“Let’s get you two some drinks and then do introductions,” Zayn decided, already walking towards the kitchenette.

Louis wrapped his arm around Harry’s middle, “Hazza brought wine.”

Harry felt his cheeks heat at the nickname, having assumed Louis forgot about it. He slung an arm along Louis’ shoulders and selfishly allowed himself to pull Louis closer to his side. If Louis asked, he would blame it on the case study.
“Hazza?” Liam asked as he looked between the two of them with a dopey grin, “That’s a sweet petname.”

Zayn nodded as he grabbed a wine–opener, “What do you call him, Harry?”

“Yeah, Harry,” Louis smirked as he looked up at him. “What do you call me?”

Harry feigned nonchalance while he shrugged, “He’s my baby.”

Liam and Zayn cooed while Louis incredulously gaped at Harry. When the other two turned around, Louis roughly pinched Harry’s waist.

Louis’ eyes flashed towards Liam and Zayn before he quietly seethed, “I am not allowing you to call me baby!”

“Too late,” Harry stifled a laugh. Harry took the proffered opener from Zayn and nodded, “Thanks.”

Harry opened the bottle and poured Louis and himself a glass of wine. After passing one to Louis, Liam ushered them back to the living room to meet the other couples. Apparently, they were the last to arrive.

“Alright, introductions for everyone,” Liam happily said when they stood in a semi-circle.

A man to Liam’s right shrugged as he gestured to himself and the girl to his right, “I’m Nav and this is my girlfriend, Quinn.”


Nav’s skin tone was warm umber while Quinn’s complexion was fair. Both were slender and dressed in fitted jeans and bomber jackets, Nav in blue and Quinn in green. The couple had warm expressions, seemingly at ease as they politely nodded to the group.

“I’m Mick,” A slender boy with ivory skin waved. He had narrowed features and shaggy brown hair that cropped just above his jawline.

A muscular guy with sun-kissed skin and a crewcut nodded, “Camden.”

“Ava,” A tanned girl with golden tresses gave a tight wave.

“We’re, um,” Mick gestured between the three of them, his expression a tad hesitant, “All together.”

Louis breathed out, “Not-so-token polyamorous couple.”

Harry’s fingers dug into Louis’ shoulder and he took a larger sip from his glass.

The next woman smiled and quickly flitted her fingers through the air as her mouth wordlessly moved. Her black hair jostled against her porcelain skin with the movement and Harry’s eyes slightly widened in recognition that she was deaf.

“I’m Natasha,” The boy to her right said, his blue eyes locked on her fingers. He slid his arm over her shoulder and looked to the group, “And I’m Daniel.”

“Token –”

Harry pinched Louis and mumbled, “Shut it.”
“I’m Katie,” The next girl said with an American accent.

The boy to her right nodded, “Brad.”

Louis let out a quiet snort and Harry did his best not to follow suit because the couple looked like a painfully American stereotype. They were dressed in coordinated pastels and had matching southern accents to go with it. Katie’s hair was red and curled into perfect ringlets while Brad’s blonde hair was neatly cut into a quiff.

“Um, right,” Harry said when he realized he was next to go. He gave a tight grin, “I’m Harry.”

“M’ Louis,” Louis comfortingly rubbed his thumb along Harry’s side. He cocked his head towards Harry, “His boyfriend.”

There was a stilted moment of everyone just looking at each other before Liam clapped his hands together and rocked his weight onto his toes.

“I just wanted to say thanks, again,” He excitedly chirped. Liam jutted his thumb towards Zayn, “This study is very important to us and we appreciate all of you taking the time to be a part of it.”

“Enough of that, though,” Zayn smiled, his eyes nearly reduced to slits. “Let’s have some drinks then head out to Passion.”

Harry internally groaned at that. Passion was one of the nearby clubs that was packed with the type of obnoxious people that Harry tried to avoid. He did his best to keep his face blank at the news, especially when everyone else seemed more than happy to go.

Louis pinched his side and raised himself to his toes, leaning in close to the shell of Harry’s ear to whisper, “We don’t have to stay long.”

“You wouldn’t mind?” Harry quietly asked, already feeling relief soothe his nerves.

“Not at all,” Louis shook his head before pulling back.

Harry grinned and looked down into his glass, “Thanks.”

“Harry, right?”

He looked up to see the circle had slightly dived into fractions, everyone starting to mingle with each other. Following his name, Harry looked to Katie who stepped in front of him.

“Yes,” Harry awkwardly nodded.

“Nice to meet ya,” She grinned, her blue eyes sliding towards Louis. “You too, Louis.”

Louis slightly shifted his weight to rest against Harry, “You too, Katie.”

When there was a pregnant lull after that, Louis cleared his throat, “So…America?”

That startled a laugh out of both Katie and Harry. He shook his head and felt the need to tuck Louis closer to his side. Harry fought back the urge and glimpsed to his right, noticing that Brad was keeping back from the conversation.

“That obvious, huh?” Katie shrugged her shoulders. She looked over her shoulder towards Brad, “C’mon over here, Sugar.”
Brad winced at the name, but took a step closer. He wrapped his arm around Katie’s shoulders and eyed where Harry’s hand cupped Louis’ shoulder. A sinking feeling started to tug at Harry’s gut, his instincts overriding his senses with hesitation.

“Where are you guys from?” Louis asked, apparently determined to keep up conversation.

“Georgia,” Katie proudly stated with her shoulders pulled back. She rested her hand over Brad’s stomach, “We decided to do a semester abroad.”

“How’d you find it?” Louis politely pressed.

“S’different than home,” Brad monotonously said, his eyes purposefully dragging between Harry and Louis. “That’s fer sure.”

The feeling in Harry’s gut intensified.

“I’m sure,” Louis simply nodded, seemingly unaware of the growing tension. “What’s the biggest difference?”

“Lou,” Harry quietly warned under his breath.

Louis looked up at Harry with his eyebrows pinched together in confusion.

“Well –” Katie started, but was cut off by Brad.

“There are a lot more gay people.”

Knew it.

Louis tensed by Harry’s side and then immediately widened his stance to make himself appear bigger. Harry was vaguely aware that Liam and Zayn were watching the interaction, part of him wondering if they suspected something like this would occur when the couples met.

“Is there a problem with that, pal?” Louis gritted out, his arm slipping from Harry’s waist so he could cock his hands on his hip.

Brad smirked, “I didn’t say that.”

Louis narrowed his eyes, “No, just insinuated it.”

“Are you all so sensitive?” Brad snorted, “Or is just you?”

That was all it took for Harry to step between the two, keeping Louis behind him. He stood directly in front of Brad, towering over the other man as he fixed his gaze into an icy glare. Brad squared his shoulders, but it did nothing to help the three inches Harry had on him.

“I’m going to say this once,” Harry lowly said, keeping his voice even. He folded his arms, “If you ever speak to Louis like that again, I won’t hesitate to kick your sorry arse and see to it that you’re shipped back to your fucking ignorant home.” Harry condescendingly cocked his head, “Got it?”

“Sugar,” Katie anxiously looked between Brad and Harry, “Let’s go grab you another beer.”

Brad glowered at Harry, hesitating before he took a step back, “Alright.”

The moment Katie managed to drag Brad towards the fridge, Louis stepped in front of Harry and rested his hands on Harry’s chest. His eyes were bright and Harry couldn’t fathom why Louis looked
happy after a conversation like that.

“That was fuckin’ amazing!” Louis beamed, almost sounding winded. “I mean, he’s a cunting fuck,” He rolled his eyes, smile staying on his face, “But, you were proper scary there.”

Louis was looking up at Harry with an amount of juvenile giddiness that he couldn’t reciprocate. Harry tensed his jaw as he glimpsed at Zayn and Liam who were watching the entire exchange. He ignored Louis’ comments and walked towards the other two boys.

“I don’t know what you’re playing at,” Harry carefully started as he looked between Liam and Zayn, “But, if that prick says anything like that to my boyfriend again, we’re done.”

“Harry!” Louis incredulously said, his body angled to Harry. “M’ fine, I don’t—”

“No,” Harry whipped his head towards Louis, a frown settling on his face. He shook his head, “No one is going to talk to you like that.” He looked back to Liam and Zayn who were watching with dumbfounded expressions and expectantly raised an eyebrow, “Right?”

“Oh, right!” Liam nervously stammered. He pointed over his shoulder, “I’ll have a word with him.”

“Good,” Harry tightly said.

Louis gently put his hands on Harry’s shoulders and dragged him back.

“Are you okay?” Harry quietly asked when there was a good amount of space separating them from everyone else.

“Harry,” Louis huffed out on a laugh, “I’m fine. Promise.”

He nodded and looked down at his glass before raising it and taking a large sip. Harry felt oddly on edge, every second making it harder for him to relax. Louis was looking at him with a worried expression, his bottom lip trapped between his teeth.

“I have a suggestion,” Louis said after a minute of silence.

“I want to get the fuck out of here?”

Louis playfully cocked his head to the side, “Wanna get the fuck out of here?”

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Let’s go girls

Louis was cackling as the opening chords thundered throughout the club, lights bathing Harry and himself in rays of green and blue. Harry had a margarita in one hand and a microphone in the other as he pulled a sultry face for the screaming crowd. It took a handful of alcoholic beverages and an hour of begging, but Louis managed to convince Harry into a duet.

I’m going out tonight, I’m feeling alright

Harry started the first verse with an obscene hip roll and head toss. Louis was standing across the stage, doubled over from laughter at the level of commitment that Harry was putting into the performance. Long gone was the frown that etched his face from a few hours prior. Instead, there was a pair of dimples and watery eyes from laughing into the crook of Louis’ neck.

Yeah, I wanna scream and shout
Louis gaped when Harry turned to face Louis, a smirk spreading over his face while he slowly shimmied over. It was obscene and drunkenly coordinated and Louis had never been more pleased in his entire life. He shook his shoulders and met Harry in the middle of the stage, finally lifting his mic to join Harry in for the chorus.

*Go totally crazy, forget I'm a lady. Men's shirts, short skirts*

Harry downed his margarita and handed the empty glass to a man jumping in the front row. The room was blazing in music and applause when Harry strutted to Louis. Harry gripped Louis’ hip with the newly free hand, the pads of his fingers digging into Louis’ skin. Louis stepped directly in front of him, filthily bracketing Harry’s thigh with his legs as he rolled his hip forwards.

*Man! I feel like a woman*

They grinded their bodies together as they danced through the instrumental portion, breaths hot against each other’s skin. Deciding not to over think his actions, Louis looped a hand around the back of Harry’s neck and lifted himself to sloppily press a kiss against Harry’s cheek. The crowd erupted while Louis pulled back, Harry’s mouth hovering just above his own. There was a distinct moment when he thought Harry had leaned a fraction of an inch forward. Louis’ eyes shut and he parted his lips.

When he didn’t feel a pair of lush lips against his own, Louis blinked his eyes open. Harry’s pupils were blown out and his grip on Louis’ waist was almost painful as his gaze darted between Louis’ eyes and lips. He shook his head and Louis watched as Harry’s mouth twisted into smirk. As Harry pulled away, Louis convinced himself that it was just the tequila telling him that they almost kissed.

Harry slipped out of reach with ruddy cheeks and mussed curls. He was beaming and seemingly otherworldly as he raised his mic again to finish off the song. Louis watched him in awe and almost recoiled as an electric vibration collided straight into his heart. When Harry winked at Louis before he turned back to the crowd, Louis told himself the stirring in his chest was just the tequila.

There wasn’t any way he had legitimate feelings for Harry.

It was just the tequila.
Chapter Six

Chapter Summary

Hi buddies! Just a quick and massive thank you to anyone who has kept up with this story. I'm planning on posting chapter seven on Sunday, but I just wanted to say an over all thanks!

Please, please, leave comments and kuddos if you dig the story. It makes me a happy cherub.

You can find me on tumblr if your heart desires @domestic-harry

Enjoy!
- Lis x

“Your hands.”

“My hands.”

“Tied up –”

“Wait, what?”

“– Like two ships.”

“You do talk some shit, Harold.”

Harry blearily beamed in response and squeezed Louis’ hand. Their intertwined fingers swayed between their bodies as the night sky began to dissipate into an impending sunrise. He wasn’t even sure at what point they had started to hold hands, just that he didn’t intend on letting go anytime soon. Louis’ daintier fingers perfectly fit into the empty spaces between Harry’s and a part of him wanted to believe that it meant something significant.

A larger part of him believed the thought was a side-effect of consuming too many margaritas.

Louis lifted the lip of a nearly empty peppermint schnapps bottle to his mouth, tilting his head back as he took a pull. He passed the bottle to Harry and so continued the cycle they had begun since leaving a twenty-four-hour liquor store. When Element closed shortly after their award-winning performance, Louis impishly grinned at Harry and told him that he knew where they could get more booze. Harry drunkenly giggled and told him to lead the way. One hour later, the two boys were stumbling into each other with breathy laughs as they tried to make it to the sunrise.

“C’mon, we’re gonna miss it!” Louis whined and quickened his pace to a jog, roughly tugging Harry along with him.

Harry pocketed the bottle in his jacket and started skip by Louis’ side, their fingers locking tighter as they barreled towards a large hill. They paused for a moment at the base of the hill, looking at each other with expectant grins before they started to climb. The sky transformed from sapphire to scarlet as they made it to the peak, their chests heaving with labored breaths while the sun bled into the
Wordlessly, they sat down on the top of the grassy hill. Louis let go of Harry’s hand and there was a protest on the tip of his tongue before Louis cuddled into his side. Harry momentarily froze as he looked down at Louis. His skin was illuminated with rosy hues and his eyes pierced zenith blue as the sunrise stretched over Manchester. Harry let himself lean into Louis’ touch, preferring to drown himself in Louis’ warmth than the sun.

“Y’know,” The corner of Louis’ mouth tugged upwards, “I can feel you staring.”

“You kissed me on stage.”

And, okay, that was not what Harry had intended on saying.

Louis slowly pulled away to face Harry, his eyelashes casting a shadow against his cheekbones. His head gently cocked to the side, smirk still evident on his face.

“Yeah, on the cheek.”

Harry flushed and nudged Louis with his shoulder, “Still counts.”

“Does it?” Louis lifted an eyebrow.

When Harry didn’t respond, Louis walked his fingers across the small space of grass between them. His pointer finger and middle finger stopped when they were on top of Harry’s thigh. Louis tapped his fingers in three quick successions, waiting until Harry looked back at him.

Louis’ tongue darted out of his mouth, lightly dabbing his bottom lip before he quietly asked, “Did you want it to count?”

Harry extended his leg next to Louis’ and kept the left one raised at his knee. Louis cupped his hand around Harry’s thigh, but didn’t move any other part of his body. Harry rested his weight back on his right hand, brushing against Louis’ arm with the movement. Pushing trepidation out of his clouded mind, Harry leaned forward to press his lips against Louis’ cheek.

Pursing his lips, Harry gently kissed Louis’ soft skin. Louis shuddered underneath him and Harry could practically feel a layer of heat rise underneath his mouth. He slowly pulled back and rested his forehead against Louis’ temple, ardently committing the moment into his memory. Harry didn’t want to experience it through a video, he wanted to remember it. He needed to remember it.

As Harry leaned back, the tip of his nose rubbed along the height of Louis’ cheekbone. He inhaled and let ecstasy seep into his veins at the knowledge that Louis smelled like a delirious compilation of morning dew and pine. Harry wanted to bottle the scent and selfishly lock it away, drown himself in it whenever he felt nostalgic for something genuine.

“That counted,” Harry murmured and pulled away.

Beryl eyes bore into emerald irises, lightning shattering into thunder.

Louis slowly nodded, “It did.”

There was an inch of space separating them and Harry was internally pleading for a reason not to move back. It was extraordinarily sobering and intoxicating being so close to Louis, both sensations coating Harry’s endorphins in a keening cloud. Harry’s heart lurched inside his chest when Louis angled his head, closing the space between them as he kissed Harry on the cheek.
It was gentler than the one on stage, more intimate in the quiet sanctuary they created on top of the hilltop. Harry lifted his left hand and cupped Louis’ jaw, turning his head into the feeling of Louis’ mouth on his skin. His eyelids lulled shut as he ran his thumb along the Louis’ jawline, memorizing the contours of his face through delicate grazes.

Louis lethargically dragged his lips along Harry’s cheek, adorning him with warm kisses that resonated into the previously empty caverns of his heart. Every press of his lips was accompanied by a delicate orchestration of songbirds and bustling leaves. Harry cautiously swept his head to the side, keeping his eyes shut as their noses softly nudged against each other.

“I wanna kiss you,” Louis exhaled.

Harry was immediately nodding, his bottom grazing the top of Louis’.

“But,” Louis’ thumb dug into Harry’s thigh, “I don’t wanna ruin things.”

“ Doesn’t have to change anything,” Harry breathed out, his hand slipping back further to card through the soft hairs against Louis’ neck.

Louis nodded, “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Harry was the one to close their distance, instantly reveling in the sensation of Louis’ lips slotting against his own. A sigh slipped from Louis’ mouth and Harry chased the taste of peppermint that filtered through with it. Louis’ lips plumped underneath his mouth, allowing Harry to tilt his head back. Harry let out a pleased hum when Louis wrapped his fingers around Harry’s wrist, his thumb lightly caressing the jutted bone.

With every press of their lips, Harry wanted to convey the indisputable notion that Louis was the most precious thing he had ever beheld. It was different than any kiss he had ever experienced, charged with emotions rather than blunt lust. He needed Louis to feel special, even if he would never admit to it out loud.

Louis parted his lips and flicked the tip of his tongue against Harry’s bottom lip. Harry parted his mouth and couldn’t help but tighten his grip as Louis dipped his tongue inside his mouth. He pressed closer, sliding their tongues together with wet drags.

The kiss slowly died out, neither willing to pull away until they were faintly panting into each other’s mouths. Louis turned into Harry’s palm and softly pursed his lips, the motion coaxing Harry to blink open his eyes. Just one look at Louis’ rosy cheeks and rose-bitten lips, Harry felt as if the wind had been knocked straight out him.

“Come back to sleep at mine?” Harry quietly asked.

Louis nodded and delicately kissed the pulse point along Harry’s wrist. Exhaustion began to pull at Harry’s senses as they clambered to their feet, the morning light bathing them in an ethereal glow. As they started down the hill, Harry pulled out the remaining dregs of the peppermint schnapps.

“Want to finish it off?” Harry asked, shaking the small glass bottle.

“Might as well,” Louis grinned, taking the proffered bottle.

Harry did his best not to stare at Louis’ mouth as it wrapped around the lip of the bottle, choosing to watch his footing as they made it to the sidewalk. Louis saved the last sip for Harry, impishly
winking as he tossed it. Harry barely caught the bottle, nearly toppling over in his haste.

“Excellent reflexes, Styles.” Louis mock-applauded. He jutted both of his thumbs upwards, “Natural grace at its best.”

“Kisses me and is still a prat,” Harry grumbled before drinking the last bit of the schnapps.

“Oi!” Louis indigently cocked his eyebrow. “We agreed on nothing changing.” He jutted his chin upwards, “That means I can snog you stupid and still be a dick.”

Harry tilted his head to the side, “Does it?”

“It does.”

“What makes you think that I’m going to let you kiss me again?”

Louis stopped walking and folded his arms over his chest. He gave Harry an unimpressed once over and lifted an expectantly eyebrow.

“You don’t want to kiss me again?” Louis deadpanned.

Harry smirked and shrugged, turning on his heel to continue walking back to the studio. He heard a disgruntled whine from behind him and had to bite back a laugh as he continued to walk. The noise happened again, louder that time and was even accompanied by the distinctive sound of a foot stomping against the ground.

“Yes, Louis?” Harry laughed, looking over his shoulder to see Louis pouting like a petulant adolescent.

Louis whined, “You weren’t s’possed to keep going.”

Harry smirked and shrugged, turning on his heel to continue walking back to the studio. He heard a disgruntled whine from behind him and had to bite back a laugh as he continued to walk. The noise happened again, louder that time and was even accompanied by the distinctive sound of a foot stomping against the ground.

“You truly are a baby,” Harry rolled his eyes before he cupped Louis’ jaw and cut off his protest with a kiss.

Louis kissed him back for a good two seconds before he pushed Harry away and schooled his expression into one of annoyance.

He raised himself to the soles of his feet and poked Harry in the chest, “M’ not a baby.”

“You’re my baby,” Harry sickeningly crooned as he pulled Louis into a hug.

Louis thrashed in his grip, deft fingers pinching every inch of Harry’s body that he could readily reach. Harry tightened his hold around Louis’ shoulders, nearly knocking both of them over when Louis shoved all of his weight in Harry’s chest. Harry let go and defensively held up his hands to guard his face when he was sure that Louis was going to go for a hair grab. He was proven right the moment he lowered his hands and received a sharp tug to a lock of hair behind his ear.

“Sto – Stop it!” Harry chuckled, any legitimate pain thoroughly numbed from alcohol.

“Worst fake-boyfriend ever,” Louis snipped. A devilish smile tugged his mouth upwards as he took a step backwards, “If you beat me back, you get to kiss me again.”
That was all the direction Harry got before Louis promptly spun on his heel to sprint towards the
direction of Harry’s building. Harry stood still for a moment, gaping as Louis sped down the
pavement with a boyish laugh. The musical sound reverberated in the morning air and that was all it
took for Harry to dart after him.

What Harry lacked in agility, he made up for with long strides. He closed in on Louis and the wind
was whipping his hair back as he ran. A wide beam cracked into his countenance, shattering him into
the purest sense nirvana. His legs burned and there was laughter caught in his throat when he caught
up to Louis’ gait.

“Bloody long legs,” Louis panted out, when they rounded the last corner to Harry’s studio.

Harry flashed Louis a wink before he put every ounce of effort into making his legs move faster.
They were neck and neck, the moment Harry pulled ahead, Louis was right there next to him. His
heart was excruciatingly throbbing in his chest and his teeth were roughly gritted. Leaning his upper
body forward, Harry burnt out the last amount of energy he had stored and beat Louis to the door.

He slumped against the frame and let out an indignant groan when Louis immediately barreled into
his side with full force. Harry didn’t have any residual energy to keep them upwards, his legs giving
out underneath him. A high-pitched squeak shot out of Louis’ mouth as they landed on the ground in
a pile of limbs.

“Fuckin’ useless,” Louis gritted, his elbow digging into Harry’s abdomen.

“At least your big arse landed on me,” Harry let out a breathless laugh. He groaned when Louis
thwacked him, “I landed directly on concrete.”

“You leave my arse out of it, Harold,” Louis glared at him before he shuffled to a standing position.

“I’d quite like to keep your arse in this,” Harry cheekily grinned from his place on the ground.

Louis made an affronted sound, his eyes comically blown out, “I give you one sodding kiss and look
at what you’ve become!”

Harry easily shrugged, “I blame the tequila.”

“Are you gonna blame the tequila for the kiss, too?” Louis cocked his hands on his hips.

“Do you want me to?”

“I –” Louis stammered, seemingly caught off guard by the question. He looked away from Harry, his
cheeks flushing pink as his bottom lip trapped between his teeth. Louis shook his head, “What I
want,” he started with his usual amount of confidence injected in his voice, “Is for you to get up off
the ground so we can sleep.”

“Help,” Harry raised his hands towards Louis. He danced his fingers in the air, “I really don’t think I
have the energy to move on my own.”

“Are you this useless after sex, too?” Louis grunted as he moved to haul Harry upwards.

“Do you want to find out?”

He let go of Harry’s hands and sent him roughly falling back to the ground. Harry was cackling at
Louis’ affronted reaction, his arms firmly folded over his chest as he scowled down at Harry. If it
wasn’t for the consistent twitch along the corner of Louis’ mouth, Harry would have had a bit more
regret for his actions.

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Louis had been awake for five minutes. Specifically, Louis had been awake and watching Harry sleep for five minutes. Even more specifically, Louis was listening to Harry mumble in his sleep for five minutes. It was a trait that Louis somehow missed the first time he slept next to Harry.

“Peppa schnapps – Hmm.”

His teeth must have left permanent divots into his bottom lip from the amount of effort he put into not laughing. Harry was slumped over onto his front, his right arm extended across the bed and wrapped around the base of Louis’ back. Louis rolled over on his stomach and folded his arms under the pillow, his head angled to look at Harry.

Harry’s nose twitched, “Bab – Hng.” He sighed into the mattress and quietly mumbled, “Babu.”

Louis pressed his face into his pillow as laughter rumbled through his chest. Harry was stupidly endearing and Louis didn’t know how to feel about it while he laid half naked next to him. He was still in the process of mentally berating himself for letting Harry kiss him the night prior. It had already been inopportune to want to have sex with Harry, but knowing that the attraction was mutual was going to be the end of Louis.

He poked his head out and looked at Harry, cataloguing the slope of his cupid’s bow. All of the usual defenses that Harry usually worse, were stripped bare as he slept. His eyelids were a dusty plum color from a lack of sleep and his curls were hopelessly mussed beyond repair. Still, Louis reckoned that he had never seen someone lovelier.

Which, again, was very fucking unlucky for him.

Louis sighed and slowly pulled himself out of Harry’s reach so he could climb off the bed. Judging by the amount of daylight that poured into the studio, Louis knew that it was well into the afternoon. He scrambled down the miniature staircase and hauled his jeans back on. When he reached to take off the black jumper Harry had lent him, Louis selfishly decided that Harry could make it one more day without it.

Quickly shoving his belongings back into his duffel, Louis was ready to leave the studio. He hesitated next to the dining table, glimpsing over his shoulder towards the disheveled duvet on the bed. Louis could see Harry’s mess of brown hair poking out from the sea of white and he mentally cursed himself for being an idiot and looking back.

“Fuck it,” He muttered under his breath.

Louis took out a notebook from his bag and ripped a piece of blank paper out. He grabbed a black pen and in messy scrawl he wrote, You snore and talk in your sleep. You should see someone about that, “Babu.” – L

He set the note on the pillow he used and left the studio. Louis’ stomach was uncomfortably furrowing as he walked home. He wanted to turn back and climb under the covers, keep listening to Harry mumble nonsense until he woke up. Maybe even stay the day to work on their psychology assignment together while spitting a good amount of banter back and forth. Harry could make them dinner and chide Louis for attempting to ruin it. By then, it would be nighttime and they’d watch a movie. Maybe even two.

When Louis walked into his flat, Niall was pattering around the kitchen with a bag of crisps in his
hand. He shrugged off his bag and found himself daydreaming about what would have happened if he stayed with Harry. It was harmless. Mostly.

“Oh, no.”

Louis snapped his head, slightly recoiling at the transparently concerned state that Niall was in. A crisp lamely hung from Niall’s jarred mouth and his posture was unusually straightened out while he gaped back at Louis.

He frowned, “Alright, Niall?”

“We should sit down,” Niall seriously decided, not waiting for a response before he wrapped a hand around Louis’ bicep and dragged him to the couch.

“Fuckin’ – What’s going on?” Louis sputtered when he fell onto the couch, eyes wide as Niall folded his hands together.

“Now, I don’t wanna alarm you,” Niall carefully started.

Louis disbelievingly laughed, “Alarm me?”

“You look proper smitten.”

Louis’ nose scrunched at that, “Excuse me?”

“Don’t panic!” Niall scooted closer to him, his hands raised as if he was warding off a dangerous animal. “We can get through this together. I’ll put on Dirty Dancing and –”

“What the fuck are you goin’ on about, mate?” Louis asked, genuinely worried for his best friend’s mental health.

“You have a crush.”

“Who the fuck would I have a crush on, Niall?”

Niall rolled his eyes, “You have a crush on Harry.”

Louis scoffed, “I just like the way he looks.”

“You like him.”

“His mouth.”

“His personality.”

“Probably his cock too, if I got to see it.”

“Louis!” Niall whined.

“Niall!” Louis mimicked him with a laugh.

“Don’t forget I’ve known you for your whole life,” Niall narrowed his eyes. “I know what you look like when you’re gone for someone.”

“I am not gone for Harry,” Louis rolled his eyes and tried to stand up.

Niall catapulted his body onto Louis’, tackling him back down onto the couch cushion with a grunt.
“Have you lost your goddamn mind?!” Louis shouted as he tried to wriggle himself free.

“St – Stop moving,” Niall panted while he gripped Louis’ wrists and pinned him down. He let out a dramatic sigh, “It’s okay to have feelings! Feelings are good!”

“And what,” Louis groaned and tried to buck Niall off of him, “Exactly makes you think that I have feelings? For Harry of all people?”

“Your face was all wonky when you came in,” Niall gritted out as he managed to straddle Louis’ abdomen.

Louis flailed his legs from underneath Niall, trying to throw him off without much luck. If someone was to walk in on them, they may have thought it was a sexual position to be in. Unfortunately for him, that was just an average Saturday for Louis.

“Your arse is crushing me,” Louis wheezed.

Niall shifted his hips back and forth, successfully digging his bony bum into Louis’ diaphragm. Louis whined and pushed all of his bodyweight towards the right. Niall’s eyes enlarged as they both tumbled off the couch in a jumbled mess of arms and legs.

“You shit!” Niall groaned when Louis’ elbow made contact with his gut. He pushed Louis off of him, “M’ just trying to help ‘ere!”

“You’ve gone completely mental!” Louis gritted out as he detangled himself from Niall’s gangly frame. He let out a dramatic sigh when he was free and leaning back against the couch, “I do not fancy Harry.”

Niall didn’t bother to move from his position on the ground, “Do too.”

“What are we, five?” He rolled his eyes.

“Did you shag ‘im?”

“Wha – Christ, Niall!” Louis leaned forward to smack Niall upside the head. “No, I didn’t shag him.”

Niall swatted his hands away, “Well, why not?”

Louis shook his head, “It’s not like that.”

“You think he’s fit.”

“So?”

“Then why not?”

“Just, cos!” Louis sputtered, getting worked up over having to defend himself. He flailed his hands in the air, “We’re just not like that! We’re mates. That’s it.”

“Is it that he doesn’t think you’re fit?”

“That’s just bloody offensive, Niall.”

Niall shrugged and held up his hands, “Cos if that’s why you won’t admit your feelings, that makes a bit more sense.”
He does think I’m attractive!”

“How would you know that?”

“I – I just know!”

“You couldn’t possibly just know that!”

“I know because he kissed me last night!”

Louis’ chest was heaving and he could feel every palpitation in his heart as Niall gaped back at him. He self-consciously folded his arm over his chest and trapped his bottom lip between his teeth.

Niall gave him an unimpressed look, “You can’t seriously be this thick.”

“What?” Louis defensively shot back, feeling his cheeks redden under Niall’s scrutiny.

There was a solid moment of silence before Niall lunged forward and gripped both sides of Louis’ face. He moved in and Louis let out a shrill scream just before Niall smacked a wet kiss against his mouth. Both of their eyes were enlarged and Louis unceremoniously sputtered out an exhale. He forcefully pushed Niall away with his hands against his chest and scrambled onto the couch. Louis’ chest ballooned and he looked down at Niall.

“What the fuck?!” Louis screeched.

“Thank you for proving me right,” Niall easily huffed and pushed himself to his feet.

Louis’ eyes bulged out as he frantically gestured between them, “That you’re fuckin’ mental?!”

“No,” Niall rolled his eyes and put his hands on his hips. He lifted an eyebrow, “That friends don’t kiss friends.”

He could feel his jaw go slack as Niall triumphantly grinned.

“You – Horan, you played me,” Louis disbelievingly spluttered.

“Now that I’ve made my point,” Niall walked to the kitchen and picked up his discarded bag of crisps, “I’m gonna go do some coarse work.”

“But –”

Niall waved over his shoulder as he walked towards his room, “Have fun watching Dirty Dancing!”

“Cunt,” Louis exhaled under his breath when Niall’s door closed behind him.

He sat still on the couch, eyes still trained on the shut door. Louis looked over at the TV and glared at the offensive screen. Crossing his arms over his chest, he mumbled to himself, “M’ not gonna watch Dirty Dancing.”

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There was a distinct crunch when Harry rolled over. He frowned and let out a full body yawn before blearily blinking is eyes open. When he shifted onto his stomach, he heard the noise again and felt something chafe against his chest.

“The hell?” He grumbled, rubbing the back of his hand against his eyes.
Harry leaned his weight onto his side and reached underneath the thick duvet. His eyebrows bunched together when he gripped a piece of paper. Sitting upwards, he looked around the small studio and felt a slight sinking feeling when he realized that all of Louis’ things were gone. Shaking off the niggling dip of disappointment, Harry squinted at the paper.

*You snore and talk in your sleep. You should see someone about that, “Babu.”* – L

“Babu?” Harry tested out the word, attempting to fight off the grin that twitched at the corner of his mouth. He dropped the paper in his lap and scrubbed his hands over his face, “Fuck.”

**Beep Beep Beep**

Harry’s head snapped towards the shrill sound that rang throughout the otherwise quiet flat. He crawled out of bed and hissed as the bare soles of his feet hit the staircase. The beeping stopped once he was at the bottom of the stairs. Harry lazily scratched his stomach while he looked over the floor, nearly passing over a black mobile that was definitely not his.

Shuffling over towards his discarded shirt from the night before, Harry pulled the phone from where it peeked out from under the fabric. When he picked up the mobile, the screen illuminated with a slew of notifications from contacts that Harry didn’t recognize.

He stared at Louis’ forgotten mobile with his bottom lip trapped between his teeth. They hadn’t meant to be seeing each other until Monday during psychology. Unfortunately, that was another day and a half away and Harry suspected that Louis would want his phone before then. Harry set the mobile down on the dresser and strode towards the bathroom.

While he took his time showering, Harry mentally trolled through his memories from the night before. He rested his forehead against the white tile wall and deeply inhaled as the hilltop kiss replayed in his head. A frustrated groan slipped out of his mouth and he slammed his fists against the wall. Water sprayed across his back, droplets clinging between his shoulder blades and Harry felt as if he was drowning.

It was one thing for Harry to come to terms with his feelings towards Louis, but it was an entirely different thing to have acted on it. He felt selfish for kissing him because it was completely self-indulgent. They still had to make it through three months and kissing was definitely not a part of the plan. It would muddle the lines between them and Harry wasn’t prepared to lose someone he had just started to let it. The prospect was unnervingly terrifying to him and Harry hated that he let himself feel affection towards Louis.

Harry pushed himself off the wall and finished washing up, wincing as his hands passed over his sensitive groin. He wouldn’t allow himself to think about the kiss in the shower from then on out because apparently, it was still a bit much for his anatomy to avoid reacting towards. Actually, Harry refused to think about the kiss ever again, shower or not. It was a one-time thing and both agreed that it wouldn’t change things between them.

Regrettably, Harry wasn’t an idiot so he knew that was highly unlikely.

After drying off, Harry gathered his hair together and secured an elastic at the base. He tugged the damp tresses and checked the mounted vanity to make sure that the ponytail wasn’t completely horrendous. When he was satisfied enough, he left the bathroom and walked towards the wardrobe to get changed into washed-out jeans and a loose white t-shirt. Slipping on his pair of pink converse and a green bomber jacket, Harry grabbed Louis’ mobile and left the studio.

He felt nerves tick at the tip of his spine as he walked closer and closer towards Louis’ building. The
only reason he wasn’t a completely riddled with anxiety was because of the note Louis had left him. Things between them couldn’t have been too strained if Louis took the time to jot down a note. That was the logic he repeatedly told himself at least until the moment he stopped outside of Louis’ door.

Harry pulled Louis’ mobile out from his back pocket and rapped his knuckles against the door. There was a faint buzz from their television and muffled footsteps that filtered into to corridor from underneath their door. Harry took a cautious step back when the footsteps grew louder, his knuckles baring white from his grip around Louis’ phone.

Louis pulled open the door and Harry felt his built up resolve crumble at the sight of the other boy wrapped up in a thick red blanket. A grey knit beanie was tugged over Louis’ head, his soft fringe poking out from underneath the material. He looked impossibly endearing and Harry was completely, irrevocably, fucked.

“Harry?” Louis confusedly cocked his head to the side.

“Sorry, um, you left your mobile at mine?” Harry winced that the words came out as a question.

*Fight harder, huh? I don't see you fighting so hard, Baby. I don't see you running up to daddy telling him I'm your guy.*

Louis’ cheeks flushed red and Harry looked over Louis’ head towards the voice that came from the TV.

“Are –” The corner of Harry’s mouth jaunted into a grin as he looked back to Louis, “Louis Tomlinson, are you watching Dirty Dancing?”

“No,” Louis immediately snapped back, wrapping the blanket tighter around his shoulders.

Harry let out a sharp laugh and pointed towards the living room, “Louis, you do know I can see your TV from here, right?”

“Anyways, you were saying?” Louis impatiently huffed, stepping closer to block the doorway.

“Right,” Harry rolled his eyes and extended his hand towards Louis. His eyes hovered on Louis’ lips for a moment before he shook his head and shrugged, “You left your phone this morning.”

“Lou?” A voice called out from inside the flat. “Who’s at the door? We haven’t finished, yet!”

His eyes widened at the intruding third voice. When Harry had mentally catalogued every possible outcome of seeing him, Louis having another man over wasn’t even a fleeting thought that he had considered. His knees knocked together while his eyes darted towards the living room where the voice had come from.

“Shit, sorry.” He practically shoved the mobile into Louis’ hands and took an unsteady step backwards, “I didn’t know you had company. I’ll just – Sorry.”

The corner of Louis’ mouth quirked upwards and he rested his weight against the doorframe. Harry watched as a man popped up from behind the backing of the couch and started towards the door. There was an embarrassing moment of hurt that dug into his gut that the blonde man was strolling towards them in nothing but a pair of fitted black pants.

“Harry,” Louis slowly gestured between Harry and the other man, “Meet, Niall.” He folded his hands over his chest and expectantly raised his eyebrows, “Y’know, my *flatmate.*”
Harry’s eyes widened and he let out an embarrassing, “Oh.”

“Yeah,” Louis playfully snorted and rolled his eyes. “Oh.”

He ducked his head down in attempts to fight off what must have been a blatant look of relief.

“Heard loads ‘bout you, mate,” Niall said almost smugly as he extended a hand towards Harry. He wagged his eyebrows, “Loads.”

Louis jabbed Niall in the side with his elbow with an affronted look, “Niall!”

Harry shook his hand and slightly narrowed his eyes as he let himself get a better look at Niall. There was something weirdly familiar about him, but Harry couldn’t put his finger on it. He pushed the feeling away and offered a polite smile before pocketing his hands.

“Well,” Harry rubbed the back of his neck then gestured towards inside the flat, “I’ll just let you two–”

“D’you like Dirty Dancing?” Niall unexpectedly chirped, cutting Harry off.

Harry reared back, “Excuse me?”

“Niall,” Louis whined and shoved his friend backwards with his shoulder.

“Cos you could watch the rest of it with us,” Niall continued, undeterred by Louis pushing him away.

“Thanks for the offer, but I don’t want to intrude,” Harry looked back at Louis, searching his face for any sign of discomfort.

Louis opened his mouth, but Niall was already reaching forward to pull Harry inside. His eyes widened in surprise and a high-pitched squeak sputtered out. He unceremoniously tripped as his wrist was yanked forwards, nearly knocking Louis’ smaller frame over in the process.

“Niall!!” Louis shouted, dropping his blanket to swat Niall’s hand off of Harry. He shot Harry an apologetic look before glaring at the blonde, “You can’t just go manhandling, Harry! He’s – Well. Just, don’t!”

“Don’t be stupid,” Niall waved him off. He turned to Harry and set his hands on his hips, “Harry’s fine, isn’t he?”

Harry fish-mouthed for a moment, frantically looking between Niall’s expectant smile and Louis’ disbeliefed expression. Figuring that there wasn’t exactly a correct answer, he non-committedly shrugged and that seemed to be enough for Niall to drag him in the direction of the couch.

“Fucks sake,” Louis grumbled from behind them.

Niall lightly pushed him towards the corner of the couch and then sat on the other end, leaving the middle cushion open. Harry pressed his side flat against the couch’s siding and leaned his weight onto the armrest. Louis begrudgingly sunk down in the empty seat with his blanket bunched on his lap, fingers twisting in the lush material.

“I’m so sorry,” Louis turned towards Harry. He pinched his bottom lip between his fingers and then dolefully let his hands drop to his lap, “You really don’t have to stay if you don’t wanna.”

“Shut up, Lou,” Niall demanded as he leaned forward and pressed play. He looked over Louis to
meet Harry’s eyes and beamed, “Everyone loves Baby, yeah?”

Staring at Niall’s painfully earnest expression, Harry gave a small smile, “I was more of a Johnny guy, myself.”

“Ah, the whole cock thing,” Niall seriously nodded in understanding and rested back.

A startled laugh shot out of Harry’s mouth and he bit his bottom lip has he nodded, “Yeah, that whole thing.”

Harry wasn’t sure if he was just used to Louis’ abrasive personality and if that’s why he found himself relatively comfortable with Niall. There was also the possibility that Niall seemed to be one of those people who genuinely did not realize that his overzealous personality was not the norm. Even Harry could admit that it was admirably infectious. Whatever it was exactly, Harry felt himself slowly relax into the couch.

“Stop hoggin’ the blanket,” Niall gruffed as he leaned forward to stretch out the blanket on Louis’ lap. He reached across Louis and spread it over Harry and then himself, “Such a shit host, I swear.”

“Oh my god,” Louis cupped his face in his hands, but Harry could still see the pink tinge along his neck.

Harry gently nudged his elbow against Louis’ and quietly murmured, “Do you want me to go?”

“No,” Louis’ hands fell from his face and he was immediately shaking his head. “He’s just,” Louis looked towards Niall then back at Harry, “A lot all at once.”

“So are you,” Harry quietly laughed.

“Not that bad,” Louis rolled his eyes and nudged Harry back.

“Lads,” Niall waved a hand in the air, “M’ right here.”

“Yeah, Babu,” Louis devilishly smirked. He pulled his knees to his chest, “Shut your mouth and let poor Niall watch the film.”

Harry gaped at Louis, “You are not calling me that.”

Louis winked at Harry before turning forwards, “You bet your lanky arse I am.”

In lieu of a response, Harry unintelligibly muttered under his breath and faced the TV. The film continued on and each of them interjected commentary here and there. Well, Niall and Louis commented while Harry amusedly listened. It was comfortable and it was the first time in a long time that he had watched a film with anyone who wasn’t a family member. Let alone two people who had the combined personality of a firecracker. Harry reckoned that he wasn’t opposed to getting used to company.

Another thing that Harry could get used to was the way Louis slowly leaned into his side as the film carried on. It started when Louis lowered his legs and his knee brushed against Harry’s under the blanket. Harry didn’t think much of it until it happened a third time and then Louis didn’t pull away. He tried to keep his attention on the screen, but then Louis’ shoulder leaned into his bicep.

Harry glimpsed at Louis from the corner of his eye and saw that while other boy was watching the film, but he was toying with his bottom lip between his teeth. He figured that he had two options at that point. The first option would be to pretend that he didn’t notice the way Louis was pressed
tightly along his side. The second option, the riskier option, was to do something about it.

Before Harry could force himself to pick, Louis slid his hand over Harry’s leg and let it rest there. He quickly turned towards Louis, unable to do anything else with the warm pressure along his thigh. Louis was already looking back at him with a slightly nervous expression that did not reflect the way he was fulling sidled against Harry, eyes darting between Harry’s lips and his irises. Steeling himself with an inhale, he decidedly ran his fingers over Louis’ hand. Harry faced forward, but he could feel the way Louis went rigid. On an exhale, Harry intertwined their fingers.

One. Two. Three. Fo –

Louis relaxed into his side and gently squeezed Harry’s hand.

Harry couldn’t focus for the rest of the film, his attention locked on the way their hands slotted together as if they were jigsaw pieces. He lightly dragged the pad of his thumb against the back of Louis’ hand, reveling in the way his soft skin felt against his own. Even though they had held hands the night before, that was with help of liquid encouragement and a certain scapegoat of tequila. There wasn’t a scapegoat for this and Harry wondered if Louis knew that. He had to of known that.

When the end credits started to roll over the screen, Harry minutely panicked. He was far out of his depth and he didn’t know if he was supposed to stay or go. For someone who always thought they had a good grip on reality, Harry had never felt so uncertain.

“Well that was a fuckin’ delight,” Niall bellowed, making both Louis and Harry wince in response.

Niall moved to sit forward and that was when Louis’ hand slipped from Harry’s.

“Definitely,” Harry chimed a moment too late.

“M’ gonna go get our shopping done,” Niall pushed himself off the couch, taking the blanket up with him. He walked towards the kitchen and groaned when he opened the fridge, “All we got is ketchup, one egg, and half eaten haloumi.”

“You know,” Harry slowly drawled out as he stood up from the couch, “That really doesn’t surprise me.”

“Watch it, Styles,” Louis warned, his elbows perched on his knees.

Niall closed the fridge and picked up a brown wallet off the counter, “Alright, I’ll see you two later.”

“Nice to meet you,” Harry gave a small wave.

“You, too!” Niall grinned with a warm expression as if Harry had just said the loveliest thing in the world to him.

Niall left and Harry was acutely aware of what his lack of presence meant. He turned and took a step away from the couch, hands clasped behind his back while he looked between Louis and the door. Louis was still staring at the screen even though nothing was playing and the sudden silence in the flat was deafening between the two of them.

“I guess I should go,” Harry jutted his thumb over his shoulder.

Louis jerkily nodded and slowly stood from the couch, following Harry to the door. Harry rested his hand on the doorknob, mentally building himself up for one last glimpse at Louis before he left. With his hands shoved in the pockets of his joggers, Louis was looking up at Harry with a layer of
hesitancy that was usually void from his expression.

“Do you,” Louis started and then stopped himself with a head shake.

“Do I…” Harry drawled out, allowing himself to take a step closer towards Louis.

Louis’ Adam’s apple bobbed in his throat as he looked up towards Harry. He swayed forward and reached his hand out, hovering just above Harry’s chest. Harry looked down at Louis’ dainty fingers and when they started to droop, he circled his own hand around them. Forgoing trepidation, Harry brought Louis’ hand against his chest, holding it there until Louis’ fingers gripped his shirt.

“Harry,” Louis quietly murmured as his hand slid to cup Harry’s jaw.

He let his eyelids lull shut, focusing on the feel of Louis’ fingers cradling his jaw. Blindly reaching out, Harry settled his hands along the dip of Louis’ waist and anchored himself there. Louis took a step closer until their chest brushed together, the touch sending energy rushing through every bit of Harry’s body.

“Come on,” Harry quietly urged, slowly blinking his eyes open to see Louis’ gaze trained to his lips. His fingers dug into Louis’ waist, “Kiss me.”


Louis groaned and dropped his forehead against Harry’s chest before pulling away. Harry shook his head and was silently begging Louis not to answer his phone, not to wreck the delicate moment that they had created.

“I’m sorry,” Louis wearily said. He scrubbed a hand over his face and pulled out his ringing mobile from his pocket, “Oh.”

Harry took a step back and self-consciously tucked his arms over his chest, “What?”

Louis’ eyebrows were pulled together as he looked at the screen, his mouth turned downwards.

“Who is it?” Harry pressed.

“Liam,” Louis answered, looking back up at Harry.

Harry bitterly snorted, “Well isn’t that ironic.”

Louis tapped the screen of his mobile and raised it to his ear, “Hello?”

There was a break where Louis was listening to Liam, but his eyes were still locked on Harry’s

“Yeah, he’s here,” Louis answered, a private grin tugging the edges of his lips. He leaned against the door, “Did you want me to put you on speaker?”

Louis pulled his mobile away and tapped the screen again. He rolled his hand in the air, gesturing for Harry to step closer.

“Harry, you there?” Liam’s voice crackled out from the other line.

“Yeah,” Harry mirrored Louis’ position against the door. “I’m here.”

“Great,” Zayn’s voice chirped, sounding slightly further away than Liam’s.
There was a small pause before Louis coaxed, “So…”

“Oh, right!” Liam laughed. “We wanted to invite you two over for dinner to go over a few things.”

Harry frowned at that, “Is everything alright?”

“Yeah, everything is fine,” Liam quickly reassured.

“We just wanted to apologize for last night,” Zayn added.

Louis narrowed his eyes at his mobile, “Apologize?”

“For how Brad acted,” Liam clarified. He awkwardly cleared his throat, “We, um, thought there might be a bit of tension with them, but I swear we didn’t think he’d say something offensive.”

“We spoke to him after you two left and said that they were out of the study if it happened again,” Zayn seriously told them.

“Can’t imagine he took that too well,” Louis bitterly snipped.

Harry humorlessly snorted in agreement.

“Should have heard Katie go at ‘im for it,” Zayn mused with a soft laugh. “She was proper embarrassed and had Brad apologize to the room as a whole.”

Louis’ eyes widened and he looked up at Harry with a baffled expression that must have mirrored Harry’s own countenance.

“Really?” Harry spoke up.

“Really,” Liam assured. “But, we went over the first retreat last night and wanted to talk to you two about it since its next weekend.” There was an uncomfortable cough before Liam continued, “Well, if you two still want to go along with the study, that is.”

Louis looked at Harry with a quirked eyebrow and when Harry nodded, he said, “We’re still up for it.”

There was a relieved sigh from the other end of the line and Harry had to bite back a laugh at how nervous Liam was that they had changed their mind.

“Okay, great!” Liam happily said.

“So,” Zayn interjected, “Do you two already have dinner plans?”

Harry and Louis shared another look because obviously, they hadn’t talked about Saturday night plans with each other. He shook his head and shrugged to imply that it was up to Louis to decide.

“We’re free,” Louis answered for them with a small grin directed towards Harry. He looked back down at his mobile. “What time were you thinking?”

“An hour?” Liam hopefully suggested. “We figured we could just order takeaway from a place by us.”

“We’ll be there,” Louis easily agreed.

Harry stepped away as Louis took his mobile off speakerphone and said goodbye. He walked
towards the island and rested his palms against the cool surface. Louis pocked his mobile and slowly ambled to the other side of the surface. They stared at each other and it was overwhelmingly unnerving because the moment before the call had effectively been shattered. Harry dropped his gaze to the island and stubbed the front of his shoe against the ground.

“We should talk.”

“You sound like me mum,” Louis deadpanned as he looked back towards Harry.

Harry uncomfortably shifted his weight to his right, “I’m being serious, Louis.”

Louis snorted, “Unfortunately.”

“What’s wrong with wanting to talk about our situation?” Harry frowned.

“Christ,” Louis waved him off. “Don’t call it a situation. That makes it actually sound serious.”

“Forgive me for caring about what’s obviously going on here,” Harry straightened his back and crossed his arms.

“Don’t get all defensive now,” Louis effortlessly rolled his eyes. He shook his head and pressed the heels of his palms against his eyes, “I just don’t think we have to talk about what it is that you wanna talk about.”

“Really?” Harry expectantly cocked his head to the side.

“Really.”

“Louis we –”

“So, we kissed!” Louis exaggeratedly groaned. He flailed his hands, “It meant nothing so there’s nothing to talk about.”

“Right,” Harry’s jaw clenched as he pushed himself away from the table.

“No need to get –”

Harry rounded the table, “Forget it.”

“Oh, no you don’t,” Louis admonished before he stepped in front of Harry’s path.

“Move,” Harry gritted out.

“No,” Louis turned his chin upwards and broadened his stance. He poked Harry in the chest, “I’m not gonna let you close off again.”

Harry felt anger boiling underneath his skin as he looked down at Louis’ indignant glare.

“Don’t tell me that I’m the one closing off,” Harry seethed as he stepped closer. He poked Louis right back, “You’re the one who doesn’t want to talk about it like an adult.”

“There you go again,” Louis snorted. He wildly rolled his fingers in the air, “Just when I thought you got off that bloody pretentious pedestal you love so much…”

Harry recoiled from that, the low blow hitting him harder than it would have just three weeks prior. It wasn’t that he expected things to have magically changed between them from one kiss. Harry just
thought, at least hoped, that Louis saw him in better light than before. Louis’ eyes widened and he slapped a hand over his mouth as he shook his head from side to side.

“Wait,” He lightly gripped Harry’s bicep and continued to shake his head. “Harry, I didn’t mean that.”

“Don’t worry,” Harry’s voice was void of any emotion as he shrugged Louis’ grip off. “I won’t try to kiss you again. I mean,” He coolly chuckled, “I’m still just some pretentious twat, right?”

“No, no, Harry,” Louis’ eyes were frantically running over his face. His grip tightened a fraction, “I – Fuck! I was just frustrated. I didn’t mean it.”

Harry swallowed the lump building in his throat and stepped around Louis to get to the door. Louis was immediately running ahead of him, slamming his back against the door to block Harry’s way.

“Louis,” Harry lowly warned.

“No,” Louis petulantly said. He stood his ground, “You’re not leaving until you believe me.”

“Why can’t you just let me leave?” Harry narrowed his eyes. “If this is about the stupid dinner,” He spat out with more venom than anticipated, “Don’t worry, I’ll still go. We can meet there.”

“This isn’t about the bloody dinner, Harry!”

“Then fucking get out of my way!”

“No!”

Harry scrubbed a hand over his face and then roughly tugged the elastic out of his hair. He raked his fingers through the wavy tresses as he gnawed on his bottom lip.

“We can talk about the kiss,” Louis quietly said after a minute of silence. He waited until Harry looked at him to tack on, “I – Buggering, fuck. M’ used to just talking shit and not really thinking about how it’s gonna sound.”

Harry bitterly snorted, “Charming.”

“I could tell you were about to put up that fuckin’ wall of yours,” Louis pushed himself off the door and took a step closer to Harry.

Louis hesitantly reached out rest his palm over Harry’s chest. His touch ignited a frenetic energy that Harry felt almost embarrassed to have. He clenched his jaw and looked over Louis’ head, refusing to meet his oceanic baby-blues.

“M’ sorry,” Louis murmured, his thumb lightly digging into Harry’s chest. “I just,” Louis heavily exhaled and lowered his hand back to his side, “I got frustrated cos we were doing really as friends and –”

“Friends don’t kiss friends,” Harry mumbled, shoving his hands in his pockets.

Louis sighed, “That’s what Niall said.”

“You told Niall?”

“He figured it out pretty quickly,” Louis shrugged.
“So,” Harry drawled out as he took a step back, “What do we do now?”

Louis glimpsed at him and Harry could visibly see the sheer amount of indecision that flickered through his mind.

“I think,” Louis started and Harry had a gut feeling that he knew where it was leading to.

“Just say it,” Harry gently urged, needing to hear it out loud.

“Unless we have to for the study,” Louis looked down, no longer meeting Harry’s eyes.

“Say it.”

Louis looked back up to meet Harry’s eyes, “Unless it’s for the study, we shouldn’t kiss again.”


Exhale, Harry.

“Okay.”

Louis’ mouth twisted into a frown, “Okay?”

Harry nodded as he internally bottled the mound of disappoint that threatened to bubble into his bloodstream. He even threw in a hollow smile and playfully rolled his eyes for good measure. After eleven years of handling disillusionment, Harry was almost a natural at pushing his feelings under the rug. There wasn’t any reason why it would be different this time around; it was just a different face than usual that caused it.

“Yeah,” He shoved his hands into his back pocket. He gestured towards the door, “Now can I go get changed for dinner or are you going to keep me prisoner?”

Louis was staring at him with a dumbfounded expression, his mouth repeatedly opening and closing like a beached flounder. His eyebrows were pinched together and his cobalt irises frenziedly flitted over Harry’s blank expression.

“Oh,” Louis shook his head and dazedly stepped to the side. “Right. I’ll, um, meet you there.”

Harry nodded, “Sounds good.”

Without another word, Harry strode past Louis and walked out the door. He trotted the staircase, his heart thundering inside of his chest to point where every palpitation was on the verge of painful. Harry didn’t cry, though. Everything might have ached to the point where he felt as if he was being pushed underneath a rough current of waves, but, at least he didn’t cry. Eleven years taught him better than that.
Chapter Seven

There was an unsinkable feeling in Louis’ gut that things we’re irrevocably fucked.

Louis continued to walk towards Liam and Zayn’s building, his feet mindlessly carrying him along as he continuously replayed Harry leaving his flat. The unmistakable amount of tension they built together was perpetually charged all the way up until Louis opened his mouth. It as if Louis had personally watched the brilliant light of a super-nova crash into the earth’s surface. Everything was shimmering and electric until it was absolute chasmic nothingness.

He saw Harry’s expression transform from openly beautiful to something so calculatedly blank and there wasn’t any question that it was his own fault. What had made it worse, even more than seeing the human embodiment of starlight extinguished, was that Louis was sure he had done the right thing.

Given their situation, he didn’t see how adding kissing and potentially, sex, would benefit their relationship in the long run. Friends don’t kiss friends. That was what both Niall and Harry had told him. But, if that was true, why did Harry ask Louis to kiss him? As far as he was concerned, Harry did not harbor a romantic bone in his body.

Louis on the other hand, well, he did.

He figured that was why he instinctively ended it before it even really began. If Louis was being honest, which he rarely was aloud, he knew that he could develop romantic feelings towards Harry. If Harry was unable to reciprocate those feelings, Louis wasn’t willing to put his heart on the line just for a few kisses. They were nice, but it would never be enough.

I did the right thing.

Louis faltered in his step when he rounded the street corner, eyes immediately falling on Harry. He was leaned up against the building entrance, long legs extended in front of him while his head was lolled back against the brick siding. Taking a few steps closer, Louis noted that Harry was wearing the same thing that he had left Louis’ flat in even though his excuse for leaving was to get changed.

“You didn’t get changed,” Louis blurted out.

Harry snapped his head towards Louis, his eyebrow perfectly quirked as he let out a scoff, “Excuse me?”

Louis frowned, “You said you had to leave to get changed.”

“I did,” Harry pushed himself off of the building. He nudged his elbow into Louis, “Then I realized there wasn’t enough time…So, I went for a walk.”

That only made Louis’ frown deepen, “We could have just gone together.”

“Aww,” Harry crooned as he pulled open the main door. He winked over his shoulder, “Did someone miss me?”

Louis rolled his eyes and pushed past Harry to make his way up the stairs. Harry trotted a few paces behind him, their footsteps the only sound echoing in the corridor. When they stopped in front of Liam and Zayn’s flat, Louis hesitated with his hand over the door.
He dropped it and turned towards Harry, “We’re okay, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Harry shrugged. “Of course.”

Louis narrowed his eyes, “Are you lying?”

“Louis,” Harry playfully rolled his eyes and lowered his voice, “Not kissing you isn’t exactly detrimental to my wellbeing.”

“That’s a bit offensive,” Louis snipped, bristled by Harry’s sudden nonchalance.

Harry’s eyebrows pulled together and his head tilted to the side. His gaze raked over Louis’ and he opened his mouth to say something, and then snapped it shut. He glanced at the door then turned back to Louis, slightly arching his back to meet Louis’ height.

“You’re,” Harry took a deep breath then quietly reminded him, “Lou, you’re the one who wanted this.”

I did.

“It’s just,” Louis started then stopped. “Kissing is how feelings get involved,” Louis managed to rush out, mindful to keep his voice low. When Harry’s eyes widened, Louis’ cheeks heated and he quickly tacked on, “Not that you would, I mean. Like, I know the whole romance thing isn’t really for you.”

“Wait,” Harry frowned and took a step forward. He intently rested his hands on Louis’ shoulders and there was the flash of starlight ignited in his eyes, “Is that why –”

“M’ not saying I do,” Louis cut him off, his nerves getting the better of him. He shuffled his weight from foot to foot, “I’m just saying, its possible that I –”

Louis was cut off by the flat’s door swinging open to reveal a slightly confused Liam standing in the doorway. He looked between Harry and Louis with wide eyes.

“Oh, crap,” Liam sputtered out. “Sorry, I thought I heard you two, but –” He thumbed over his shoulder, “Take your time, lads.”

“Sorry,” Harry apologetically winced, “Could you just give us –”

“No, no, it’s fine! Don’t wanna be rude,’” Louis quickly said over Harry’s unfinished question. He nonchalantly waved his hand, “We were just about to knock, anyways.” Louis meaningfully widened his eyes when he glanced at Harry, “Weren’t we, Harry?”

Harry’s hands slipped from the Louis’ shoulders and he schooled his expression back to a blank slate. If Louis hadn’t been looking for it, he would have missed the tinge of disappointment that pinched the corner of Harry’s mouth. Unfortunately for him, Louis had picked up on the habit of speculating ever small reaction Harry made. He didn’t miss the subtle twitch.

“Right,” Harry nodded and clasped his hands behind his back. He angled his head towards Louis, “What he said.”

Liam slowly nodded and then took a step back, sweeping his hand towards the inside of the flat, “Come on in, then.”

“Thanks,” Louis mumbled as he stepped past Liam.
Zayn appeared from down the hall and gave them a small wave, “Hey, guys.”

“Hello,” Harry monotonously chimed from behind him. “Thanks for having us.”

“Course,” Zayn waved them off. “What kind of food d’you two like?” He asked as he walked towards the kitchen. Zayn pulled out a few menus from a drawer and waved them, “Any food allergies?”

“Oh, um,” Louis’ eyes widened and he looked at Harry, “Allergies?”

Zayn confusedly cocked his hip to the side, “You don’t know?”

“No, that’s not it,” Harry slung his arm over Louis’ shoulder. He playfully shook his head, “This one now thinks that I am allergic to shellfish.” Harry let out a soft laugh, “I got food poisoning a few weeks ago, but Louis is still convinced I’m allergic.”

“He says that as if he didn’t look up the side-effects for an allergic reaction,” Louis glared at Harry before turning towards Zayn and slapping a smile on his face. He winked, “I was just indulging ‘im. Being a good boyfriend and all that.”

“Indulging me?” Harry squeezed his shoulder. His eyes were full of mirth as he looked down at Louis, “Are you forgetting the part where you drove me to the hospital against my wishes?”

“Are you really gonna use that against me?” Louis slipped out from under Harry’s arm and settled his hands on his waist, “In that case, don’t expect me to take you to the hospital next time your dramatic arse says that you feel like you’re dying!”

“Oh, I’m dramatic?!” Harry tossed his head back and scoffed.

“Well, then.”

Louis begrudgingly swallowed his retort and slowly turned to face Liam and Zayn who were watching them with wide eyes. The menus were hanging limp by Zayn’s side and Liam didn’t even attempt to hide his slack jawed response.

“You two really know how to rile each other up, don’t you?” Liam awkwardly laughed as if he wasn’t sure if it was meant to be funny or not.

“Obviously, he brings out the best in me,” Louis deadpanned without a thought.

It was silent between the four of them, Louis’ words hanging in the air like a thick fog. Liam and Zayn gaped at him with matching incredulous expressions. Louis’ gut felt heavy as he realized that he managed to ruin the entire fake-boyfriend operation before the first retreat.

Well done, Tomlinson

There was a breathy huff to his right and it somehow managed to sound like a bullet in the otherwise quiet flat. Louis snapped his head to look at Harry. His stomach instantly swooped at the sight of Harry barely biting back a laugh. His dimple was fully on display and his bottom lip was flushed from his nipping teeth. Harry looked back at Louis and that was all it took for him to burst out in laughter.

Harry shook his head and panted out, “You’re such a fucking menace.”

The sounds that Harry made were infectious and as Louis gawked at him, he knew that he didn’t
stand a chance. Harry’s usually pale cheeks were pigmented with rosy hues as he continued to cackle. A spout of surprised laughter shook his shoulders and it only encouraged Harry to be louder. They fed off of each other and Louis found himself subconsciously leaning into Harry’s side to for support.

“Yeah,” Louis easily agreed. He nudged Harry's hip with his own, “M’ your menace, though.”

“Shit.”

Liam was beaming at them, hands clasped against his chest. He looked from Zayn to the “couple” and made a pleased sound.

“I’m just really happy you both decided to do this,” Liam gushed, sounding nothing but genuine with his boyish grin. “Your banter between each other is, well, it’s just different than the other couples.”

“Aww, hear that, Babu?” Louis cooed and quickly pinched Harry’s cheek. “He thinks were different.”

Harry groaned at the petname and swatted Louis’ hands away from his face.

“Yeah,” Zayn slowly drawled out. He looked down at the menus in his hand and lethargically droned, “I’ll be happy when we pick a place to order from.”

“Could just do a pizza,” Louis suggested with small shrug. “Probably the easiest, innit?”

With everyone in agreement, Liam ordered two pizzas. They decided on a veggie pizza for Harry and Zayn to split and a peperoni for Louis and Liam. Once their order was placed, they shuffled further into the living room with freshly opened beers in hand. Zayn stretched out on a loveseat, Liam on a ratted arm chair, and Harry and Louis on the couch.

“So,” Louis smacked his lips together, “The first retreat is this weekend?”

Liam nodded as he finished taking a sip.

“Is it by campus?” He leaned forward to rest his elbows against to tops of his knees. Zayn shared a private grin with Liam before he smirked, “Not exactly.”

“Not exactly?” Harry frowned and looked over towards Louis. When Louis shrugged, feeling just as confused, Harry carefully asked, “Where are we going?”

“It’s a bit amazing, actually,” Liam set the brown bottle down onto a coffee table and beamed. “The department really splurged on the retreats since –”

“Fascinating,” Louis cut him off and sat up straighter. He narrowed his eyes, “Now, where is it?”

“Louis,” Harry hissed under his breath. “Sorry,” He apologetically smiled at Liam, “He’s not very polite when it comes to surprises.”

“It’s in London.”

Louis unceremoniously choked on his beer when the words left Zayn’s mouth. His chest heaved forward and his eyes slightly glazed over. Judging by the sputtering sound to his side, he reckoned Harry had the same reaction. He pounded his fist against the center of his chest and cleared his throat with a rough cough.
“London?” Louis squeaked.

Zayn was openly laughing at their reaction as he nodded. Liam looked just as pleased by their discombobulated state. Louis suspiciously looked between the two of them, “Are you serious?”

“Yes,” Liam chirped. He clasped his hands together, “The University is footing the bill for the expenses.”

“But, logistically,” Harry scooted towards the lip of the couch, “How is that going to work out?”

“Harry!” Louis swiftly smacked Harry upside the head. He leaned in towards him and hissed, “When someone tells you that you’re goin’ to London for free, that’s not the first thing you say!”

“I mean, thank you,” Harry rushed out, his cheeks tinting pink. He scratched the back of his neck, “Are we all going to be in the same flat? The whole weekend?”

“We found something with six bedrooms,” Liam nodded. He lifted his shoulders “It’s not anything too posh, but, it’s not bad.”

Louis could see the way Harry tensed as he continued to rattle off questions.

“How’re we getting there?”

“Rented two vans,” Zayn supplied. He jutted his thumb between Liam and himself, “We’re gonna drive.”

“Is it a long drive?”

“Harry,” Louis quietly interjected. He studied Harry’s clenched jaw, “Just let them explain.”

Harry looked glanced back at Louis and weakly said, “But, like, I don’t think I understand why?”

“Why, what?” Zayn curiously tilted his head to the side.

“I don’t want to sound ungrateful,” Harry fidgeted with his hands in his lap. He looked between Liam and Zayn, “But…Why are we going to another city?”

Liam’s eyebrows pulled together, “Do you not want to go?”

“No,” Harry’s eyes widened, “That’s not it.”

Louis frowned as Harry seemed to get more and more uncomfortable with Liam and Zayn’s scrutiny. He shifted closer towards Harry’s side and rested a hand on his lower back, lightly running over his tensed spine.

“Um, lads?” Louis carefully asked, looking back to Liam and Zayn. He gestured between himself and Harry, “Is there somewhere we can go? Y’know, just a minute to go over things?”

“Sure, of course,” Liam quickly said, picking up on Harry’s obvious discomfort. He pointed towards the corridor, “My room is the second door on the left.” Liam offered a gentle smile, more so towards Harry than Louis, “We’ll let you know when the pizza is here.”

Louis gratefully nodded, “Thanks, Liam.” He stood from the couch and lightly tapped Harry’s shoulder, “C’mon.”
Harry wordlessly stood from the couch and led the way towards Liam’s room. When they walked inside the scarcely decorated bedroom, Louis quietly shut the door behind them and leaned back against the wooden surface. He watched as Harry strode towards a window on the opposite wall, his fingers knotted together.

“Sorry,” Harry eventually mumbled.

“Why’re you apologizing?” Louis frowned.

Harry turned around and folded his arms over his chest. He shrugged and reached a hand up to tug at his bottom lip.

“Harry,” Louis quietly said, waiting for Harry met his gaze. When Harry looked back at him, Louis carefully asked, “C’mon, it’s just me.” He tried to reassuring smile, “You can talk to me.”

“It’s just,” Harry started then cut himself off with a humorless laugh. He mussed his hair and sighed, “I don’t like the idea of being stuck in a different city, in the same flat, probably the same car, as that prick.”

Louis reared back, “Liam?”

“What?” Harry frowned. He shook his head, “No, Brad.”

Louis couldn’t help but laugh at that. He rolled his eyes, “After yesterday, I highly doubt he would fuck with you.”

“I – No,” Harry scrubbed a hand over his face. “That’s not it.”

“Then what’re you going on about?” Louis pressed. “M’ a bit lost here.”

“He was a fucking knob to you,” Harry rushed out with a grimace. “And he can apologize all he wants,” Harry continued, gaining confidence with each word, “But, I don’t forgive him for playing to stereotypes and being blatantly homophobic.”

And, okay. That wasn’t what Louis prepared himself to hear.

He sighed, “Really, it’s not a big –”

“No,” Harry cut his hands through the air and then strode towards Louis. He stopped just in front of him and his eyes were frantically searching Louis’. Harry grated, “He was wrong and he shouldn’t have talked to you like that.”

“I know,” Louis thoughtfully said, barely fighting off the urge to smooth out the worry lines on Harry’s forehead.

Harry looked down at his hands and mumbled, “I don’t want to put you in a positon where it’s going to happen again.”

Louis felt as if his heart had splintered at Harry’s painfully earnest sentiment. He opened his mouth to say something, but he didn’t even know what to say in the situation. After a moment of heavy silence, he opted to close the distance between them and wrap his arms around Harry’s waist. He tucked his head underneath Harry’s jaw and flattened his hands against his back. Harry leaned into him as his arms circled Louis’ shoulders. Louis felt the tension of Harry’s body dissipate as they both sunk into the embrace. Selfishly, Louis nosed the collar of Harry’s shirt and breathed him in.
“We don’t have to ride in the same car as ’em,” Louis quietly said. He soothingly rubbed circles into Harry’s spine with his thumbs, “And we don’t have to spend more time with ’im than we have to.”

“Yeah,” Harry mumbled, not sounding too convinced.

Louis lolled his head back and looked up at Harry. He frowned at the serious expression that tightened Harry’s features, his emerald irises stony and void of their playful spark.

“I didn’t realize how much it bothered you,” He admitted.

“You don’t deserve to be treated disrespectfully.”

The sentence rolled off of Harry’s tongue with a startling amount of ease. It was as if the notion was obvious that he was simply pointing it out. Harry’s words reverberated inside of Louis, shocking him with unparalleled electricity that was a far cry from simplicity.

Louis rested his head back against Harry’s chest and whispered, “Thanks.”

His eyes lulled shut as Harry’s heartbeat rhythmically thudded underneath him. Louis felt as if he was back on the hilltop, the rest of the world stilted except for them. He even allowed himself a moment to pretend it was true. Make-believe they were building a genuine relationship and they were close to falling over the edge like the arch of a roller coaster, every passing day bringing them closer to the swooping feeling of falling for each other.

He sighed and lowered his arms, not wanting to fall into the emotions that had started to become nearly impossible to ignore in their close proximity. It wasn’t going to happen for them and he needed to focus on keeping their relationship platonic.

Things would be better that way.

Louis hoped that if he repeatedly told himself that, he might even believe it.

Harry loosened his grip and stepped back, “Thanks.”

“What’re mates for,” Louis nudged Harry’s side and then turned away, instantly hating how the words sounded coming from his mouth.

“Right,” Harry exhaled.

“We should go back out,” Louis hurried as he walked to the door. He gripped the doorknob and looked over his shoulder, “Alright?”

Harry nodded with a faint smile, “Alright.”

Louis pressed his lips together and pulled the door open. They walked back out towards the living room to see Zayn and Liam watching TV. Liam noticed them first, his head snapping towards Louis then Harry and there was a hopeful expression painted across his features.

“Is everything okay?” Liam hesitantly asked, causing Zayn to look away from the TV and towards the reemerged pair.

“Yeah,” Louis nodded and took back the seat he was in earlier. “Look,” He intertwined his hands together as Harry sat back down next to him, “’M’ gonna be very blunt cos I want this to work out for everyone.”

Zayn perked up at that, fully turning his body away from the program. Liam nodded and Louis felt
Harry slowly slide closer to his side. Without thought, he rested his hand on Harry’s thigh and gave what he hoped to be a reassuring squeeze.

“Go on,” Zayn swept his hand in front of him.

“Brad is a cuntin’ twat.”

Harry let out a sharp laugh at that and Louis indulged himself in knowing that he caused it. He could tell that Zayn was fighting off his own laughter as he looked down with his tongue pressed into his cheek.

When no one contradicted him, Louis brightly said, “Glad we all agree.”

“Does that mean you two won’t…” Liam anxiously drawled out.

“We’ll do the study,” Louis glanced at Harry for reassurance. He nodded and Louis continued, “But, we’re not gonna be stuck in the same van as that tosser. Harry’s, um, well –”

“I’m not comfortable with it,” Harry interjected, earnestness blanketing his tone.

“Fair enough, mate,” Zayn admitted.

Liam nodded, “You can go in the other car.”

“Excellent,” Louis grinned. He slipped his hand off of Harry’s leg and leaned forward to grab his discarded beer. “We know that we’re gonna have to talk to them and whatnot,” Louis tilted the bottle from side to side, “But, he – We, would rather not have a repeat of Friday.”

“No problem,” Liam eagerly said. “It won’t happen again.”

“Good,” Harry curtly nodded.

Once the residual tension was lifted from the air, Louis could practically feel everyone start to relax. The pizzas were delivered and the four of them ate as they rolled through the logistics for the trip to London. Louis found himself continuously glimpsing at Harry to make sure that he was comfortable, a habit that he didn’t want to fight off. Harry caught his eyes a few times and he would privately smile back before focusing on the conversation.

When they had finally ironed out the travel details, the time was rounding close to nine. Louis was sitting back and openly admiring Harry as he animatedly talked to Zayn about film structure. When Zayn mentioned that he was minoring in film, Louis witnessed Harry’s personality start to shine through in the way it did when they were alone. With every passing comment, Harry’s gesticulation became bolder and his answers drawn out longer. It was mesmerizing and a selfish part of Louis was jealous that someone else was able to bring it out in Harry.

There was a comfortable lull in conversation and Harry gently nudged Louis in the side with his elbow. Louis sleepily blinked up at him and softly smiled. He fought off a yawn, but must not have done a very good job at it because Harry’s mouth curled in amusement.

“Tired?” He asked, his smirk suggesting that he already knew the answer.

Louis unabashedly nodded, “Think it just hit me that we only slept like five hours last night.”

Harry hummed in understanding, “Want to go home?”

“Please,” He exhaled on a pathetic laugh.
“Okay,” Harry quietly complied, his dimple dipping into his cheek. He looked to Liam and Zayn, “Think I’m gonna get Louis home now before he falls asleep here.”

“M’ fuckin’ knackered,” Louis ineloquently chimed in, pulling a laugh from the other three men.

“Thank you for dinner,” Harry politely said as he stood up from the couch. “And, um,” He fidgeted with the hem of his shirt, “Being understanding with the whole, uh, Brad thing.”

“Of course,” Zayn gently said with a close-lipped smile. He stood from the loveseat and shoved his hands into his jean pockets, “Thanks for coming tonight.”

“Oh!” Liam squeaked before he pushed himself to his feet and jogged towards his room without another word.

“Alright, then,” Louis drawled out.

Liam returned a moment later with two red shirts in his hands. Zayn hummed in understanding while Liam passed them to Louis and Harry.

“Wear these the day and night before we leave,” Liam instructed. He settled his hands on his hips, “On Friday, put them in individual zip-lock bags and bring them with you.”

Louis’ nose scrunched, “And…Why are we doing this?”

“Part of the study,” Zayn stated as if it made any more sense.

Liam nodded, “Just make sure you label the bags and know whose is whose.”

“Can’t have them mixed up,” Zayn tacked on.

Louis and Harry looked to each other with raised eyebrows, but they shrugged nonetheless. Saying final goodbyes, they left the flat and walked outside side by side. A steady hum of nightlife passed by them on the streets as they quietly meandered back towards their respective flats. When it came to the point where they had to split ways, Louis realized that both of them had considerably slowed their pace. They stopped at the street corner and Harry turned to face Louis.

“Today was,” Harry drawled out, his eyes widening as he searched for an appropriate word. Louis huffed out a laugh and weakly supplied, “Interesting?”

“Yeah,” Harry nodded and scuffed his shoe against the pavement. “That’s one way to describe it.”

“Right,” Louis said, his eyes darting from Harry to the street and back. “Well…”

Harry shoved his hands in his pockets and rocked back, “Get home safe, yeah?”

“You too,” Louis faintly grinned.

“Goodnight, Lou.”

“Night, Babu.”

Harry’s cheeks flushed pink as he rolled his eyes and shook his head. He took a few steps backwards, eyes still locked on Louis’ before he fully turned around and walked away. Louis stood still for a moment and watched Harry leave. There was a niggling feeling in his stomach that made him want to run after Harry. It begged him to give into the itch that ticked along his skin and kiss
Harry just one more time. Knowing that would only hurt him in the long run, Louis scrubbed his hands over his face and turned to walk home.

****

*There is something in your loving that tears down my walls*

“I wouldn’t have pegged you as closet Adele man.”

Harry spun on his heel with a surprised squeak. A broomstick was still cradled in his hands from dancing around as he swept away remnants of dirt. His jaw drooped when his eyes landed on Louis.

*I wasn’t ready then, I’m ready now*

Louis was leaning against the doorframe to the greenhouse, his arms folded over his chest and a playful smirk played at the edges of his pink lips. If his demeanor was anything to go by, Harry assumed that Louis had been watching him twirl around the shop long before he announced his presence.

He wore the same red t-shirt that Harry had on underneath his green work apron and a pair of fitted blue jeans on his muscular legs. Quickly, he pulled his black beanie off his head and mussed the matted hair. Harry couldn’t help the swooping motion of his heart when Louis pushed himself off of the doorframe and took a few steps closer.

*The sweetest devotion hitting me like an explosion*

Harry flushed at the song lyrics and darted his hand out to silence the Bluetooth speaker that rested on a shelf of succulents. Silence wrung throughout the greenhouse, but Adele’s words were still ricocheting inside of Harry’s mind. They had been since Saturday evening.

“What, um,” Harry winced as he fumbled for words, “What are you doing here?”

Louis spread out his arms and gave him a dubious look as if it was obvious.

“You said I should come by sometime to see the shop.”

“And you didn’t think to warn me?” Harry deadpanned.

“After getting to see that little performance there,” Louis devilishly smirked as he rolled his fingers through the air, “M’ happy with my decision not to warn you.”

Harry groaned and rubbed a hand over his face, “I hate you.”

“Quite the moves you got,” Louis carried on and started to sway his hips. “What was that you were doing by the corner?” He leered and obnoxiously shook his shoulders, “Bit of a shimmy for the cactus, was it?”

“Louis,” Harry whined, fighting off a laugh through his embarrassment. He dropped the broom and gripped Louis’ shoulders to stop his movements, “Stop that before you hurt yourself.”

“Oh, are you gonna give me dancing lesson, Harold?” Louis waggled his eyebrows. He slipped out of Harry’s grip, “We could do it like Dirty Dancing.” Louis placed his hand over his heart, “Obviously, I’m Baby.”

“Obviously,” Harry snorted.
Louis took a step back and impishly narrowed his eyes, “Think you could lift me?”

“Absolutely not,” Harry immediately said as he held up his hands in warning. “Tomlinson, don’t even think about it.”

“Oh, I’m thinking about it, Styles,” Louis experimentally bent his knees.

Before Louis could pounce on him, Harry darted out of the green house and ran into the main section of the store. He could hear Louis sprinting after him, the soles of his shoes loudly slapping against the concrete flooring. Harry ducked behind the register and crouched down. He tried to quiet his breathing when he heard Louis enter.

“Oh, Styles,” Louis sang-song and Harry was valiantly biting back a laugh. “Come out, come out, wherever you are.”

“Who the bloody hell are you?!”

Harry promptly jumped to his feet, looking across the store to see Jules incredulously gawking at Louis who was in the process of entering the employees lounge. Louis held up his hands as if he was under arrest and stepped away from the grey door.

“Uh,” Louis drawled out. He accusingly pointed at Harry, “His fault!”

“It most certainly was not,” Harry huffed, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Oh,” Jules lilted her voice as her hazel eyes twinkled with mirth. She cocked a manicured eyebrow, “You must be Louis.”

“Depending on what you’ve heard,” Louis paused to glimpse at Harry, “I might be.”

Harry stepped out from behind the register, “Jules, this is Louis.” He gestured between them, “Louis, this is Jules.”

Louis pointedly looked to Harry, “The infamous Jules, hmm?”

“What’s he goin’ on about?” Jules whipped towards Harry.

Harry sighed, “Don’t worry about it.”

“He draws you a lot,” Louis announced as if he was revealing a big secret.

Jules gave him a deliberate once-over, “And?”

A smug grin stretched over Harry’s face as Louis looked between the two of them with a dumbfounded expression. His mouth opened and closed multiple times, blatantly unable to formulate a response. Harry really shouldn’t have found it to be endearing.

“Anyways,” Jules droned and gave Louis a suspicious look before turning towards Harry, “I thought you left tomorrow morning?”

“We do,” Harry shrugged. He rested back against the register’s counter and the corner of his mouth twitched, “Louis just wanted to stop by and smell the roses.”

There was an unimpressed pause before Louis deadpanned, “If that was meant to be a joke, it wasn’t a good one.”
“He’s not wrong,” Jules scoffed under his breath.

“Hey!” Harry dragged out with an affronted pout. “You’re meant to be the nice one.”

Jules blew him an exaggerated kiss with a loud smack. With one last observatory once-over directed at Louis, she wandered towards the backroom. Harry glared at her retreating pixie figure up until she disappeared behind the door.

“You look like a putout puppy,” Louis laughed.

Harry raised his chin, “I do not.”

“Whatever you say,” Louis snorted. He slid his hands into his front pockets and tilted his head towards the exit, “Should probably let you get back to work.”

“Probably,” Harry mumbled, hating the disappointment that underlined his tone.

Louis walked backwards towards the exit, “I’ll see you tomorrow at nine, yeah?”

Harry nodded, “See you then.”

He watched Louis walk out of the shop and kept watching the door in a pathetic hope that he might reappear.

“You’ve got it bad.”

Harry groaned and lolled his head back on his neck. He covered his face with his palms and let out a strangled sound from the back of his throat.

“M’ not sure what that means,” Jules playfully mused, “But, I’ll just assume you agree.”


“Give him a blowie to show yer affection,” She snorted.

Harry felt irritation slowly creep under his skin. With his jaw clenched, he abruptly strolled by Jules and went back to the greenhouse.

“Wait, Harry!” She called from behind him.

He picked up the discarded broom from earlier and didn’t bother to look at Jules as he sighed, “Forget it.”

“M’ sorry,” Jules quietly apologized, stepping directly in front of Harry. She frowned, “I was just joking.”

“Yeah, well, I wasn’t,” Harry murmured.

Jules tilted her head to the side, “Never seen you like this before.”

Harry shrugged, “I’ve never liked someone before.” When she made a sound in protest, Harry rolled his eyes and amended, “I’ve never liked someone romantically before.”

She nodded in understanding, “Does he know you like him?”

“I mean,” Harry slightly extended his hands by his sides, “I’ve been pretty obvious about it.”
“What’d you mean?”

“We, um,” He scratched the back of his neck, “I kissed him.”

Jules eyes widened, “Were you gonna mention that bit any time soon?!”

Harry winced, “It doesn’t matter anymore.”

“Don’t be stupid,” She leaned forward and incredulously smacked his bicep. “Course it matters!”

“On Saturday,” Harry started, his cheeks heating with slight embarrassment, “Louis told me that we shouldn’t kiss unless it’s for the study.”

Jules frowned at that, “Why?”

Harry shrugged, “He said that kissing is how feelings get involved.” He fidgeted with the ring around his forefinger and noncommittedly lifted his shoulders, “I guess he doesn’t want that.”

“Maybe he thinks you don’t want that,” Jules slowly said. She sympathetically smiled, “You don’t exactly give off the vibes of warm and fuzzy feelings.”

“Alright, let’s just say,” Harry huffed and crossed his arms, “On the off chance he might have feelings for me…You think I should just waltz up to him and say that I fancy him?”

“Maybe not a waltz —”

“Jules.”

“— Something closer to a tango.”

When Harry flashed her an unimpressed glare, Jules rolled her eyes and loudly sighed.

“You should just be honest,” She told him.

“Yeah?” Harry humorlessly laughed. He cocked his eyebrow, “And what if it ruins everything? The study would go to complete shit all because he knows that I have a bit of a crush on him.”

Jules narrowed her eyes, “You and I both know that you don’t care about the study.”

“That’s not true,” Harry defensively shot back. He lifted his jaw and snuffed, “I need to get a new lens.”

“Which you already have money saved for,” Jules slowly said.

“I do not,” He squawked.

“Oh, really?” She laughed and shook her head. “Harry, you’ve done nothing but work for the past three years.”

Harry’s cheeks flushed, “So?”

“So…I know that you don’t spend the money you’ve been making.”

“I’m saving to move,” Harry quickly said.

“You have more than enough saved to move.” When Harry opened his mouth to retort, Jules pointed her index finger at him, “Before you deny it, remember who does your bloody payroll.”
Harry flushed crimson and looked away when she smugly grinned at him.

““The only reason you’re doing the study at this point, is because you like Louis.”

Jules words felt like a bucket of ice-water being dumped over Harry’s body. His body tensed, fingers tightly balling into fists by his side. Denial unwillingly died on the tip of his tongue, leaving a bitter taste in its wake. He felt exposed underneath her open scrutiny, all of his emotions stripped bare and left in the open.

Harry knew that Jules was right. All it took was one blunt statement for him to see that at some point along the way, he stopped doing the study because he felt like he had to. One month in and Harry’s motives took a tailspin into something completely different than where they had begun.

“You’re right,” Harry eventually murmured.

Jules reached out and rested her palm on his shoulder, her eyes quickly flitting over his face.

“Tell him.”

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Come Friday morning, Louis found himself anxiously standing inside a local café. He continuously shifted his weight from foot to foot as he waited for his order to be called out. Louis pulled his mobile from his pocket and internally groaned when he saw that it was almost six-thirty. Harry and Louis decided to walk to Zayn and Liam’s together in case anyone from the study saw them head inside separately. That meant he had approximately four minutes to run to Harry’s studio so they wouldn’t be late.

It was the morning of their first retreat and Louis was determined not to ruin it before they even made it to London. He thought that it would be a nice gesture to show up with breakfast, but that nice idea quickly turned into a nightmare because the café was packed. Every time the bell above the door chimed, Louis felt a new roll of nerves wrack through his body.

“Two Americanos with a dash of cream and two blueberry muffins?”

Louis’ head snapped towards the barista with a relieved sigh. He quickly pushed himself past two girls to grab the proffered coffee cups and stuffed paper bag. With a small grin, he gripped his order and shouldered his way out of the budding crowd. When he made it outside, Louis tightened his hold around the cups and quickly sped towards Harry’s flat.

His chest was heaving by the time he made it to Harry’s door. Nylon uncomfortably chaffed against his shoulder from his slung duffel bag and he took a deep breath before he knocked. Any ounce of irritation he felt from the obscenely early morning hour dissipated when he saw Harry standing in the doorway with a sleepy smile.

“Good morning,” Harry said with a syrupy voice. He eyed the cups in Louis’ hands, “Did you bring me coffee?”

Louis playfully smirked, “Only if you plan on letting me in anytime soon.”

Harry huffed out a laugh and took a step back, “Come on in.”

“Thank you,” Louis chirped, passing Harry one of the cups as he stepped by him. He dropped his duffel onto the kitchen table and turned towards Harry, “Hope you like blueberry muffins.”
“You didn’t have to do that,” Harry closed the door, his teeth gently tugging on his bottom lip.

Louis shrugged, “S’just a muffin.” He rested back against the surface, “Don’t get too excited.”

Harry rolled his eyes and took a sip from his cup, a content hum reverberating from his chest. He smacked his lips, set the cup down, then walked towards the wardrobe.

“Just need to pack a few more things then I’m ready,” He said.

Louis valiantly tried to not focus on Harry as he flitted through the studio with long legged strides. His hand tightened around the coffee when Harry stripped off his t-shirt and slipped on a cream jumper. He averted his eyes and stared at the table when Harry changed into black jeans, willing his heart to palpitate at a platonically acceptable pace. If Harry noticed that he was being uncharacteristically quiet, he didn’t show it as he finished changing and gathering his belongings.

“Alright,” Harry breathlessly said as he tugged on a pair of leather Chelsea boots. He slung a green duffel over his arm and picked up his camera bag, “Ready?”

“Yeah,” Louis quickly nodded and shouldered his own bag.

They left the flat together and started towards Liam and Zayn’s. Louis pulled out one of the blueberry muffins and then handed Harry the paper bag. Harry accepted it with a small smile and bumped their arms together.

“Wonder who we’re gonna ride with,” Louis mused aloud after a few minutes. He looked up at Harry, “Who would you wanna be with?”

“Doesn’t really matter to me,” Harry monotonously answered. He took a gulp of coffee then cleared his throat, “Does it matter to you?”

“Didn’t really talk to any of ‘em last week so I don’t know who’s alright,” Louis shrugged. A playful smile tugged the corner of his mouth, “Guess none of them could be as bad as Mr. and Mrs. Georgia Peach.”

Harry sputtered around a mouthful of coffee, the back of his hand instantly rising to wipe away coffee remnants off his chin. He enthusiastically nodded and they resumed the rest of their walk in comfortable silence. They finished their muffins and coffees, disposing the trash in a nearby bin. Louis’ eyes were mostly locked ahead, but he could practically feel Harry sneaking glances at him every few minutes.

“Um, we should,” Louis awkwardly stammered when they got to the street before Liam and Zayn’s building.

“Hmm?” Harry confusedly hummed, slowing his gait.

“Shouldn’t we like,” Louis lamely gestured between their chests, “Be holding hands or summat?”

“Oh,” Harry’s eyes widened. He looked towards the direction of their turn and then nodded, “That’s a good idea.”

Louis held out his hand and watched as their fingers slotted together. Harry’s hand was warm against his own and the touch somehow anchored the nerves that ticked through him. He looked up to see Harry watching him with a close-lipped smile.

“C’mon,” Louis murmured, gently pulled Harry forwards to round the corner.
When they stepped onto Liam and Zayn’s street, Louis felt as if his idea paid off. There was a cluster of people gathered by the entrance and Louis recognized them to be the other couples. He could feel Harry’s grip tighten in his own when Brad’s head snapped towards them. Louis squeezed Harry’s fingers and rubbed his thumb along the back of Harry’s hand.

“It’s gonna be okay, Harry,” Louis quietly said.

Harry glanced back at him and weakly nodded, “Okay.”

They stopped when they reached the other couples and Louis realized that neither Zayn or Liam were present. Mick took a step back and offered a small smile as he made room in the make-shift huddle.

“Hi,” Louis widely greeted, eyes darting over tired faces.

A general rumble of “good morning” was offered back and Louis instantly felt a thin layer of tension when it became silent. Across the circle, Nav was quietly looking between Louis and Brad. It was subtle, but it was also enough recognition for Louis to instinctively lean into Harry’s side. His eyes hesitantly landed on Katie’s equally nervous ones. She dragged her gaze away and Louis watched as she bumped her hip into her boyfriend’s.

Brad unenthusiastically cleared his throat and mumbled, “Might as well say it now.”

Harry let go of his hand and then circled his arm around Louis’ shoulders. It was obscenely protective and Louis found a part of him completely reveling in the attention. He wrapped his arm across Harry’s back and lightly gripped his soft waist. Katie gave Brad a pointed look when he didn’t readily continue and Louis did his best to bite back a laugh.

“I apologize for how I acted last week, fellas,” Brad said, sounding like a caught schoolboy rather than genuinely sincere. He looked down at Katie and when she lifted her eyebrows, he tacked on, “I was wrong.”

Daniel subtly signed Brad’s words to Natasha, the quick movements mesmerizing to Louis who could barely manage the simplest of sign. He did feel a small sense of victory when Natasha rolled her eyes and narrowed her eyes at Brad, apparently unimpressed by his apology. If Louis had any doubts that the other couples had heard what Brad said on Friday, he definitely didn’t anymore.

“Uh, thanks,” Louis awkwardly said, feeling uncomfortable by the whole exchange in front of the other couples. Harry didn’t answer and really, Louis didn’t expect him to. He cleared his throat and looked to the rest of the group. “Where are Liam and Zayn?”

Mick looked relieved to have the topic changed as he leaned into Camden and gestured towards the front door, “They just had to finish grabbing a few things.”

As if on cue, the front door flung open to reveal a disheveled Zayn and overly chipper Liam. Zayn tugged his grey hood over his head and offered a haphazard smile to the group. Liam, ever the upbeat person, was widely beaming to the group as if he had stumbled upon an adoring crowd.

“Sorry about that!” Liam said, far too brightly for the time of day.

Zayn seemed to agree because he glared at Liam, “Do a bit less Li, we’re all right here.”

Liam frowned, “M’ just excited.”

“So you’ve continuously mentioned,” Zayn groaned.
“Wake up,” Liam easily snipped and then looked back to the group. He clapped his hands together, “Alright, we already divided the cars.”

Zayn nodded, “Harry, Louis, Ava, Mick, and Camden, you’re with me.”

“Thank god,” Louis mumbled under his breath. He looked up at Harry, “Don’t think I had it in me for that much Liam in the morning.”

Harry pinched his shoulder as he bit into his cheek to suppress a laugh.

“Everyone else,” Liam grandly swept his hand out in front of him, “You’re with me.”

“Come on,” Zayn flicked his hand over his shoulder and started walking. “I parked in the lot by Aldi.”

The two couples followed and Louis fell into step by Zayn. When Zayn pulled out a pack of cigarettes from the pocket of his hoodie, he frowned and made a frustrated sound.

“Need a light?” Louis guessed, already pulling out a disposable lighter from the pocket of his joggers.

“Yeah,” Zayn gave him a relieved smile. He took the proffered lighter, “Thanks, mate.”

Louis nodded and pulled out a fag from his own pack. He wordlessly took the lighter from Zayn and lit the end of his cigarette. Hollowing his cheeks, Louis inhaled smoke and tilted his head back to release it. Glimpsing to the side, he saw a slight frown etched into Harry’s mouth.

Zayn must have also noticed because he raised an eyebrow, “Not a fan of smoking, hmm?”

Harry non-committedly shrugged, “Not particularly, no.”

Louis flushed and ducked his head down on the next inhale. He hadn’t realized that Harry probably didn’t know that he smoked until that moment. It wasn’t a habitual practice for him, just something he indulged himself in from time to time so it made sense that he hadn’t smoked in front of Harry before. Harry’s blatant distaste for the practice made him feel antsy as he took another drag.

“Mick’s the same way,” Ava chirped from her pace behind them. She had her own lit cigarette dangling from her fingers, “Not too fond of me smoking.”

“I’d like to keep you around as long as possible,” Mick boyishly said, the corners of his mouth slightly turned downwards.

“What about you, Camden?” Louis turned around and walked backwards, eyes on the burlier man. He cocked his head to the side, “What d’you think.”

“Honestly,” He shrugged as he looked to Ava, “Couldn’t be arsed. It’s her body and she can do what she wants.”

Louis grinned, “Knew I’d like you, mate.”

When Camden easily smiled, Louis turned back around to the front.

The small group walked into the Aldi parking lot and followed Zayn towards a silver van. Zayn flicked the butt of his fag to the ground and opened the trunk. Everyone shuffled forwards and stacked their bags before moving towards the passenger doors.
Camden took the seat up front, leaving Ava and Mick in the middle row, and Harry and Louis in the back. It was slightly cramped and Louis had to readjust his position a few times to get mildly comfortable. Harry was having a bit more trouble, his long legs cramped closer towards his chest from the limited space.

“Just lean back on me,” Louis eventually rolled his eyes when Harry winced for the sixth time in discomfort. He leaned back against the window, propped his left leg on the seat and patted his chest, “Your legs will have a bit more room at an angle.”

Harry leaned forward then slightly hesitated, “You sure?”

“C’mon, Babu,” Louis playfully smirked, watching the steady flush that climbed Harry’s neck in response.

“Thanks,” Harry mumbled as he slid over to the middle seat and secured the seatbelt.

Harry settled into the empty space between Louis’ legs and rested his head back onto Louis’ chest. His legs extended out towards the other side of the van and he let out a nearly inaudible sigh. Louis hesitated for a moment before he slowly wrapped his arms around Harry. It easily could have been explained that he was doing it for the study, to look romantic in case anyone looked back at them.

Louis didn’t know if he could convince himself of that being the real reasoning.

He bent his neck and quietly murmured against Harry’s temple, “This okay?”

Wordlessly, Harry nodded and reached his hands up to loosely wrap around Louis’ forearm. His sure touch was almost therapeutic to Louis’ furiously rabbiting pulse. Harry slipped the pads of his fingertips underneath the cuff of Louis’ jumper and massaged small circles along his wrist. Louis watched Harry’s eyelashes fan out with an accompanied yawn.

The memory of Harry drunkenly admitting he had never cuddled anybody before Louis, played over in his mind. Louis didn’t even know if Harry remembered telling him, but he was sure that it had happened. With Harry melding his body into his own, he would have never suspected that Harry wasn’t one for delicate touches. Harry went unbelievably pliant against him and his expression was almost cherubic as his lips parted just a touch.

It was roughly a four hour drive to London from Manchester and Louis spent its entirety by rotating glances between the view and Harry’s sleeping figure. It only took ten minutes before Louis felt Harry’s breathing even out, his fingers slowly halting their ministrations as sleep took over. He glanced toward the middle seat and saw Ava resting along the crook of Mick’s shoulder. When Mick caught his gaze, they exchanged small smiles.

“We’re about five minutes out,” Zayn eventually called out. He quickly glimpsed over his shoulder, “If you wanted to wake ‘em up.”

“Thanks,” Mick chirped and Louis watched him duck his head down and quietly mumble something into Ava’s ear.

There was a twinge of jealousy that pinged inside of Louis as he caught the side-profile of Ava’s sleepy grin. She lifted her chin and smiled when she was instantly met with a quick kiss. The simple gesture between them was oddly intimate and came across almost instinctive. It was as if it was their first thought was to wake up and kiss each other. Louis looked towards the front passenger seat and saw Camden watching them with a fond smile, not an ounce of jealously coating his expression.
He turned his attention back to Harry who had slightly shifted in his sleep. His temple was tucked into Louis’ shoulder and his fingers loosely clutching onto the material of Louis’ jumper. Allowing himself another selfish minute of feeling Harry tucked under his arm, Louis slowly ran his fingertips along Harry’s shoulder.

Harry’s nose twitched and his eyebrows slowly furrowed together when Louis applied a bit more pressure. Louis tugged his bottom lip between his teeth, doing his best to fight off an endeared laugh. Harry’s eyelashes fluttered before he sleepily blinked and angled his head upwards.

“Good morning,” Louis quietly teased.

“You’re a good pillow,” Harry lethargically drawled, his voice still coated with sleep.

Louis exhaled a laugh, “I’ll add it to my CV.”

Harry non-committedly hummed and slowly sat up, his hand bunched into a fist as he rubbed his eyes. Louis let his hands fall to his lap and carefully pulled his leg off the seat. Reaching towards the floor of the car, Harry pulled his camera from his travel bag and flicked it on. When Louis caught himself blatantly studying Harry, he turned towards the front and tried to focus on Zayn expertly maneuvering the van through the cramped streets of Soho.

“Hey, Lou?”

The nickname had Louis snapping his attention back towards Harry with an embarrassing speed. Harry was grinning from behind the body of the camera, the lens pointedly directly on Louis. He snapped his jaw shut and schooled his expression into something more unimpressed rather than blatantly surprised. Harry huffed out a laugh and then lowered the camera, a toothy smile plastered on his face.

“Got you,” Harry happily sung, sounding far too juvenile for Louis to feel anything other than fondness.

Louis rolled his eyes and leaned forward to pinch Harry on the thigh. He dramatically folded his arms, “Give a man some warning, Styles.”

“Absolutely not,” Harry winked at him and turned the camera off.

“You’re the worst thing to happen to me,” Louis deadpanned and turned to the front.

Ava was watching them with an amused expression, her warm eyes sliding from Louis to Harry.

“Does he do that often?” She asked.

Louis seriously nodded, “It’s horrible.”

“Hey!” Harry drawled out with an affronted tone, his grin somehow remaining intact. He looked to Ava and fake-whispered, “He actually loves the attention.”

“I fuckin’ do not!” Louis shook his head

“Here!” Zayn yelled from the front, effectively ending their conversation.

Louis looked out the window and craned his neck to see the flat they were staying in. It was a simple brick-front building with windows lining the four stories. He took off his seatbelt and waited for Ava and Mick to climb out before he followed suit. Harry was right behind him, his joints unpleasantly
cracking when he was finally able to stretch out.

“You sound like an eight-year old nan standing for the first time,” Louis told him as Harry reached his arms above his head.

Harry pouted and dropped his hands, “I have bad joints.”

“Y’don’t say,” Louis sarcastically said

“Fuck off.”

“Make me.”

“You are a child.”

“And you’re a nan.”

Harry winced, “That’s disturbing.”

“Yeah,” Louis frowned and scrunched his nose. “That escalated in a not so good way.”

Zayn rounded the van and opened the trunk for everyone to grab their belongings. When they had their bags in hand, Zayn led the way to the front door. He unceremoniously shoved a bronze key into the lock and gave it a rough jiggle before twisting the knob. They trickled into the flat and Louis’ eyes were instantly darting over every visible surface.

It was simply decorated, a few hanging pictures of the London skyline and white painted walls. They hovered in the entrance for a moment and Louis was itching to see the rest of the flat. Zayn dropped the key on a small brown table before turning towards them.

“Alright, there are six bedrooms,” He gestured over his shoulder towards the staircase. “Go ahead pick your rooms, unpack, and we can go get lunch when everyone else gets here.”

Louis instantly darted towards the staircase and he heard Harry’s laugh from somewhere behind him. He checked the two rooms on the second floor, felt uninspired and then continued to do the same for the next two floors. When he got to the last bedroom, he halted in the doorway and made a pleased sound from the back of his throat.

“Harry!” He shouted into the stairwell, his voice loudly echoing against the walls. “Get your arse up here, I picked a room!”

It was the most spacious of the bedrooms in the building with cream colored walls. A king-sized bed was perched against the far right wall with a navy duvet stretched over top. While the size was a plus, what sold Louis on the room was its joint balcony that looked over Old Compton Street. He strode into the room, dropped his bag, and jumped onto the bed. Louis rolled onto his back and spread out his limbs, eyes locking on a simple black overhead fan. There was a thrum of heavy footsteps and he lifted his head to see Harry walking through the doorway.

“Well done,” Harry appreciatively said as his eyes landed on the balcony.

Louis beamed and lolled his bead back, “Thank you.”

He heard Harry shut the door behind him and soft thud of his belongings being set on the floor. Louis pushed himself up and rested his weight back on his hands. He watched Harry stride to the balcony doors and carefully pull them open. A slight breeze filtered into the room while he stepped
outside. Louis rolled off the bed and padded after him.

“Are you nervous?”

Louis’ brows pinched together, “Nervous?”

Harry nodded and rested his forearms against the rod iron banister, “Yeah.” He glanced at Louis then looked at the street below, “Doing this the whole weekend, I mean.”

“A bit,” Louis tilted his head from side to side and copied Harry’s position. “It’s more about not knowing what’s gonna happen than anything else.”

“We can’t exactly prepare,” Harry nodded in agreement.

“No,” Louis exhaled on a laugh. He intertwined his fingers together, “M’ not nervous about being with you, though.”

Harry disbelievingly turned to face him, “You’re not?”

Louis shrugged and kept his eyes on his hands, “M’ comfortable around you.”

The only sound in the air was the faint hum of cars driving below. Louis felt his heart climb to his throat at the realization that his answer didn’t exactly emanate platonic vibes. It almost felt too vulnerable of a statement, too heavy given their circumstance.

“Me too.”

Louis raised his head, his lips parting as he saw pure earnest painting Harry’s expression. His cheeks were tinged with a rosy hue, but he looked certain as he kept Louis’ gaze.

“Oh,” Louis lamely supplied. He pushed his fringe away from his forehead, bit back a smile, and quietly mumbled, “Well, good.”

Harry opened his mouth and Louis could see that he was debating on the words that were on tip of his tongue. Hooded eyes trailed from Louis’ down to his mouth and Louis felt himself mirroring the movement. Harry dropped his gaze and there was a tension along his jawline as he clenched the muscle. He gave Louis a small smile before pushing himself off the railing. Louis hung his head and hated the disappointment that clawed the inside of his chest. Harry walked back inside and Louis stayed outside, the physical distance mirroring what Louis was feeling inside his heart.

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“Alright,” Liam scrubbed his hands together as he stood in front of the couples. He looked over the room with eager eyes, “Ready to start?”

Once Liam and the three other couples arrived, everyone headed out to a local Thai restaurant for a late lunch. Relatively easy conversations flowed over the table and Harry quietly listened along. Unsurprisingly, Louis’ voice was at the heart of majority of the topics. His quick tongue interjected comments and opinions, never staying quiet for a long period of time. Harry decided to himself that he could listen to Louis rattle off nonsense every single day.

After the hefty bill was paid, they walked back to the flat and upon Liam’s request, grabbed their red shirts. The five couples were sprawled throughout the living room area, spreading between three couches and two armchairs with zip-locked red shirts in hand. Harry was pressed against the corner of the largest couch and Louis opted to sit on the floor between his legs. Close to his right sat Nav
and Quinn, relaxed expressions on both of their faces.

Zayn collected their shirts and went to the kitchen to label each bag with a number. Harry anxiously tugged on his bottom lip until Zayn reappeared with the sealed plastic bags and an impish grin stretched over his face. He lined the bags on the coffee table, bold numbers staring upwards.

“So how this is gonna work,” Zayn started to explain, dramatically pausing before he continues, “Is that one at a time, you each will come here and sniff each shirt. After you do that, you’re gonna tell us which shirt belongs to your partner or partners.”

“There’s a theory that a person has the ability to pinpoint their significant other’s scent,” Liam said as he held up a notepad and pen. “Everyone had a specific pheromone and we want to see if the theory has any truth to it.”

“So,” Zayn drawled out with a smirk before his eyes landed on Mick. “How about you first, Mick?”

Harry anxiously watched as one by one, individuals stood up and participated. A few had more difficulty deciding than others, teetering between two different shirts before choosing. Natasha was the quickest to pick out her partner’s shirt. She took one sniff into the third bag and immediately pointed to the number three.

When Louis went up, he glanced back at Harry with a quick smirk. Harry leaned forward, his forearms resting against the tops of his knees as Louis started to go through the bags. Louis hesitated between the second and tenth bag, his hand hovering back and forth between the two. Eventually he picked the tenth bag and Harry glanced at Quinn, knowing she picked the same bag for Nav.

When Louis turned back around, he was much less confident and offered Harry a small shrug. Harry gave him a reassuring smile and stood from the couch. He stopped at the table and picked up the first bag. A citrus scent filled his nose and he immediately set it back down. The second bag was too lemony and the third bag was too musky. Harry continued down the line, nerves building when none of them reminded him of Louis.

On the eighth bag, Harry raised the bag and inhaled. The remnant hint of pine filtered through his senses and he immediately knew that it Louis’. He looked at Liam and nodded, feeling confident enough to not test the other three shirts. Harry set the bag down and turned around.

Louis was gaping at him, “You didn’t even give the other ones a go?!”

Harry self-consciously shrugged and sat back down, choosing to ignore Louis’ incredulous stare. He looked at Liam and Zayn seeing them deliberate over their notes. After a minute or so, Zayn turned towards the group as a whole.

“Three of you managed to get it correct,” Zayn announced.

The couples disbelievingly looked around the room and Harry felt his confidence shrinking.

“Natasha,” Liam grinned as he turned to face her, “You were spot on.”

She beamed and rolled her fingers through the air, her mouth forming around the words. Daniel snorted and told the group, “Of course I was.”

Laughter rolled through the group and Harry fondly watched as Daniel stuck his tongue out at Natasha. She immediately reciprocated the action and even tacked on an eye roll. Harry decided that he quite liked them.
“The second person,” Liam dramatically drawled out as he looked to the couch, “Quinn.”

Louis groaned while Quinn made a pleased sound and pecked Nav on the cheek. Harry knew that he shouldn’t have felt slightly disappointed, especially when they were surrounded by legitimate couples who also got it wrong. It was just a small test and it didn’t really mean anything. Still, Harry couldn’t find himself to be a bit displeased that Louis couldn’t pick him out.

“And lastly…” Zayn announced as his eyes skated over the group.

He felt his pulse quicken as he waited, his palms slightly turning sweaty where they rested against his thighs.

“Harry.”

Louis snapped his head back and his eyes were comically wide. Harry looked back at him with a dumbfounded expression and let out a surprised laugh. The amount of intensity that passed over Louis’ face was a bit overwhelming and Harry didn’t know what else to do aside from give a slight shrug.


“You smell like pine trees,” Harry awkwardly admitted.

Liam cleared his throat and said. “Now we’re gonna have you all answer a questionnaire about what you think is important in a relationship and….”

Louis was still staring back at Harry and he found himself blocking out Liam’s words. He watched the corner of Louis’ mouth slowly lift into a smile, iridescent opal flecks lighting his eyes. The skin by his eyes pinched and Harry found himself mentally calculating every small freckle that dotted across Louis’ cheeks. Louis’ nose scrunched and his teeth slightly poked out from behind his lips. Harry felt as if he had been struck by lightning.

“Harry?”

“Hmm?” Harry quickly looked up to see Liam standing in front of him with a clipboard.

Liam looked between Louis and him with a knowing smile. The twist of Liam’s mouth made Harry feel as if his thoughts were being projected for the whole world to see.

“The questionnaire,” Liam nudged the clipboard into his hands and then passed one to Louis.

“Oh, right,” Harry cleared his throat. “Sorry.”

Louis took his proffered clipboard and gave Harry a final once-over before he turned to face forward. Harry looked down at the questionnaire and had to steel himself a deep breath. He plucked a black pen off the top of the surface and started to roll through the questionnaire.

Whatever Harry had been expecting, it definitely was not an in depth packet filled with one-hundred questions. As he flipped from page to page, the questions started to mold together. Each one was just different enough where they weren’t the same question, but similar to point where it felt as if he had answered the same one over and over. He could feel Louis becoming restless after an hour, his frame fidgeting between Harry’s legs.

After an hour and a half, everyone had finished the questions. There was a restless energy in the room and it was nearly tangible. Louis managed to climb onto the couch and wedge himself between Harry and the armrest, his fingers continuously tapping against his kneecaps. It had grown dark
outside and Harry had an undeniable feeling that they were up for an eventful evening out in Soho.

“So, drinks?” Louis unceremoniously said to the room as a whole.

He was immediately met with a chorus of approvals.

“Everyone get ready and meet back here in an hour,” Zayn decided, already stalking towards the stairs.

The couples dispersed to their respectful bedrooms to get changed for the bars. Harry followed Louis up the stairs, valiantly fighting off an amused grin at the way Louis was practically bouncing with excitement. They got to their bedroom and Harry shut the door behind him.

“Fuckin’ finally,” Louis loudly groaned with his hands raised above his head.

“Someone’s excited,” Harry mused as he opened his duffel.

“That was miserable,” Louis whined. He started pulling clothes from his bag and leaving them strewn in a mess over the floor, “If I ever have to answer what I look for in a partner again, I’ll gauge my eyes out.”

Harry laughed and pulled out a floral blouse from his bag, “That’s a bit dramatic.”

“The fuck is that?”

“Huh?” Harry clutched the shirt in his hand and met Louis’ bewildered expression.

“That,” Louis pointed at the onyx blouse in Harry’s grip.

Harry frowned as he looked down at the red flowers printed over the material, “What’s wrong with it?”

“Do you own anything that isn’t sheer and indecent?”

“Don’t be a dick,” Harry snipped and turned around to tug his jumper over his head.

Louis snorted, “M’ being blunt, there’s a difference.”

“Not when you do it,” Harry grumbles and pulled the thin fabric over his arms. “You’re just being crass.”

“Don’t wear it.”

Harry’s eyes widened, “Excuse me?”

“You can’t wear it,” Louis crossed his arms.

“And why the hell not?” Harry narrowed his eyes.

“It’s,” Louis wildly gestured towards Harry’s chest, “You’re gonna attract a lot of attention.”

“Does that matter to you?” Harry cocked his head to the side and a smirk slowly curled his lips.

Louis coldly glared back at him, “I’d rather not have to fend men off my fake-boyfriend.”

“That’s all?” Harry pressed, his nimble fingers securing the bottom four buttons.
“Yes,” Louis snapped.

Harry laughed and shook his head, “That’s not a good enough reason for me not to wear it.”

Louis spun on his heel and gritted out, “Whatever.”

“You’re jealous and we haven’t even left the flat.”

“I am not!”

“Just admit it, Louis.”

“No.”

Harry sighed, “Whatever you say.”

“Exactly.”

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Louis leaned over the lip of the bar and waved down the bartender. He could feel Harry’s presence behind him as he attempted to order them a round of Kamikaze shots. A thunderous base pulsed throughout the packed club and Louis was not nearly intoxicated enough for it being two in the morning.

Just like he had suspected, Harry Styles was attempting to ruin his life.

Three times, nearly four, Louis had to step in when men and women alike tried to flirt with Harry. They would be crowded close together and as if Louis hadn’t existed, someone would slide between them and start talking to Harry. It was infuriating and Louis was almost certain that Harry had started to encourage his suitors in order to get a rise from him.

Louis never suspected that he would die a vengeful death due to a floral shirt, but it was on the verge of occurring.

“Well, hello there.”

“For. Fucks. Sake,” Louis gritted from behind his teeth and spun around.

There was a sleazy looking man leaning into Harry’s side. He had raven hair that was plastered back with an obscene amount of wax. To his credit, Harry wasn’t even facing the man, his eyes locked on Louis. There was a slightly challenging glint in his irises and Louis was not in the mood to play along. The irritation that had been building up underneath his skin had passed a boiling point as he watched Wax Man place an offensive hand on Harry’s shoulder.

“Oh!” Louis shouted over the music. He smacked Wax Man’s hand off of Harry and spat, “Can you get your grimy hands off my boyfriend, pal?!”

“Boyfriend?” The man incredulously laughed.

“Yes,” Louis sneered and in a moment of stupidity, set his hands on Harry’s neck. He looked at Wax Man and clearly enunciated, “Boyfriend.”

Without another word, Louis raised himself to the balls of his feet and kissed him. He closed his eyes and slotted their lips together without much finesse. Harry made a surprised noise into Louis’ mouth and for a moment, he was frozen against Louis. His lack of response set a rush of realization over
Louis. He lowered his hands and promptly reeled to lean back. Apparently, that was the sign Harry needed before he roughly pulled Louis flush against his chest and kissed him back.

Louis fisted his hands in Harry’s hair and tilted his head to the side, chasing the taste of vodka off of Harry’s lush lips. He wanted to drink him in and drown in the feeling of having Harry’s lips against his own. It was significantly filthier than their last kiss, movements almost frantic underneath the strobing lights. A needy sound slipped from Harry’s throat and his fingers snaked below the fabric of Louis’ Henley. His touch sent electric trills throughout Louis and it was addictive and maddening all at once.

Needing to catch his breath, Louis pulled back and roughly panted into Harry’s mouth. Harry pressed their foreheads together and darted his tongue out to flick it against Louis’ bottom lip, eliciting a high pitched whine from Louis.

“Louis,” Harry keened and quickly kissed him as if he couldn’t get enough. He leaned back, eyes darting over Louis’ face, “I thought – Shit. I thought you didn’t want to unless it was for the study?”

Panic flushed throughout Louis’ body because Harry’s question reminded him exactly why he had been resisting temptation in the first place. He had let jealously cloud his rational and the fact still remained that Harry would never romantically feel the same way he did. It was always going to be physical for Harry. Louis’ pupils enlarged and he covered his mouth, stumbling to step backwards.

“Don’t you fucking dare,” Harry practically growled.

“I –” Louis cut off, feeling his heart hammer inside his chest. He looked down and stupidly rushed out, “It was for the study.”

Harry instantly shook his head, “No it wasn’t.”

“It was,” Louis insisted, feeling anxiety roll through him. He scrubbed a hand over his face, “The other couples are here and he –”

“Why are you lying?” Harry roughly cut him off.

“I’m not.”

“You care about me.”

Louis pinched the bridge of his nose and shook his head, “Shut up, Harry.”

“Just admit it!” Harry yelled, his irises blown-out.

“Why?” Louis shriled, sounding hysterical. He tugged on a fistful of hair, “Tell you I care just so you can remind me that you physically can’t care about me the same way?!”

Harry narrowed his eyes, “What?”

“You aren’t capable of caring about me.”

The color drained from Harry’s face and he looked as if Louis had punched him in the gut.
“You aren’t capable of caring about me.”

Harry bolted from the bar and chased after Louis’ fleeting figure through the mass of people. Louis’ words ricocheted inside his mind and every time they did, he felt as if there was a sharp dagger continuously delving deeper into his chest. The only reason Harry was determined to follow Louis out of the club was because his openly broken expression perfectly mirrored how Harry felt. That alone planted a pathetic seed of hope inside of Harry’s gut and kept him moving through the crowd.

“Louis!” Harry shouted as he roughly shoved his way to the exit.

“Oi! Harry!”

There was a hand clamped on his bicep and it uncoordinatedly dragged him to a halt. Harry swiftly turned his head around to see that the tight grip belonged to Liam. He was staring at Harry with a countenance of drunken concern, eyes glassy and lips turned downwards.

“Everything alright?”

“Alright?” Harry couldn’t help the almost manic laugh that spat out of his mouth. “I – I just need Louis,” He shook Liam off and ran out of the bar, not bothering to waste any more time to reach the only person he was concerned about.

A rush of frigid air rolled over him when he made it outside, his chest painfully heaving from the knot of anxiety bubbling inside of him. He hissed as wind whipped around him and wildly turned from side to side, searching for Louis’ figure in the dark. Harry’s jaw slackened when he saw the outline of a man quickly rounding the corner of the building. Even in the dim lighting of the cloud-covered moon, Harry had no doubt that it was Louis

Harry sprinted down the pavement, the soles of his boots thunderously smacking against the concrete. He turned the corner and froze at the mouth of a compact alley. Next to the back exit of the club, was the silhouette of Louis’ crouched body. His knees were bent and his fingers were desperately shaking as he attempted to light the cigarette hanging from his lips. Slowly walking over, Harry stopped in front of Louis and ducked down. Louis was roughly sniffling with his eyes determinately focused on the flint of the lighter. He cautiously reached forward and took the lighter from Louis’ fingers. When Louis didn’t move, Harry pocketed the disposable light and then pinched his fingers around the cigarette. Louis’ mouth parted a fraction of an inch and Harry let out a sigh as he took the cigarette from his mouth.

“Louis,” Harry quietly murmured, fighting every instinct that itched to reach out and hold him.

Slowly, Louis looked at Harry through his eyelashes. Harry was nearly knocked backwards, somehow still stunned by the impact a simple glance had on him. Even in the near blackness of the night, Louis’ irises shined with more depth than an oceanic sunrise. Louis wiped the back of his hand over his nose and squinted towards the street, drunken bar patrons stumbling by with bouts of laughter.

“Lou –”

“For right now,” Louis’ voice croaked, sounding almost foreign to Harry’s ears. He weakly shrugged and looked back at Harry with exhaustion, “Can we just – Can we just not talk for a bit?”
There were so many questions that Harry wanted to ask the other boy, things that he wanted to tell him before they left London. Louis’ final words at the bar were driving him mad and he had to know what Louis meant, knowing that he wouldn’t be able to rest without understanding. He also realized that asking them in an alleyway at two in the morning, wasn’t going to do either of them any good. Harry forced himself to swallow the words that wanted to burst out and nodded.

“Let’s go back,” Harry murmured and stood up straight. He reached out a hand, “Come on, Lou.”

Louis hesitantly took his hand and let Harry haul him to his feet, their touch parting the moment he was standing. Turning back to the street, they made their way back to the flat in silence. Deciding that it would be best to warn Liam and Zayn, Harry pulled out his mobile and shot a quick message to let them know they had left because he was feeling poorly. Pocking his mobile, Harry realized that it wasn’t even a lie.

When they got to their building, Harry lifted a potted plant by the door and grabbed the spare key Zayn had told them about. He unlocked the door, replaced the key, and followed Louis up to their room. It was unnervingly quiet inside the flat and Harry suspected that they were probably the first ones back. He exhaled an inaudible sigh and closed the bedroom door behind them.

Harry grabbed an old hoodie and a pair of joggers from his bag, keeping his back to Louis while they wordlessly changed. He paused in place, blankly staring at the wall as he listened to the sound of Louis climbing into bed. Rubbing his hands over his face, Harry steeled himself before he turned around and followed suit.

Louis chose the right side of the bed, body curled underneath duvet and faced towards the wall. Harry silently padded to the other side of the mattress and pulled back the duvet before sliding underneath. He settled on his back, gaze locked on the ceiling fan as it thoughtlessly rotated above. His hands rested over his abdomen as he anxiously intertwined his fingers.

Eventually, he heard Louis’ breathing even out. Harry lolled his head against the pillow and shifted onto his side. He stared at the faintly distinguishable silhouette of Louis’ body across the mattress, tightly curled away from him. His fingers fisted themselves into the sheets and he felt as if he was an atomic bomb moments from detonation.

“Still awake?”

Harry’s spine stiffened when Louis’ timid voice pierced into the silence. His heart frantically palpitated inside his chest and he let out an uneasy exhale.

He nodded, more so to himself, and whispered, “Yeah.”

“Thought so,” Louis quietly sighed.

Harry felt unbelievably weak as he murmured, “Can we talk?”

“I – ” Louis choked off and Harry watched him shake his head into the pillow.

“Louis, please.”

“Tomorrow?” Louis practically pleaded, sounding more unsure than Harry had ever heard him.

“Can you at least – Fuck. Just…Can’t you even look at me?” Harry croaked, his voice sounding as if it was grated raw against sandpaper.

For a moment, Louis didn’t move. The seed of hope that Harry was clutching onto was dying inside
of his gut, replaced with embarrassment and hurt. He went to roll over, but froze when the sheets rustled next to him. Louis slowly turned over and his position mirrored Harry, a foot of space left between them on the mattress.

The tip of Louis’ nose was pink from irritation and his hair was disheveled past the point of relief. Sapphire eyes were red-rimmed and rosy lips bitten raw. Louis looked impossibly wrecked and Harry didn’t know how to erase the evening from their history. He didn’t understand what he could have done to prevent Louis from staring at him with an expression that wasn’t far from broken.

There was only one thing that he was certain of in that moment as they laid facing each other. One sole thing he could hold on to with an irrevocable grip as everything else became obscured.

Harry was on the cusp of falling in love with Louis.

It felt as if he was back to climbing the hill in Manchester. He was reliving the brief moment before he had reached the top, heart wildly fluttering in anticipation as his steps closed in. Harry couldn’t see the sunrise yet, but he knew for a fact it was going to be there when he made it. Lying across from Louis, Harry was certain that it would be Louis’ brilliant smile greeting him when he finally reached the peak. Louis would be standing at the top of the hill, saturated in warmth and ethereal light that corrupted the possible chance of a rivaling view.

The only difference was that come sunrise, Harry didn’t know if Louis would stay on the hill with him or if he would rush back to the pavement.

Harry reached across the bed, aching to be the anchor Louis could depend on. He gently traced his fingers against the back of Louis’ hand, feeling smooth skin underneath his fingertips. Harry cupped his hand around Louis’ and clutched onto him. Louis glanced down at their hands, bottom lip trapped between his teeth.

Pulling Harry’s hand against his chest, Louis intertwined their fingers.

They looked at each other and it was clear that neither boy knew what would happen when daylight blanketed them. Harry closed his eyes and focused on the thrum of Louis’ pulse against his hand. He deeply inhaled and on the release, he decided it would be enough. For that moment, holding Louis’ hand was enough for Harry.

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Louis woke up alone.

Sunrays filtered through the balcony doors and onto the bed, draping the duvet in warmth. He pushed himself into a sitting position and crossed his legs. His fingers rested in his lap, restlessly fidgeting as he stared at the empty space to his right. Louis could still feel the ghost of Harry’s touch from the night before and he realized there was a distinct possibility of him getting sick. Grabbing the pillow next to him, Louis pressed his face into the fabric and loudly groaned. The sound came out muffled, so he did it even louder a second time.

Once he was sure that he wasn’t going to vomit, Louis crawled out of bed. Voices filtered underneath the crack of their door and Louis held his breath as he listened for a familiar drawl. Louis frowned when all he heard was Nav and Quinn’s distorted voices.

At least they got to wake up next to the person they cared about.

Shrugging on a jumper left on the floor, Louis left opened the door and quietly padded towards the first floor. With each level he passed, voices grew louder and Louis had to pause on the last set of
steps when he heard the quiet rumble of Harry’s voice. He adjusted his fringe, knowing it was probably past the point of redemption, and entered the living room.

Zayn and Liam were sprawled across one of the couches, bodies angled towards Katie as she spoke from one of the armchairs. Harry sat in the chair to her right, a steaming ceramic mug clutched in his hands as he listened. As if he sensed himself being watched, Harry turned his head towards the entryway.

Harry’s jaw drooped as his eyes intently locked on the center of Louis’ chest. Louis followed Harry’s pointed stare with a slight frown tugging at the corners of his mouth. His cheeks flamed crimson when he realized why Harry was gawking. Apparently, Louis had grabbed Harry’s grey jumper instead of his own when he left their bedroom. He snapped his head back up to see Harry leaning forward as if he was going to get out of the chair.

“G’morning, Louis.”

Louis turned towards Liam’s easy grin and slightly waved, “Morning.”

“How’re you feeling?” Zayn asked, not bothering to move.

“Feeling?” Louis confusedly drawled out.

“Yeah,” Harry cleared his throat with a cough. He meaningfully widened his eyes, “I told them that we weren’t feeling well last night, so that’s why we left early.”

“Oh, right,” Louis nodded, waving a nonchalant hand in the air. “Had a bit too much, I think.”

“Didn’t happen to have anything to do with all those blokes hitting on Harry,” Zayn lethargically looked over his shoulder with a pointed stare, “Did it?”

Liam smacked Zayn on the bicep and hissed, “Zayn!”

Katie snorted into her mug, “Yikes.”

He narrowed his eyes at Zayn and surprised himself when he said, “It did, actually.”

“Lou,” Harry deeply exhaled and stood from his chair.

“M’ gonna go for a walk,” Louis quickly said, jutting his thumb over his shoulder.

“Just be back in an hour!” Liam called after him. “That’s when we go over the questions from yesterday.”

Louis didn’t bother to respond as he jogged back up the staircase. He passed by Daniel and offered a curt smile before he kept moving. Heavy footsteps followed behind him and Louis didn’t have to look to know that they belonged to Harry.

He pushed open the bedroom door and quickly moved towards his bag. Pulling out a pair of trainers, Louis sat at the edge of the bed. As he tugged on the first shoe, Harry slowly walked through the door.

“Where are you going?”

Louis shrugged and laced his second shoe.

Harry walked over to the bed and sank down. He was crouched between Louis’ parted thighs and
his hands hesitantly wrapped around the back of Louis’ calves. Feeling anxiety crawl inside his gut, Louis looked away from Harry’s hopeful expression.

“You said we could talk,” Harry murmured.

“Yeah, but,” He nervously started to ramble. “I just need –”

“Louis,” Harry cut him off and squeezed his legs.

“What is it that you even want from me?” Louis miserably groaned and cradled his head in his hands.

“I want you to be honest with me.”

Louis clenched his eyes shut and shook his head, feeling his pulse rapidly thrumming.

“What did you mean at the bar?”

“Christ,” Louis gritted and dropped his hands to look at Harry. He shrugged, “M’ not gonna say it again.”

“Fine,” Harry snapped and stood up. He rested his hands on his waist, “I’ll say it.”

Louis’ eyes widened and he jumped to his feet, “Don’t.”

“What was it again?” Harry purposely squinted his eyes and tapped his chin. “Oh, I remember!” He humorlessly laughed with his head tossed back.

“Harry, stop,” Louis begged, not needing to hear the truth spat back at him.

“You aren’t capable of caring about me,” Harry icily said. He arched his back so he was at eyelevel with Louis, “Those were your exact words, were they not?”

“Fuck off,” Louis grunted as he pushed his way past Harry.

Louis ran out the door, freezing when he saw Nav and Quinn staring back at him with wide eyes.

“Louis Tomlinson,” Harry angrily called as he followed Louis into the corridor.

The four of them were dead silent as they looked between each other. Louis knew his words were bad enough with context, which meant that they probably sounded horrendous without any at all. He roughly shook his head and darted down the stairs, ignoring the pointed silence from the living room as he rushed out the front door.

He paced outside the building with his arms folded behind his head. Louis winced when the front door slammed, but his anxious ministrations didn’t stop.

“I –” Harry started then cut himself off.

Louis halted his movements and glimpsed at Harry. He immediately regretted the decision, feeling as if he was hit by an anvil from the destroyed expression that was reflected back at him.

“I’m,” Harry’s shoulders helplessly slumped. “Louis, I’m fucking begging you here.”

“For what, Harry?” Louis helplessly dropped his hands.
“For what?!?” Harry incredulously laughed. “For you to be honest!”

He feebly lifted his shoulders, “Honest ‘bout what?”

Harry stepped closer and rested his hands on Louis’ shoulders, “Tell me what you meant last night.”

“You don’t –” Louis gestured towards Harry with a dumbfounded expression, not understanding why Harry was so caught up on the comment.

Harry cupped Louis’ jaw and lowered his voice, “I don’t…What, exactly?”

“You don’t do feelings!”

“What’re you even going on about?” Harry frowned.

“Fucks sake,” Louis gritted out and shook Harry’s hands off of him. He angrily ran his fingers through his hair, “You told me that you don’t do the romance thing, yeah?” Louis dubiously gestured between them, “So why are you so fuckin’ offended that I pointed it out?”

Harry defensively folded his arms over his chest, “Just because I’ve never been romantically interested in someone before, I’m physically unable to ever feel that way?”

“Well, I’m not exactly gonna wait around to find out,” Louis snorted, feeling irritation replace his trilling nerves.

“You don’t think we could be good together?” Harry broadened his shoulders.

“No, fuck,” Louis scrunched his nose. “You –” He cut himself off before quietly saying, “You said you care about me.”

Louis’ eyes widened, “Wait, what?”

Harry raged on, “And you’re acting like all I’m doing is trying to shag you until I develop feelings!”

“Wait, shut up,” Louis waved his hands in the air, “Let’s go back to what you just said.”

“The shagging bit?”

“No, fuck,” Louis scrunched his nose. “You –” He cut himself off before quietly saying, “You said you care about me.”

Harry just stared at him for a moment, his eyes purposefully widening as he slowly rolled his hand.

“Yes?” Harry drawled out as if he was waiting for Louis to finish the thought.

“You like me?” Louis reiterated. He pointed to himself, “As in…Romantically?”

“Obviously,” Harry disbelievingly laughed, his mouth gradually unfurrowing.

Louis abruptly shoved him, “What the fuck was obvious about that?!”
“I held your hand during Dirty Dancing,” Harry shrugged as if it was a clear enough explanation.

“But –”

“Well?” Harry promptly cut Louis off. “Aren’t you going to say it back?”

“What is this, primary school?”

“To be fair, I never got to do this in primary,” Harry slowly beamed. He rocked his weight from his heels to his toes, “So, yes.”

A surprised laugh shot out of Louis’ mouth and he hung his head. He could feel a surge of blood rush to his cheeks, his top teeth sharply digging into his bottom lip. Louis looked up and saw Harry watching him with reignited supernova electricity. His heart wildly thrummed in his chest as closed the remaining distance between them, the tips of his trainers brushing Harry’s bare feet.

“I like you, too.’’

Harry dropped Louis’ gaze as his smile started to grow wider with every passing second.

“You’re an idiot,” Harry eventually huffed out on a laugh before he cupped Louis’ jaw and kissed him.

Louis’ eyelids lulled shut and he smiled into the kiss. His fingers slid underneath the back of Harry’s hoodie and he reveled in the feeling of Harry’s warmth. There was an intensity to the way Harry kissed him, every movement feeling calculated in order to prove that he meant what he said. Louis took everything that Harry had to offer him, meeting every kiss with just as much fervor.

Harry reverently brushed his thumbs along Louis’ cheekbones as he carefully cradled him in his grasp. Lifting himself to his toes, Louis rocked into the kiss. He reached for Harry’s jaw and simultaneously angled his head to the side. Harry sighed into his mouth and Louis took it as an invitation to swipe his tongue against the plush of Harry’s bottom lip.

“You taste sweet,” Louis murmured before he pecked Harry’s flush lips. He dabbed the tip of his tongue against his lip and hummed, “Sweet like vanilla.”

Harry turned his head and brushed his lips against Louis’ cheek, “Vanilla chamomile.”

Louis quietly made a pleased sound and Shakily exhaled when Harry nosed the shell of his ear. He bit back a needy moan when Harry tugged his earlobe between his teeth and then leaned away. Harry slid his palms down to Louis’ shoulders and rested their foreheads together.

“I don’t really know how to go about this,” Harry whispered, almost getting lost in the sound of passing traffic.

“Me neither,” Louis huffed out a laugh and gradually opened his eyes.
“Great,” Harry sarcastically laughed and pecked Louis another time.

Louis smiled into the kiss, feeling giddy in the newfound realization that Harry liked him back. He leaned away when their lips separated and rested back on his feet. Harry’s cheeks were flushed pink and his mouth was the color of rose petals.

“We’ll figure it out together, yeah?” Louis raised his eyebrows.

Harry nodded and looked down and he slipped his hands along Louis’ arms. He joined their hands together and Louis bit his bottom lip as their fingers carefully intertwined.

“When we get back,” Louis quietly drawled out and squeezed Harry’s hands, “M’ gonna take you out on a proper date.”

The corner of Harry’s mouth jaunted into a grin, his dimple deeply carving into his cheek. He met Louis’ eyes and tilted his head to the side.

“That so, Mr. Tomlinson?”

Louis seriously nodded, “Gonna make an honest man out of you, Styles.”

“I think I prefer Petal,” Harry quirked his eyebrow.

“Think I do too.”

****

“Alright,” Liam enthusiastically rocked his weight from side to side as he looked over the gathered couples. He looked over to Zayn before continuing, “Now there was a reason why we had you all fill out those questionnaires.”

Zayn nodded, “Have any of you heard about the five love languages?”

Harry’s eyebrows pulled together as he glanced up at the smaller boy who was practically sitting in his lap. Louis widened his eyes and shrugged before turning back to Liam.

When they came back inside, the rest of the couples were already gathered in the living room. Harry let Louis unceremoniously push him into the empty armchair before promptly crawling onto his lap. With heated cheeks and just a touch of trepidation, Harry wrapped his arms around Louis’ waist and kissed the back of his shoulder. He ignored the pointed looks from the other couples and buried his face into the back of Louis’ jumper. Technically, his jumper.

“Alright,” Zayn drawled out when no one answered. “There are five different love languages and every person, receives and gives love in a different way.”

Liam held up his pointer finger, “There is Words of Affirmation.”

Zayn looked over the room, “Which means that your love is reaffirmed by words.”

Louis snorted, “Excellent definition, lads.”

Harry bit back a laugh and squeezed Louis’ hips.

“Really?” Zayn dully said as he pointedly narrowed his eyes at Louis.

“And then there’s Acts of Service,” Liam carried on as if Louis didn’t speak. “Basically, actions
speak louder than words for people who align with this one.”

Zayn held up three fingers, “Third is, Receiving Gifts.”

“Like blowjobs?” Louis mumbled under his breath.

Liam raised four fingers, “Quality time.”

“Last,” Zayn picked up and waggled all of the fingers on his left hand, “Physical touch.”

“Exactly,” Liam beamed and clasped his hands behind his back. “So, the questions you answered helped us determine what signs of love you want to receive and what signs of love you show your partner or partners.”

Zayn grabbed a small stack of papers and started to walk around the room, “We’ve ordered yours’ into two lists, one for giving and one for receiving.”

“One being the most and five being the least,” Liam chimed.

Zayn handed a piece of paper to everyone and Harry offered a small smile when he took his own.

**Harry Styles**

**Giving**

- Acts of Service
- Quality Time
- Physical Touch
- Words of Affirmation
- Receiving Gifts

**Receiving**

- Words of Affirmation
- Quality Time
- Acts of Service
- Receiving Gifts
- Physical Touch

Harry looked over his list, his bottom lip trapped between his teeth as he read. There was a good amount of truth to it from his very limited experience. He nudged Louis and pointedly looked towards his list. Louis got the hint and switched their sheets.

“Oh, shit,” Louis exhaled once his eyes roamed over Harry’s results.

**Louis Tomlinson**

**Giving:**

- Physical Touch
- Quality Time
- Acts of Service
- Receiving Gifts
- Words of Affirmation
**Receiving:**
- Words of Affirmation
- Acts of Service
- Quality Time
- Physical Touch
- Receiving Gifts

“F**k,” Harry muttered under his breath.

Louis was already gaping at him when he looked up.

“I mean,” Louis quietly started, looking back down at Harry’s sheet in his hands, “It doesn’t have to mean anything…Does it?”

“Now these are actually very important to understand for a functioning relationship,” Liam happily said.

“For f**ck’s sake,” Louis groaned and rolled his eyes towards Liam.

Harry’s stomach was knotted with nerves as he glanced at Louis’ results. What they needed and gave in a relationship, were almost completely different. According to Liam, that was a very problematic situation.

“But,” Katie started and then cut herself off. She looked down at the paper in her hands, “What if they’re different?”

“So, we’re not alone,” Louis mumbled.

Harry pinched Louis’ side, “If they’re the standards…”

Louis frowned at him, “It’s been all of twenty minutes and you’re already havin’ doubts?”

“No!” Harry said a bit too loud, wincing when the other couples looked over. He lowered his voice, “I’m not, I swear.”

“If they’re different,” Zayn sluggishly dragged out, “Then that’s what we’re going to talk about today.”

Camden lifted his hand with a frown, “D’you mean in front of everyone?”

Liam nodded, “Yes.”

Harry felt Louis still in his lap, his spine straightening and eyes enlarging. He ran a soothing hand between Louis’ shoulders even though he felt a strain of panic tugging at his stomach.

Zayn turned towards them, “Harry and Louis, want to go first?”

Louis let out a humorless laugh, “Not exactly, pal.”

“It won’t be bad,” Liam soothed. He gestured towards the empty space in the center of the room, “Just come up here and we can talk about your lists.”

“Right,” Louis snorted and begrudgingly climbed off of Harry.

Harry followed suit and stood at the front of the room. He wanted to wring his hands together, but
the sheet of crisp paper was keeping him from doing so. Louis and Harry awkwardly stood face to face with results in hand, neither wanting to make eye-contact.

“Alright, Harry,” Liam started with an earnest grin. “How about you tell us your number one for giving and receiving?”

“Um,” Harry cleared his throat, “Giving is acts of service and receiving is words of affirmation.”

Brad huffed out a laugh and Harry immediately narrowed his eyes towards the other man.

Zayn motioned towards Louis, “And how about you?”

Louis carefully looked between Harry and Brad before he answered, “Giving is physical touch and receiving is words of affirmation.”

“What is your number five?” Liam asked, but his tone suggested that he remembered the answer.

Harry awkwardly scratched the back of his neck, “Receiving gifts for giving and physical touch for receiving.”

Without being prompted, Louis said, “Words of affirmation for giving and receiving gifts for receiving.”

“And wasn’t words of affirmation one of your lower ones for giving, Harry?” Zayn asked.

Harry bristled at the almost rhetorical tone of the question. He curtly nodded and looked back to Louis who was already watching him. Louis reached out and linked their pinkies together.

“What’s interesting about you two,” Liam gestured between the couple, “Is that you both prioritize the need to receive verbal affirmations in your relationship, but neither of you necessarily give it.”

“Yeah, doc,” Louis sarcastically rolled his eyes. “That’s very interesting.”

Liam picked up his notebook and pen, “Why do you think that is the way it is?”

“Aren’t you meant to be answering that?” Louis quickly shot back.

Harry lowered his head to try and hide his grin.

“Even now,” Liam cocked his head to the side and pointedly looked at their joint pinkies, “Harry’s lowest on his receiving list was physical touch, but that was your instinctive way to comfort him.”

Louis frowned at that, his nose scrunching in discomfort. His hand slipped away from Harry’s and he folded his arms over his chest.

“Hold on just a minute,” Harry narrowed his eyes at Liam. “Just because touching isn’t my most prioritized,” He took a deliberate step closer to Louis, “That doesn’t mean I don’t want Louis to touch me.”

Liam held up his free hand, “Just an observation, Harry.”

Harry clenched his jaw and turned back to Louis with his hand extended. Louis swayed forward a step and met Harry’s grip. He slotted their fingers together and meaningfully squeezed. Louis gave him a weak smile in response.

“Would you say that you two have difficulties with communication?” Zayn asked.
Harry couldn’t help but to laugh at the question, especially given their discussion just a half hour earlier. Louis was quick to join in, his body leaning into Harry’s side as he laughed. Harry covered his mouth with his palm when both Liam and Zayn frowned at them, obviously not understanding how the question was remotely humorous. Louis cleared his throat and bumped his nose against Harry’s bicep before turning back to the other two.

When he somewhat gathered his bearings, Harry asked, “Define, difficulties?”

“Because that’s all a bit dependent on who’s judging, innit?” Louis seriously said.

“Oh, definitely,” Harry solemnly nodded. He wrapped his arm around Louis’ shoulders, “Very dependent.”

“What might be difficult for us,” Louis gestured between himself and Harry, “Might be easy for the other couples.”

“Say,” Harry drawled out, his fingers in the air, “Oh, I don’t know…Telling the other person that you even see them in a romantic light?”

Louis held his hand over his heart, “That could be the hardest thing we’ve tried to communicate since we met.”

Harry tilted his head back and faux-vengefully shook his fist in the air, “Those damn words of affirmation not pulling through.”

“I just keep tryin’ to touch you instead of communicating how I feel,” Louis dramatically turned towards Harry and cupped his neck.

Harry gripped Louis’ shoulders, “And I insist on being your man-servant to prove my unyielding affection.”

“Oh, Harry,” Louis loudly sniffled. “That was beautiful.”

Harry bent his knees and held the back of his hand to his forehead, “There are those words of affirmation that I needed.”

“So glad we’re fixed now,” Louis cooed.

Louis bowed to the room and Harry had to spin away and cover his face as he laughed. He knew that what they were doing was childish, but everything about Louis was making him feel giddy. Harry had never felt that way before with anybody and he wasn’t about to start missing out now that he had found it with Louis.

“I –” Liam began and then cut himself off with a confused frown. He fumbled for his words, “Um, right.” Liam shook his head and mumbled, “Not really sure what to do with that, but okay.”

“That was just about the gayest thing I have ever seen.”

Harry immediately tensed, his head snapping towards Brad who was watching them with a glare that was nothing short of disgust. Louis was instantly closing in towards the couch, his fists balled to his sides. Brad shrugged Katie off his lap and stood from the loveseat. He threateningly broadened his shoulders and Harry instantly rushed over to pull Louis back, wrapping his arms around Louis’ slighter frame and holding him to his chest.

There was a flurry of action in the room. Liam darted to stand in front of Brad, his hands warningly
held up. Camden was by Harry’s right and Nav stood to his left. Louis was struggling in Harry’s grip, all of his momentum thrashing forward to get to Brad. Harry tightened his grip and hissed through his gritted teeth when Louis accidentally nailed him in the side with his elbow.

“What the fuck is your fuckin’ problem, pal?!” Louis shouted. He looked over his shoulder, “Harry, let me go right now so I can fuckin’ kill ‘im.”

As much as Harry wanted to let Louis get in at least one punch, he also didn’t want Louis to be arrested for assault.

“Yeah, Harry,” Brad sneered, looking over Liam’s shoulder, “Let yer girlfriend go.”

An indescribable amount of anger surged throughout Harry, his entire body flooding with heat. He meaningfully looked from Camden to Louis and when Camden nodded in understanding, he let go.

Camden immediately hauled Louis back while Harry shoved Liam to the side.

“Watch your fucking mouth,” Harry threatened, his chest nearly bumping into Brad’s.

“Yeah?” Brad placed his hands on Harry’s chest and pushed him. “Or what?”

“Stop it!” Katie screamed from her place behind him, her hands cupping over her mouth.

Liam inserted himself between Harry and Brad, his hands extended out, “Both of you, calm down!”

“Kick his arse, Haz!” Louis shouted from behind him.

“What do you have against us?” Harry swatted Liam’s hand away and tried to step forward, but Nav’s hand on his shoulder stopped him.

Brad rolled his eyes, “I didn’t come here to have ya rub your relationship in my face.”

“How the hell was that rubbing our relationship in your face?!” Harry roughly shrugged Nav’s hand off of him, eyes locked on Brad’s.

“Just was!” Brad indignantly crowed.

“Wow,” Harry humorlessly snickered. He slowly clapped his hands together, “That’s incredible logic you have there.” Harry stepped closer, “I hope your parents didn’t pay too much for your education because the results are extremely lacking.”

“Don’t speak to me like that you fuckin’ fag!”

The room was silent and Harry felt his jaw go slack. There was a distinct beat of nothingness before Harry lunged forward.

**CRACK**

Harry shook his fingers out, but barely felt the pain as it bloomed along the knuckles of his right hand. He was vaguely aware of Nav dragging him back and Brad’s nose starting to cake with blood from the blow. There was an uproar of screaming and bodies furiously moving from their seats. Harry was numb from his surroundings as Brad’s words continued to echo throughout his head.

With every echo, Brad’s words gradually transformed into another voice. It was gruffer and laced with just as much malice. Harry clenched his eyelids shut and pressed the heels of his palms to his eye sockets. He shook his head, trying to get rid of the too-familiar voice that slurred derogative words in a steady loop.
“Fuck – Let me go!” Louis loudly grounded out from off to the side.

Harry scrubbed a hand over his face and looked over in time to see Louis managing to break out of Camden’s hold. Louis rushed to Harry and grabbed his right hand. He looked over the already bruising joints with a pained expression and Harry barely winced when Louis ran a finger over the tender bones. Louis opened his mouth to say something, but swallowed his words before letting go of Harry’s hand and surging upwards. He wrapped his arms around Harry’s neck and pulled him into a bone-crushing hug.

Harry exhaled and circled his arms around Louis’ waist, slowly feeling his senses become reignited. Louis was slightly shaking in his grip, movements just faint enough where Harry wouldn’t have noticed if he wasn’t holding him. He arched his neck and tucked his head into Louis’ neck. Louis

“You moron!” Katie screamed at Brad. Harry looked over Louis’ shoulder and saw her weakly pushed Brad, “What the hell is your problem, huh?”

“I just got punched, Kitty!” Brad shouted back, his voice slightly muffled from the rag over his nose. “Why are you actin’ like I’m the one who hit ‘im?!”

“You might as well have!” Katie frustratingly ran her fingers through her hair. “You were bein’ a jack ass!”

Harry weakly snorted and shook his head. He slowly loosened his grip around Louis’ waist and stood up straight. Louis lowered himself and cradled Harry’s jaw.

“Harry,” Liam cautiously said. He meaningfully looked to Harry and shook his head, “We – Brad’s done.”

Brad indignantly huffed, “But –”

“If you say another word,” Zayn icily cut him off, “I will punch you.”

“I’m not doing the study.”

Once Harry’s words were out, the room became silent.

“Mate,” Zayn carefully said. He hesitantly stepped closer towards Harry, “You don’t have to do this. He’s not gonna be here anymore and there are still two other retreats.”

“Two really good retreats,” Liam eagerly tacked on.

Harry turned away from them and held his hands behind his head. Anxiety crept along his spine and he felt short of breath as the room remained silent. He hated having the attention on him as the faint echo continued to taunt his thought process.

He shook his head, “I need to go.”

“Harry –”

“I’m leaving,” Harry rushed out, already turning to leave the room.

Zayn stepped in front of him, “Mate, just take a second to think about this.”

“You don’t have a car here,” Liam quietly reasoned.

Harry impatiently rolled his eyes, “I’ll take a train.”
Louis closed the space between them and rested his hand on Harry’s lower back. He meaningfully looked up at Harry, “We will take a train.”

Harry allowed himself to weakly smile and thankfully nodded in agreement.

“I’m sorry,” Harry quietly said to Liam and Zayn, feeling all too aware of the several pairs of eyes locked on the exchange. He shook his head, “I just can’t do this.”

Zayn shared a look with Liam before he slowly nodded, “We understand.”

“If you change your mind though,” Liam offered a tentative smile, “You’re more than welcome back.”

Harry looked down at the floor and jerkily nodded, “Right. Um. Thank you.” He looked back up and his gaze slid between the two of them, “Both of you.”

Louis traced his thumb underneath the hem of Harry’s hoodie, “Let’s get packed, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Harry mumbled before walking towards the staircase without a final look to the room.

He rushed to their bedroom and sat at the end of the bed with his head in his hands. Harry didn’t bother to glance at the door when he heard Louis walk in. There was a slight shift of weight on the mattress and Harry let out a shaky exhale when Louis crowded behind him. He could feel Louis kiss between his shoulder blades as he cuddled into him.

“Are you okay?” Louis quietly asked.

“Yes.”

“Are you lying?”

“Yes.”

Louis feebly laughed, “Thought so.”

It was silent and Harry focused on the feeling of Louis pressed against him. Brad’s initial words pinged at his memories and it left a sick taste in his mouth. He wrapped his hands around Louis’ and held them against his stomach, not sure if he was comforting himself or Louis at that point.

Harry was painfully aware that Louis had seamlessly become the most important part of his life. He wanted to take care of him and what they had. Even though there would always be “Brads” in the world, Harry promised himself that he would do his best to protect Louis from their hatred.

“I really care about you,” Harry quietly admitted after a few minutes. He looked over his shoulder, “You know that now, right?”

Louis looked up at him and gently smiled, his eyes slightly glazed over. He nodded and kissed Harry’s shoulder.

“I know, H.”

****

“So…M’ aware it’s been a bit of a rough day,” Louis carefully drawled out as his eyes kept straight ahead, “But, I don’t think breaking an entry will make it much better.”
The pair stood outside a peach painted door on the seventh floor of a luxurious building. Harry hadn’t offered Louis any explanation for their destination. He didn’t even mumble a word since they finished packing. Louis was slightly worried about Harry’s well-being when he reached forward and knocked on the random door.

Louis subconsciously leaned into Harry’s side when there was a muffled bustling from inside the flat. He nervously looked at Harry, feeling even worse when his expression was a touch on the tentative side. His hand tightened around the strap of his duffel when the door hauled open.

A young woman stood in the entryway with her hand still gripped around the doorknob. She had silver hair that was cropped just above her shoulders and fair skin that was speckled with freckles. Her facial features were oddly familiar and Louis felt uneasy because he was absolutely positive they had never met. Her confused expression cleared when her hazelnut irises crossed over Louis and on to Harry.

“Harry?” She gaped, her hand limply falling from the doorknob.

Harry awkwardly scratched the back of his neck, “Sorry for just dropping by without –”

She rushed forward and shut Harry up with an enthusiastic hug that suggested they hadn’t seen each other in a while. Louis took swayed backwards and felt increasingly more confused than when they entered the building. He self-consciously folded an arm over his stomach and tugged at his bottom lip with his other hand.

“Don’t be stupid,” She snorted. With an exaggerated huff, she stepped back and cocked her eyebrow, “You don’t need to have a bloody formal invitation to visit your sister.”

Sister

Louis’ eyes widened and he swiftly snapped his head towards Harry. His jaw was already hung loose when Harry looked at him with a slightly guilty expression. He narrowed his eyes when Harry weakly shrugged.

“Gemma,” Harry gestured between his sister and Louis, “This is Louis.” He clasped his hands behind his back and angled his head towards the woman, “Louis, this is my sister.”

Gemma turned to face Louis with a guarded expression, eyes slowly raking over Louis as if she was mentally cataloguing all of his physical details.

“Nice to meet you,” Louis mumbled and extended a hand.

She eyed it and promptly turned to face Harry with her hands on her hips, blatantly ignoring Louis’ gesture. He snapped his jaw shut and did his best not to gawk as he let his hand awkwardly fall back to his side.

“What’s going on?”

Harry sighed and hung his head back, “It’s a long story.”

Gemma looked between Harry and Louis before scoffing, “I bet.” She gave Harry one more look before walking inside and calling out, “I’ll put on a kettle, get your arses in here.”

Louis smacked Harry on the bicep and whispered, “Why the fuck didn’t you warn me?!”

“Yeah, um,” Harry slowly shuffled towards the door. He thumbed over his shoulder, “I’m just gonna
go inside, and, yeah.”

Louis glared at him, “M’ gonna murder you for this.”

Harry rolled his eyes, “Wouldn’t expect anything less, Lou.”
Chapter Nine

In hindsight, Harry supposed that bringing Louis to his older sister’s flat was probably not the most well thought out plan. Gemma was bustling around the kitchen with mugs in hand and the quiet hum of boiling water reverberated into background noise. Louis hovered in the entryway, one foot tucked over the other as he looked over the flat. Harry looked between Gemma and Louis, bottom lip trapped between his teeth.

“How do you take it, Louis?” Gemma asked, glimpsing over her shoulder.

“Oh, um,” Louis stammered, hesitantly rocking his weight towards the direction of the kitchen. “Just a bit of milk. Um, please.”

Harry couldn’t help but grin at the sight of Louis’ blatant nerves of meeting Gemma. He walked over to Louis and stopped just in front of him. Cradling one hand along the column of Louis’ throat, Harry slowly ducked down and pressed his lips against Louis’ forehead. He felt Louis exhale against his neck and relax into Harry’s touch.

“Nervous?” Harry quietly mumbled.

Louis nodded, not giving away anything more than that.

Harry reassuringly squeezed Louis’ shoulder and stepped back. He turned around and stilled when he saw Gemma watching them with wide eyes. She was in pure shock if her gaping mouth was anything to go by. A small part of Harry was a bit insulted that the idea of him being with Louis was that surprising to his sister.

“Details,” Gemma ineloquently demanded. She gestured towards the mugs on the counter top, “Get your cuppas, then details.”

“Alright,” Harry sighed and walked to the kitchen.

He wordlessly handed Louis his tea and then took the remaining ceramic cup. Gemma traipsed towards the dining table, pulling out a chair with her ankle hooked around the wooden leg. Harry followed suit, taking the seat to her right at the square table. Louis sat next to Harry which put him across from Gemma. Harry looked between them and immediately felt as if he was playing medium. Gemma suspiciously narrowed her eyes at Harry over the lip of her mug. She set the drink down and deliberately folded her hands over the surface of the table. Harry exhaled and ran his fingers through his hair before taking a sip.

“I was pretending to date your brother.”

Harry instantly sputtered out his tea and Gemma keeled forward in a rough cough. He whipped his head towards Louis with eyes bulged out and tea remnants speckling his chin. Louis looked just as surprised at his words, his hands slapped over his mouth.

“Louis!” Harry hissed, his hands roughly gripping the edge of the table.

Harry put his head in his hands and groaned, “I think she gets it, Lou.”

Gemma was speechless and Harry would have been impressed under any other circumstances. When nobody spoke, Harry slowly lowered his hands and visibly shrunk underneath Gemma’s glare.

“Y’know, Harry,” Gemma slowly started, her tone making Harry sink further into his chair. She slapped on a fake smile, “When we have those weekly skype dates and I always ask what’s new with you…”

Harry flinched, “Uh oh.”

“This is the kind of shit you’re meant to be telling me!” She busted out, leaning over to smack him against the side of his head. “You thought I wanted to hear about yoga?!” Gemma crowed, her hands flailing in front of her. “Why the fuck would I wanna hear about bloody yoga when this kind of shit is going on?!”

Louis folded his arms over his chest, “When you say ‘this kind of shit,’ d’you –”

“Shut it, Lewis,” Gemma glared at Louis.

Louis frowned, “That’s actually not –”

“Would you prefer I call you Dickhead?”

“No, ma’am.”

Gemma smirked, “Good lad.”

Harry was mortified and Louis didn’t look better off, his cheeks flushed crimson. He reached underneath the table and cupped Louis’ knee in attempts at being reassuring. Louis circled his fingers over Harry’s and tightly squeezed.

“Explain,” Gemma commanded with her eyes locked on Harry’s. “I want the entire story.”

“I met Louis when classes started back up. He broke my lens.”

“What the hell?” Gemma incredulously asked Louis.

Louis looked between Harry and Gemma before carefully asking, “Am…Am I aloud to talk again?”

“Jury’s still out.”

“Gemma,” Harry groaned, “Can you please just try to be remotely civil to my boyfriend?”

“Boyfriend?!” Both Louis and Gemma squawked in response.

Harry’s eyes enlarged and Louis was gripping onto his hand impossibly hard. He gaped back at Louis, reeling from the term that came out of his own mouth.

“I mean – Well, I thought,” Harry stammered, feeling his palms start to get clammy.

“Babu,” Louis softly grinned at Harry. He frenetically shifted in his chair, “D’you – Will you be my boyfriend?” Louis squeezed his hand, “For real, this time?”

Harry felt his chest tighten and he quickly nodded, “Yeah.” He leaned forward and kissed Louis’ cheek, “For real this time.”
“What the bloody fuckin’ hell is going on?!” Gemma shouted, effectively snapping them out of their bubble. She stood from her chair, “Louis, how d’you feel about fire escapes?”

“Well, I have one, but –”

“Excellent,” Gemma cut him off. She pointed towards the paneled windows across the flat, “There’s a lovely one just out there. Feel free to use it.”

Harry gaped at his sister, “Are – Gem, are you exiling him?”

“Temporarily,” Gemma nonchalantly flitted her fingers in the air. She pointed at Harry, “I need to talk to you.”

“Peachy,” Louis huffed out as he quickly stood from his seat. He darted towards his bag and pulled out his pack of cigarettes and lighter, “I’ll just, um, go now.”

Harry frowned at the box in Louis’ grip, but figured that he had bigger matters to deal with at the moment. Louis tightly nodded and then walked towards the window, pushed it open, and climbed onto the fire escape.

“I can’t believe you did that,” Harry hissed once Louis was outside.

“He’ll be fine,” Gemma waved him off. “S’not like a pigeon is gonna carry him away.” She looked towards the window and tilted her head from side to side, “Although, he is pretty small. A bird probably could do the job.”

Harry couldn’t help the sharp laugh that came out of his mouth. He shook his head and wiped his palms over his face.

“Now, tell me what’s going on,” Gemma pressed, sounding a smidge kinder than before. She rested her chin on her hand, “Last I checked, you weren’t interested in boyfriends.”

“He’s different,” Harry murmured, keeping his eyes trained on the table. He shrugged, “I really care about him.”

Gemma was quiet for a moment before she admitted, “I can tell.”

“I actually hated him at the beginning,” Harry supplied with a breathless laugh. He shook his head, “He was absolutely miserable to deal with.”

“Yeah?” Gemma excitedly asked. She scooted closer towards Harry, “Tell me about it.”

“Well, he broke my new lens,” Harry started, sitting up straighter in his chair. “He was having a kick about and his football nailed it. Completely destroyed the glass.”

Gemma knocked their knees together, “Hasn’t he ever heard of chat up lines?”

Harry scoffed, “I don’t think he did it on purpose.” He shook his head, “Anyways, he couldn’t afford to replace it, so he came up with the idea to sign us up for a paid couples study through the Psych department.”

“But –”

“We weren’t a couple?” Harry supplied. Gemma nodded and he continued, “Yeah, that’s why we were pretending. Seemed easy enough and we actually got accepted to participate.”
“Bloody hell,” She mumbled under her breath.

“I know,” He easily agreed. “We fought a lot because we’re just, well, we’re just really different.”

Harry thumbed the edge of the table, “But, it works for us? Being different, I mean.”

“How so?”

“Well,” Harry paused to take a sip of tea. “He brings me out of my shell and like, I dunno, he just encourages me to do things in the moment.” He looked at Gemma, “He took me to Liverpool. Not for any real reason, just because he wants me to be more spontaneous.”

Gemma’s expression softened immensely, “That’s actually really sweet, H.”

“Yeah,” Harry blushed and nodded.

“Why are you in London, though?”

Harry sighed, “For the study.”

Gemma rolled her hand in the air, “C’mon, you gotta give me a bit more than just that.”

“There are three retreats with the other four couples and this was the first one,” Harry slowly explained.

He glanced outside and saw Louis with his mobile pressed to his ear and lit cigarette dangling between his fingers.

“Anyways,” Harry cleared his throat and looked back to Gemma, “There was this one couple, Brad and Katie, and they guy was a complete dick.”

Gemma frowned and sat up straighter, “What’d you mean?”

“He said some homophobic shit,” Harry sighed, feeling his gut twist from the memory. He shook his head, “I can handle people being homophobic towards me, you know that.”

“You shouldn’t have to,” Gemma quietly said and reached out to hold onto Harry’s hand.

“Thanks,” Harry mumbled. He glanced back towards the fire escape, “What I can’t deal with is someone being disrespectful towards Louis.”

Gemma nodded in understanding, “So…What happened?”

“Brad said something that just made me snap,” Harry helplessly shrugged. “I punched him.”


Harry slumped his shoulders, “I know, I shouldn’t have.”

“Are you kidding me?!” Gemma exclaimed and Harry was surprised to see her grinning. “Anyone who’s a homophobic twat to my brother deserves a good punch.” She excitedly leaned forward, “Tell me you got him in the balls.”

“Gemma!” Harry laughed, feeling tension be relieved from his frame. He shook his head, “Sorry to disappoint, but I did not punch him in the balls.”

“Aww.”
“I think I did break his nose, though…”

Gemma let go of his hand to pat him on the back, “Now that’s the kind of news I wanna hear.”

“As my older sister, shouldn’t you be discouraging this behavior?” Harry laughed.

“Eh,” Gemma shrugged, “This is the most exciting thing to happen in your young life.”

“Hey!”

“So, I’m gonna support it,” Gemma carried on.

“You make it sound like I’m boring,” Harry deadpanned.

Gemma shrugged, “Your words, not mine.” She ignored Harry’s affronted noise and looked outside, “Guess we can invite lover boy back inside.”

“Do you approve?” Harry twisted his hands together.

Gemma winked at him and stood from her chair, “Jury’s still out.”

“What’re you doing?” Harry nervously asked as she slowly walked towards the window.

“My job as a big sister,” She smirked. “Give me five minutes alone with him.”

“Christ,” Harry exhaled. He threateningly pointed his index finger at Gemma, “Be nice.”

“No promises,” She called over her shoulder before opening the window.

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Louis deeply inhaled and let out a swirl of grey smoke on an exhale. He sat on the steps of the fire escape, mobile clutched in his hand and Niall’s tinny voice echoing into his ear.

“He punched ‘im?!”

“I know,” Louis disbelievingly huffed. “I wasn’t sure if I should be turned on or worried.”

Niall cackled, “M’ guessing you went with turned on.”

“Course,” Louis laughed. “He looked bloody attractive doing it. Like a sexy boxer.”

“Sexy boxer defending your honor,” Niall dreamily mused. There was a bit of rustling on the other line before Niall asked, “What’re you gonna do now?”

“No idea,” Louis mumbled and took another drag from his cigarette. “Think we might stay here the night. If his sister doesn’t kill me, that is.”

“Y’just gotta charm her,” Niall encouraged. “Tell her that her son is God’s gift and he makes flowers look shit in comparison or summat like that.”

Louis rolled his eyes and deadpanned, “Beautifully said, Nialler.”

“Thanks, buddy,” Niall chirped.

There was a creaking towards his left and Louis snapped his head to see Gemma opening the window.
“Um, Niall,” Louis cleared his throat as she climbed outside, “I gotta go.”

“Good luck!” Niall loudly cheered. “Don’t forget, lovelier than flowers and God’s gift!”

Louis huffed out a laugh and shook his head, “I won’t. Bye.”

He lowered his mobile and hung up. Gemma sat next to him on the stairs and gestured towards the carton of cigarettes.

“You smoke?”

Louis fidgeted with the cuffs of Harry’s jumper, “If I say yes, am I gonna lose points on the Gemma scale of approval?”

The corner of Gemma’s mouth lifted and she reached forward for the pack. She pulled out a cigarette and then plucked the lighter from Louis’ hand. Gemma pointedly looked at him as he lit the fag, deeply inhaling before letting out a puff of smoke.

“You won’t lose points by me,” Gemma rolled her eyes. She nodded towards the window, “Now, Harry? Probably.”

“Had a feeling he didn’t like it,” Louis sighed.

“Our dad smoked a lot when we were growing up,” Gemma said. She looked down at the cigarette and flicked out the building ash, “Think H just associates it with him so he doesn’t like it.”

Louis frowned, “They don’t get on?”

Gemma looked at him with a curious tilt of her head, “What’d he tell you about growing up?”

“Um,” Louis looked away and narrowed his eyes in thought. He raked over their conversations and dumbly realized that Harry never mentioned his childhood. Louis shook his head, “Now that I think about it…I don’t think he ever mentioned it.”


“What,” Louis started then cleared his throat, hands anxiously knotting together, “What happened?”

Gemma hesitated, her lips repeatedly parting and closing. She glanced towards the living room and then shook her head.

“Dad was…Well, he was a completely shit father to Harry. He was fine with me, but not H.” Gemma sadly looked down at the grated surface of the fire escape, “He used to be much more outgoing as a kid before Dad left.”

“Really?” Louis pressed, straightening his back at the information. “You mean, he hasn’t always been so…”

“Closed off?” Gemma faintly supplied.

Louis nodded, “Yeah.”

She nodded, “Used to have a bunch of mates growing up.” A fond grin tugged at the corners of her mouth, “Was bloody popular with the old ladies at our church, too.”

“It was the curls, I’m sure,” Louis playfully said.
“Definitely,” Gemma seriously nodded.

“But,” Louis held out his hands and raised his shoulders, “What happened?”

Gemma took another drag and shook her head on the exhale, “You should ask him.”

“Do you think he’d tell me?”

“Honestly,” Gemma cocked her head to the side, “I think he might.” She nudged their shoulders together, “He really likes you.”

Heat raised to his cheeks and he bit his bottom lip as he looked away.

“I like him, too,” Louis admitted. “A stupid amount, actually.”

Gemma stumped the butt of the cigarette and stood up. She flicked it over the ledge and turned to face Louis, openly scrutinizing him. Louis fidgeted underneath her rapt attention, cautiously hold his breath as she nodded.

“Good,” Was all she said before opening the window. She looked over her shoulder, “Well? Come on then.”

Louis exhaled a small laugh and pushed himself upright. He grabbed the carton and followed Gemma inside. Harry was already anxiously watching them from the kitchen table when they clambered through.

“Well…You’re both alive,” Harry carefully said as he stood from his seat. “That’s good.”

“Yeah,” Gemma nonchalantly shrugged. “He can stay a bit longer.”

Louis couldn’t help but beam, knowing it was probably the best he was going to get from Gemma.

“I’m assuming you two want dinner,” Gemma rather stated than asked, moving to grab her purse off of the table. “I can stop at the shop and get stuff to make curry chicken?”

“Please,” Harry thankfully said.

Louis nodded, “Did you want company?”

She waved him off, “You two settle in, it’s fine.”

“Yes,” Louis shuffled towards Harry’s side.

Gemma looked between the two of them, a smile ghosting her lips. She nodded and walked towards the door, hauling it open and giving them a wave before leaving. Harry circled his arms around Louis’ waist and tucked his head into the crook of Louis’ neck. He slowly kissed along the skin there, lips gently adorning Louis’ skin with soft presses. Louis lolled his head to the side and leaned back into the touch.

“You asked me to be your boyfriend,” Harry murmured against his skin, his tongue darting over Louis’ jawline.

Louis bit back a whimper, “Didn’t give me much of a choice, did you?”

Harry nipped at his jaw and huffed out a laugh, “Shut up.”
When Harry carefully turned him around in his arms and hovered above Louis’ mouth, Louis’ eyes widened. He stepped back and held up an index finger as an idea popped into his head.

“Wait,” Louis darted towards his bag and pulled open the zipper. “Hold that thought just a second.”

“What’re you doing?” Harry whined.

Louis pulled out his toothbrush and toothpaste, holding both up for Harry to see. Without further explanation, he stalked down the hallway and opened two doors before he found the bathroom. He started to brush his teeth and he heard Harry pad down the hallway.

“Is this something you do every time you are about to kiss someone?” Harry amusedly asked with his weight rested against the doorframe.

Louis spat out the toothpaste and cupped his hands under the faucet. He swished out the remaining traces of toothpaste with water then smacked his lips together.

“No, I don’t,” Louis rolled his eyes.

He held up the pack of cigarettes and pointedly shook them before tossing them in a silver bin by the sink. Harry’s head was tilted in confusion when Louis also tossed the lighter. Louis proudly put his hands on his hips and faced Harry.

“What’re you doing?” Harry quietly asked.

“You don’t like smoking,” Louis simply shrugged.

Harry’s eyes widened, darting between the wastebasket and Louis.

“Are – Are you serious?”

Louis stepped towards Harry and cupped his jaw, this thumbs lightly dragging over Harry’s cheekbones.

“I wanna make you happy.”

Harry huffed out a laugh, “Yeah, but – ”

“But, nothing,” Louis cut him off. He smiled at Harry, “I’d rather you be happy than have another cig.” Louis shrugged, “Easy choice.”

Harry gaped at him, remaining quiet before he surged forward with a throaty moan. Louis let out a surprised noise from the back of his throat as Harry hungrily kissed him. The kiss was instantly filthy, lips wetly smacking together and hands frenetically roaming over each other. Louis wrapped his arms around Harry’s neck and angled his head when Harry flicked his tongue against the seam of his lips.

“Fuck,” Louis whined, his eyes rolling back as Harry dipped his tongue inside his mouth.

Their tongues deliciously slid together with a bite of mint to accompany the movement. Harry’s fingers slipped underneath the jumper and pressed into the dip of Louis’ spine. Louis let himself be pulled impossibly close and raised himself to the balls of his feet. He aligned their groins and tentatively rolled his hips forwards.

Harry moaned into his mouth and glided his grip lower. His palms gripped onto the thick muscle of Louis’ arse and both men let out needy whimpers from the contact. Louis carded his fingers into
Harry’s curls and roughly tugged on the tendrils. A low hum reverberated from Harry’s throat which only spurred Louis to do it again.

“Sweetheart,” Harry exhaled.

Louis outright whimpered at the petname and tugged on Harry’s bottom lip with his teeth. He kissed Harry with even more fervor, letting out needy sounds every few moments.

“You like it when I call you that?” Harry asked and flicked his tongue over the plush of Louis’ bottom lip.

“Yeah,” Louis nodded, throwing any abashment away without thought. He kissed Harry, “Love it.”

“Fuck,” Harry moaned and snaked his hands lower to grip the back of Louis’ thighs. He tapped his fingers twice, “C’mon, Sweetheart.”

The implication was enough for Louis to jump up and circle his legs around Harry’s waist. Harry wrapped both arms underneath Louis’ arse and carried him with ease.

“Wanna spread you out over a bed,” Harry murmured as he walked them out of the bathroom.

Louis nodded into the junction of Harry’s neck and tightened his thighs around Harry’s hips. He lathed his tongue over Harry’s pulse point, eliciting a low moan from the other man. Louis nipped over the skin, alternating between small bites and kisses until the skin flushed red. Harry didn’t falter in step as he opened a door to a relatively empty bedroom.

“Guestroom,” Harry answered Louis’ unasked question.

Harry kicked the door shut behind him and carried Louis over to the bed. He arched his spine and carefully set Louis down onto his back. Louis kept his legs hooked around Harry’s waist as he tugged on Harry’s hoodie.

“Off,” Louis whispered.

Harry nodded and tugged the hoodie over his head, his white t-shirt quickly getting tugged off as well. Louis’ eyes raked over Harry’s bare torso and he was immediately itching to get his hands on him. Pushing himself upwards, Louis unhooked his ankles and situated himself on his knees. He stripped off his jumper.

“So fuckin’ gorgeous,” He reverently murmured as his hands traced over the laurel leaved tattooed into Harry’s skin. Louis shook his head, nearly in disbelief, “My gorgeous petal.”

Harry cupped his hands around Louis’ neck, “Yours.”

“Shit.”

Louis ducked forward and mouthed at Harry’s collarbones. The pads of his fingers burned against Harry’s abdomen, reveling the feeling of Harry’s skin against his own. Harry lolled his head back and breathy sounds were pouring from his lips as Louis kissed down his sternum. He dragged his mouth over Harry’s pecks and hovered over Harry’s right nipple.

Wetting his bottom lip with the tip of his tongue, Louis blew out a breath of cool air over Harry’s nipple. Harry’s spine arched beautifully in response, his fingers slipping to grip Louis’ shoulders. Louis flicked his tongue over Harry’s nipple and nearly melted at the high-pitched mewl it pulled from Harry.
Louis closed his lips around the sensitive bud. He lightly grazed his teeth over the bud and felt goosebumps trail over Harry’s skin. The room was filled with an orchestra of Harry’s ragged breath and the slick sound of Louis’ tongue lapping over Harry’s body. Louis raised his fingers to pinch Harry’s left nipple, instantly making it pert underneath his ministrations.

“Oh my god,” Harry whined, his voice sounding as if it was layered with treacle.

Pulling back, Louis blew over the damp skin and watched Harry’s reaction. Harry’s eyes were pinched shut and his pouty lips were opened into a perfect oval. He was perfect and Louis absolutely wanted to wreck him until he was incoherent.

“So sensitive,” Louis admired as he gently thumbed over both of Harry’s nipples.

Harry jerkily nodded, his bottom lip trapped between his teeth. He looked down and Louis felt himself harden at the sight of Harry’s darkened irises. Louis whimpered and gripped the back of Harry’s neck to pull him down into a bruising kiss.

They alternated between deliberate drags of their tongues to sharp tugs of their teeth. Louis scooted backwards on the mattress and pulled Harry with him. Harry crawled over Louis’ body, his broader frame completely encompassing Louis’ slighter one.

“I’ve been thinking about what you taste like,” Harry suggestively whispered into Louis’ mouth.

Louis’ hips jerked upwards on their own accord, his hands hungrily gripping at the base of Harry’s spine. Harry nosed against Louis’ neck and nipped at the tender skin. Louis turned his head into the duvet and roughly bit his bottom lip. He felt blood rush towards his cock when Harry ground his hips downwards.

“Your mouth tastes sweet like honey,” Harry crooned as he ground his arse against Louis’ length. “Did you know your lips tasted like that, Sweetie?”

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Louis slurred out.

Harry lowly laughed as he crawled down the length of Louis’ body, “Did you, Sweetie?”

Louis shook his head as his hands roughly fisted the duvet.

“Don’t get all quiet on me now,” Harry tutted as his fingers teasing ran along the hem of Louis’ joggers.

“You fuckin’ minx,” Louis whimpered. He rested his upper body weight onto his elbows and gaped at Harry, “Fuckin’ filthy mouth.”

“Would you like me to stop?” Harry devilishly smirked.

Louis vigorously shook his head, “Fuck, no.”

“Good,” Harry grinned and hooked his fingers around Louis’ waistband.

Louis raised his hips and watched Harry through hooded eyelids as he tugged his joggers down. His cock was straining against a pair of black briefs, the thick outline heavy against his hipbone. A carnal sound ripped through Harry’s throat before he ducked down and mouthed at Louis’ length through the cotton material.

“Shit,” Louis panted, falling back and tossing his arms over his head.
He focused on the feeling of Harry’s warm breath against the sensitive crown of his cock. Harry’s hands were pinning Louis’ hips down as he teasingly hovered just above the tip. Louis let out a needy whine and felt the breath punch right out of him when he felt Harry’s tongue dart out.

“Already so wet,” Harry gasped.

Louis weakly nodded as Harry ducked back down to lap at the precome that seeped through his briefs. It was absolutely maddening because it wasn’t enough, but Louis wasn’t sure how long he would be able to last once Harry finally wrapped his pretty pink lips around his length.

“Hazza, please,” Louis begged.

“What do you want?”

“Anything, just – 

Fuck.”

Harry pulled Louis’ briefs down and Louis let out a relieved sigh when his cock freely smacked against his skin. He pushed his sweaty fringe from his eyes and watched as Harry slowly kitten licked along the vein underneath his length. Louis’ eyes rolled back when Harry reached the crown and swirled his tongue around the head.

“Look so good doing that, fuck,” Louis praised, reaching down to thumb at Harry’s bottom lip.

“Think you can come from my mouth?” Harry asked with rosy wet lips.

Louis nodded, “Yeah.” He moaned when Harry wrapped his lips around the head of Louis’ cock, “Fucking hell. M’ definitely gonna come like this.”

Harry’s eyelashes fanned out and Louis had never seen someone look so ethereal with a cock in their mouth. He did his best to keep his eyes open as Harry slowly sunk down, swallowing Louis in one glide. His cock twitched inside Harry’s mouth and they both moaned as Harry pressed the tip of his tongue into Louis’ slit.

“Fuck,” Harry brokenly exhaled when he pulled off. He circled Louis’ cock with his fist and started to slowly jerk him off, “You taste so fucking sweet.”

“Oh my god,” Louis blushed, his bottom lips roughly trapped between his teeth.

Harry spat on the head of Louis’ cock and Louis’ hips roughly jerked upwards. Slick slowly dripped down his length and Harry was quick to lap it back up. There was already heat building in Louis’ gut and he knew that he wasn’t going to last much longer as Harry continued to work him over.

“Gonna have you taste how sweet you are,” Harry said with a nonchalance that had Louis’ heart race at an impossible rate. He looked up Louis’ body with a quirked eyebrow, “How would you like that, Sweetie?”


Harry deliberately remained their eye contact as he took Louis back in his mouth. Louis could feel Harry’s throat relax around him as he picked up the pace. He carded his fingers in Harry’s hair and started to guide his movements. Harry let out a muffled moan when Louis’ hips uncontrollably jerked upwards into a deep thrust.

Louis’ eyes started to mist over and he felt the coil of heat tighten in his gut. He lolled his head back and his mouth was slack as Harry cupped his balls. A high-pitched mewl poured from his lips when
Harry deep throated him and swallowed around his length. Louis was on the brink of complete nirvana.

“M’ gonna come,” He rushed out, his fingers roughly gripping Harry’s hair. “Fuck, so close, Petal.”

Harry lowered his hand and pressed the back of his knuckle against Louis’ perineum. A scorching shot of electricity plowed through him and his eyes shot open. His cock twitched inside of Harry’s mouth and then he was coming. An animalistic moan reverberated from Harry’s throat as he took every bit that Louis had to offer.

Louis feebly slumped onto his back and Harry pulled off of his cock with a wet smack of his lips. Harry sidled up Louis’ torso and gripped Louis’ jaw. Knowing what was going to happen, Louis shut his eyes and met Harry’s mouth.

He immediately parted his lips and moaned as Harry pushed his come inside. Their tongues lethargically rubbed together, both swallowing Louis’ taste with every kiss. Harry was slowly rolling his hips against Louis’ thigh and Louis slid his hands down to cup Harry’s arse.

“Wanna make you come,” Louis breathlessly whispered.

Harry eagerly nodded and bucked his hips forwards.

“Slide up here,” Louis instructively patted the back of Harry’s thighs. He shifted a pillow underneath his head, “Wanna get my mouth on you.”

“Fuck,” Harry brokenly moaned.

He rolled off of Louis and quickly stripped off the rest of his clothes. Louis was still slightly hazy from his orgasm, but he felt highly attuned to the fact that it was the first time he saw Harry naked. Harry’s long ivory legs looked gorgeous and strong as he straddled Louis’ chest. His cock was heavy between his legs, the tip flushed a pretty pink that matched the color of Harry’s lips.

Louis cupped his hands around the back of Harry’s thighs and guided him forwards. Harry snaked a hand behind Louis’ neck to help support him. He opened his mouth and blinked up at Harry as he took him in. Harry’s chest was already heaving as he shallowly pumped his hips forwards.

“Oh, fuck,” Harry groaned, his head lolling backwards.

There was a carnal need that pooled in Louis’ gut. He needed to make Harry feel better than anyone else ever had. He wanted to strip Harry of past experiences and replace them with their own memories. The other boys didn’t care about Harry, neither him for them and Louis wanted to prove it with every flick of his tongue.

He leaned back and focused on the crown of Harry’s cock. A bead of precome blurted onto his tongue and Louis deliriously swallowed around the taste. Wrapping his hand around the base of Harry’s cock, he opened his mouth wider and poked out his tongue. Louis looked up through his matted eyelashes and lightly slapped the tip of Harry’s cock against his tongue. Harry was watching the movement with dilated pupils and a slack jaw.

“How’re you real?” Harry almost reverently asked. He reached down with his free hand to push Louis’ fringe off his forehead, “You look fucking sinful, Sweetheart.”

Louis moaned and bobbed his head forward. He loosely twisted his fist around Harry’s length, spit dripping from the corner of his mouth and onto his collarbone. Harry felt heavy against his tongue and the ache that was already settling in Louis’ jaw was one of his favorite sensations.
“Petal,” Louis exhaled when he pulled off. He kept slowly jacking Harry as he looked up, “Want you to fuck my mouth.”

Harry clenched his eyes shut and he instantly gripped the base of his cock. Louis’ eyes widened that even the notion of Harry fucking his mouth almost made him come.

“Yeah,” Harry eagerly nodded. His expression relaxed and Louis was already opening his mouth as Harry said, “Finish me off like that, Sweetie.”

Louis had never been more enthusiastic to comply.

He deeply inhaled as Harry slid his cockhead back between Louis’ parted lips. Louis focused on relaxing his throat and taking even breaths through his nose. He flicked his tongue upwards and soothingly ran his fingers along the backs of Harry’s thighs.

Harry started off by teasingly pumping his hips with small thrusts as Louis kept his head still. Louis hollowed his cheeks and encouragingly squeezed Harry’s arse with both palms. Harry’s reaction was instantaneous, a gravelly moan ripping through his throat. He thrusted forward, deeper than before. Louis whimpered around the feeling of Harry brushing the back of his throat.

“Taking it so – Ah, fucking well,” Harry slurred out. His thighs started to twitch, “M’ already so close, Sweetie.”

Louis started to bob his head again, roughly swallowing Harry until he was choking. He sputtered out a breath and pulled back, his chest heaving with pants.

“Wanna,” Louis blearily looked at Harry, words hitching on his ragged breaths, “Want you to come on my face.”

Harry let out an impossibly throaty moan and he quickly worked his hand over his length. He stopped supporting the back of Louis’ neck, letting him weakly fall back against the pillow. Louis palmed Harry’s pert arse and closed his eyes when he saw Harry’s jaw go slack.

Warm ropes of come caught his cheekbone first and Louis greedily opened his mouth. The rest caught on his chin and lip, his tongue immediately darting out to taste Harry.

“Christ,” Harry panted, his hand slowly stopping.

Harry rolled onto his side and slung his leg over Louis’ lower abdomen. Louis slowly blinked open his eyes and he was almost taken aback by how close Harry was hovering over him. Harry thumbed at the stripe of his come along Louis’ cheekbone and then pressed the digit into Louis’ mouth. Louis’ eagerly sucked on Harry’s thumb, swallowing Harry’s taste.

“So fucking perfect,” Harry whispered before he ducked down.

Louis moaned into Harry’s mouth as the other man slid their tongues together. He knew Harry was chasing the taste of himself and if Louis wasn’t on the brink of exhaustion, he would have already started to get hard again. Instead, he circled an arm around Harry’s slender waist and pulled him closer.

Every kiss felt like a breath of life being pushed into him and Louis didn’t know when sex had started to make him feel poetic. He figured that it wasn’t even a sex thing, just a Harry thing. Their wet kisses eventually melted into sleepy pecks, neither one of them actually wanting to stop.

“That was…” Louis drawled out and wildly gestured in the air for a lack of words.
Harry’s dimple appeared as he beamed back at Louis. He nodded and duked down kiss Louis once more before slumping onto his chest. Louis wrapped both arms around Harry’s back.

“It was,” Harry quietly murmured. He kissed Louis’ pec, “You’re the best.”

Louis bit back a smug comment and decided to kiss the top of Harry’s head instead.

“Y’know,” Louis drawled out after a minute of comfortable silence, “I would have never pegged you as a dirty talker.”

Harry made an embarrassed sound and tucked his face into Louis’ neck.

Louis laughed, “Look who’s being quiet now!”

“S’never happened before,” Harry muffled against Louis’ skin.

“Well,” Louis reassuringly squeezed the soft skin along Harry’s waist, “I loved it.”

Harry rolled back and met Louis’ eyes, “Really?”

Louis nodded, not bothering to be bashful, “Fuckin’ hottest thing I’ve ever heard during sex.”

“Oh,” Harry flushed as he started to look incredibly pleased with himself. He leaned forward and pecked Louis’ lips, “Good.”

There was a distinct sound of the flat’s front door opening and Louis let out a disgruntled groan.

“Does that mean we have to move?” Louis whined.

Harry huffed out a laugh and rolled off of Louis, “Afraid so.”

Louis dramatically huffed and pushed himself into a sitting position. He climbed off the bed and started to sort through the discarded clothes on the floor. When he bent over to grab his briefs, there was a strangle noise from the bed. Louis whipped around and saw that Harry was staring at him with his bottom lip between his teeth.

“Please tell me you like being eaten out,” Harry weakly begged as if it was a major crisis.

Louis’ smirked and turned back around, suggestively swaying his hips with the movement. Harry reiterated his pained sound, slightly louder a second time around. He slowly bent over as he stepped into his briefs, fully aware of the string of noises that Harry was making from the mattress. Louis pulled the briefs over the swell of his bum and spun on his heel.

He cheekily winked at Harry, “How about you find out when we’re back in Manchester?”

Harry flopped onto his back, his hung cock lazily slapping against the inside of his thigh. He spread out his arms on the mattress and if Harry’s sister wasn’t in the other room, Louis wouldn’t be able to resist a second round.

“You’re trying to kill me,” Harry whined.

“Yep,” Louis brightly said. He picked up Harry’s briefs and threw them at Harry, “Now get decent. M’starving.”

“You mean to tell me that come wasn’t enough of a well-balanced meal for you?”
“Oh my god,” Louis groaned with his hands covering his face. “Never say that again if you still want to have a boyfriend.”

Harry perked up at that, resting his weight back on his elbows as he beamed at Louis, “Hey, you’re my boyfriend.”

Louis schooled his expression into an unimpressed glare, “Did you already manage to forget?”

“I didn’t say that,” Harry sang-song as he clambered off the bed.

“Oh my god,” Louis gaped at him. He pulled his joggers back on, “You did already forget, you prat!”

Harry started to get changed, “If this is what dating is like, I can’t wait for marriage.”

Louis shrugged on his jumper, “No way in hell I’d marry you now.” He settled his hands on his hips, “You would forget.”

“Nuh uh,” Harry tutted his tongue and tugged on his hoodie. He turned to face Louis and impishly smirked, “I’d remember because I’d have a ring.”

“It would just blend in the your sixty other pirate rings,” Louis deadpanned. “Hardly a case, Harold.”

Harry shrugged, “Fair point.”

“You’re not meant to agree with me!”

“Is this our first fight as a couple?”

“Yes.”

“So…Make up sex is a thing for us now, yeah?”

Louis didn’t bother to respond before he hauled the door open and walked out into the corridor. Harry laughed and quickly followed Louis out, pulling him against his chest when he caught up.

“Get off me, you bloody behemoth,” Louis swatted Harry’s hands away.

Harry nuzzled his head into Louis’ neck, “But, we’re bonding.”

“You were better when you didn’t like talking to me,” Louis groaned. He frowned once the words were out and spun around in Harry’s hold, “Actually, no.” Louis seriously looked at Harry and cupped his cheeks, “That wasn’t funny. I like this you. Happy and slightly obnoxious you.”

Even if he was teasing, Louis never wanted to give Harry the impression that Harry should revert back into his shell.

A gentle smile tugged Harry’s lips upwards and he ducked forward to softly kiss Louis. He melted into the kiss, only pulling back when there was a deliberate cough from the living room. Louis winced and looked over his shoulder to see Gemma watching them with a bored expression.

Gemma sighed, “Do I have to burn the guestroom sheets?”

“Definitely,” Harry instantly answered.

Both Gemma and Louis groaned in response.
The rest of the evening consisted with the three of them pattering around the kitchen and making dinner. Louis felt more and more at ease with Gemma as night rolled through. Anytime he made Gemma laugh particularly hard with a sarcastic comment, Louis would catch Harry watching them with a soft expression.

They sat around the square table and ate dinner, Louis feeling slightly buzzed off of the white wine in his glass. Judging by Gemma and Harry’s rosy cheeks, he suspected that he wasn’t alone. Louis sat back and listened to them reminisce on childhood memories, interjecting his commentary from here to there. But mostly, he was just reveling in the blatant admiration that Harry had for his older sister.

Harry listened each of her stories with starry-eyes and Louis felt helpless as his heart strings were tugged like a well-played guitar. His mind wandered to the prospect of Harry meeting his family. It was far too soon to be thinking about that kind of step in their relationship, but Louis knew that he wanted to take it one day. He couldn’t imagine ever getting tired of dating Harry.

When dinner wrapped up and they were well sated, the three of them filed into the living room. Gemma sprawled out on a smaller couch, leaving Harry and Louis the bigger one. As the beginning of Pulp Fiction flickered across the television, Louis slid closer to Harry’s side. He didn’t know where Harry stood on cuddling in front of his sister, but he figured that they were relatively tactile in front of her for the past handful of hours.

Harry turned his head and gently nosed along Louis’ hairline, “Do you want to lie down?”

“Yes,” Louis quickly rushed out, his neck slightly flushing from embarrassment.

Harry affectionately huffed out a laugh and kissed Louis’ temple. Louis shuffled forward to give Harry room to lie down. When Harry was flush against the pillows, he patted the empty space in front of him and sleepily smiled. Louis bit back a matching grin and laid down, pressing his back to Harry’s front.

“Comfortable?” Harry quietly asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Louis nodded and contently hummed as Harry protectively wrapped an arm over Louis’ chest. He rested his head against Harry’s extended arm and cuddled back into Harry’s warmth. Louis did his best to bite back a pleased noise when Harry hooked their ankles together.

As the opening scene was well underway and Louis was sure that Gemma’s focus was on the television, he turned to look over his shoulder. Harry looked down at him with the warmest expression that made Louis feel safe and even loved, for lack of a different term,

“You’re my favorite person,” Louis whispered.

The skin by Harry’s eyes crinkled and he lethargically pressed his lips against Louis’ cheekbone. Louis’ eyelashes fanned against his skin and he could feel the way his heart uncontrollably palpitated. Harry slowly pulled away, his lips delicately brushing against his skin until he hovered by the shell of Louis’ ear.

“You’re my favorite, too.”

****

Harry flinched when someone prodded his shoulder. He cuddled closer into Louis’ warmth and nonsensically mumbled in response. When there was another sharp pressure, Harry sleepily blinked his eyes open. He blearily looked around until his eyes settled on Gemma who was standing in front
“Head on off to bed, H,” Gemma whispered. She hesitated for a second before she quietly added, “I really like him.”

He glanced at Louis’ sleeping figure before looking back at Gemma with a shy smile, “Me too.”

She sweetly smiled before walking off towards her bedroom. When he heard her door shut, Harry gently rubbed his hand along Louis’ bicep. Louis mumbled something incoherent and turned over to nestle himself against Harry’s chest. It was unbearably adorable and Harry almost didn’t have it in his heart to wake Louis up.

“Sweetheart,” Harry lowly hummed and kissed Louis’ forehead.

Louis’ nose scrunched as he slurred out, “Sweetie.”

Harry felt his heart swoop inside his chest and he bit back a laugh. He kissed Louis again and nodded into his skin, “Come on, Sweetie. Time for bed.”

“Bed time for me,” Louis sleepily mumbled.


He managed to help support Louis into a standing position before he led Louis down the hall with their fingers intertwined. Harry opened the bedroom door and gently shut it behind them. Louis instantaneously crawled under the covers and made a needy noise when Harry didn’t quickly follow suit.

“C’mere,” Louis sluggishly demanded.

Harry changed out of his clothes and left just his pair of briefs on. He got under the covers and Louis immediately clung to his side, his limbs draping over Harry’s body. It was a stark comparison to their previous night and it almost took Harry aback how much had happened.

“G’night, Babu,” Louis murmured before his breathing evened out.

“Goodnight, Lou,” Harry exhaled.

That night, Harry fell asleep with Louis safely wrapped in his arms. He figured it would be the first on many nights going to bed like that, but he couldn’t fathom the idea of ever getting used to it. Louis was the kind of person that someone could never get used to. Harry tightened his hold around his boyfriend focused on the feeling of Louis’ heartbeat on top of his own.

Louis’ quiet snores filtered through the room and for once, Harry felt as if his life was coming together for him. He carded his fingers through Louis’ soft hair and shut his eyes. That evening, Harry fell asleep with Louis tucked against his side and a single thought running as a mantra through his mind.

*I could quite love you.*

****

Louis woke up to the smell of bacon.

It was their last day in London and Louis let himself selfishly take a few minutes more of peaceful silence. He was still tucked against Harry’s side, but unlike when he fell asleep, his head was in Harry’s lap. Harry’s fingers were lethargically scratching his scalp, the motion light enough where
Louis figured he had been sleeping through it. Louis deeply exhaled and subtly shuffled closer.

“You do know I can tell you’re awake, right?”

Louis let out a petulant huff and opened his eyes. He was looking up at the back of a book.

“Are you really reading right now?” Louis croaked out, his voice thick with sleep.

Harry lowered his book and slid his hand from Louis’ scalp to his jawline. Louis pursed his lips when the pad of Harry’s thumb brushed over his bottom lip. He kissed the digit then turned his neck so he could nuzzle into Harry’s stomach.

“I like reading in the morning.”

Louis let out a quiet laugh, “Course you do.”

Harry shut the book, “What’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing, Dollface.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“Noted.”

Harry dropped his book onto the side table, “Breakfast?”

Louis nodded, but took no initiative to move.

“You gotta get up,” Harry laughed.

He nodded again and bit the inside of his cheek when Harry made a noise from the back of his throat.

“You’re not moving.”

“Has anyone ever complimented you on your observation skills before?”

“Has anyone ever told you that you’re obnoxious?”

“Yes,” Louis laughed and nipped Harry’s stomach with his teeth. “You have.”

Harry giggled and shoved Louis away when he tried to blow a raspberry onto his stomach. Louis pushed himself upright and tilted his head to the side. Harry was purposefully frowning at him, but the corners of his mouth twitched to release a smile.

“Good morning,” Louis quietly said.

Harry leaned forward and kissed Louis’ forehead, “Good morning.”

“What would you say,” Louis drawled out, waiting for Harry to pull back to continue, “If our first proper date was in London?”

“I’d say…What do you have in mind?” Harry cocked his head to the side.

Louis beamed and darted forward to peck Harry on the lips, “Breakfast. Get changed. Date.”

“Very efficient itinerary,” Harry laughed. “One that didn’t answer my question…At all.”
“Shut it,” Louis kissed him once more before climbing off the mattress. He stretched his hands over his head and spun towards Harry, “C’mon, move your lazy arse.”

“Alright, alright,” Harry nodded

Louis impatiently huffed as Harry slowly got changed, fully aware that he was being obnoxious.

“Could you go any slower?” Louis whined. His stomach growled and he glared at Harry’s back, “M’ gonna starve before you manage to get changed.”

Harry tugged a plain t-shirt over his head and turned to face Louis. He set his hands on his waist and cocked his head to the side.

“You’re a brat.”

Louis gasped, “Take that back right now.”

Harry laughed and shook his head, “Absolutely not.”

“But, Harry,” Louis exasperated, “I need words of affirmation. Not words of twattishness.”

“That’s a new one,” Harry snorted. He closed the distance between them and pecked Louis on the nose, “I like you and you’re still a brat.”

Louis beamed at him, “I like you and you’re still a twat.”

“Now that’s sorted,” Harry nodded towards the door, “Breakfast?”

“Yes, breakfast,” Louis lifted himself and pecked Harry’s cheek.

They walked out of the bedroom and Louis made a pleased sound when the smell of bacon became stronger. He skipped into the kitchen, hearing the trail of Harry’s laughter behind him. Gemma was in front of the stove gathering her hair into a messy bun, eyes on the strips of frying bacon.

“Good morning,” Louis chirped.

She turned and grinned at Louis, “Morning.”

“How’d you sleep?” Harry asked as he filed into the kitchen.

“Pretty good,” Gemma drawled out, lowering her hands to flip the bacon. She glanced over her shoulder, “How do you like your eggs, Louis?”

“However you make ‘em is fine with me,” Louis answered.

Gemma’s mouth quirked into a smirk, “Good answer.”

Louis proudly smiled and looked at Harry to see him already shaking his head with amusement.

“Want help?” Harry asked.

“Nah,” Gemma scrunched her nose. She jerked her head towards the table, “Just sit and look pretty for a bit while I finish.”

Louis tipped his chin upwards, “I can do that.”

“Bet you can, princess,” Gemma snorted, pulling an indignant squawk from Louis. “Did you two
Have plans for today?"

“M’ gonna woo your brother,” Louis stated with a matter-of-fact tone.

Harry sat down at the kitchen table, “He’s going to try and woo your brother.”

Gemma attempted to school her face into an unimpressed expression, but Louis caught the fond look that darted over her eyes.

Louis sat down in the chair next to Harry and pouted, “Why do you have such little faith in me?”

“Do you even have a plan yet?” Harry lifted an eyebrow.

“Nope.”

Harry laughed, “That’s why.”

“But,” Louis loudly started, “It’s gonna be good.”

“I have no doubt,” Harry quietly said, privately smiling at Louis before directing his attention to Gemma.

The rest of their morning consisted of bacon, scrambled eggs, and milky tea. Gemma and Harry were going on about a cousin’s impending wedding, but Louis had basically tuned them out. His mind was focused on where he wanted to take Harry for their date. A few ideas ticked through his thought process, but they weren’t good enough for a first date. Louis needed it to be a good first date because he realized that Harry had probably never been on a date before.

Slightly panicking, Louis abruptly pushed his chair back from the table. Harry stopped talking and looked at him with a curious tilt of his head. Louis held up his index finger and then excused himself. He darted back to the guestroom, closed the door, and grabbed his mobile.

Louis immediately called the only person that he trusted to genuinely help him.

“Oh, good morning, Darling!”

Louis grinned at the warm voice, “G’morning, Mum.”

“This is a lovely surprise,” She cooed, a slight rumble of voices echoing in the background.

“I call you every week,” Louis rolled his eyes.

“I know.” Johanna snorted, “And you already called me on Thursday. Don’t tell me that you already miss your mummy that much.”

Louis whined, “Stop it.” He started to pace across the floor, “I actually need help.”

Her voice automatically hardened, “Louis Tomlinson, what did you do?”

“Why do you automatically think I did somethin’ wrong?!” Louis disbelievingly shot back.

Johanna scoffed, “Because I know you like the back of my hand.” She groaned, “Christ’s sake, tell me you didn’t break someone else’s camera.”

Louis flushed at that, remembering her incredulous reaction when he told her about that day. He had said that he was going to pay Harry back, but left it at that. She would have lectured and potentially
neutered him if she knew about the case study. All Johanna knew was that Louis broke Harry’s lens and that they were classmates.

“Well…This actually has to do with Harry,” Louis quietly said.

“What about Harry?”

“We’re in London –”

Johanna immediately cut her son off, “What the hell are you in London for?!” She made a displeased sound, “And why are you only telling me this now?!”

“School project,” Louis winced at the lie. He shook his head, “That’s not the point, though.”

“Are you in trouble?”

“No, Mum –”

“Is it drugs?”

Louis groaned, “What?! No!”

Johanna let out a relieved sigh, “Okay, good.”

“You think I’m on drugs?!” Louis gaped. He shook his head even though she couldn’t see him, “What would possibly make you think that?!”

“You said you needed help!”

“And your first thought was drugs?” Louis stammered through a laugh. “Cheers Mum, real nice.”

Johanna loudly exhaled, “What is it then?”

“I – Um,” Louis tugged at his bottom hip. He pinched his eyes shut, “M’ taking Harry out on a date today and I don’t know where to take him.”

“A date?!” Johanna squawked. She quickly rushed out, “You didn’t tell me you liked him.”

“He, well, he’s kinda my boyfriend now?”

“Louis Tomlinson.”

“It just happened!” Louis defended himself. “And I can’t talk long,” Louis glanced towards the door. He sighed, “I’ll tell you about it later, but I just need an idea of where to take him.”

He could tell that she was doing her absolute best not to rattle off a million questions. They were always open with each other, ever since Louis was just a kid. For her not to know that he fancied someone, let alone had a boyfriend, was completely out of character for him. In his defense, Louis didn’t even know where they stood until two days ago. He tugged at his bottom lip when she let out a heavy sigh.

“You’re not getting out of this,” She warned him and Louis made a disgruntled noise of affirmation. “But…We can talk about that later.”

Louis mumbled, “Thanks, Mum.”
“As for the date,” Johanna drawled out, an obvious smile in her voice, “I may have an idea.”

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Harry’s eyes widened when the elevator doors gently opened.

“Like it?” Louis hopefully asked once they stepped out.

Louis had taken him to Sky Garden in the heart of London.

It was a place that Harry had heard of before, but it was even more incredible than he could have possibly imagined. The top floor was encased by a massive glass dome, allowing the bleeding sunset to pour through paneled windows. Harry’s hands clasped over his mouth as they walked across the polished floor. The view overlooked the entire city of London, variously shaped glass buildings bathed in warm orange hues from the descending sun.

The expansive space was divided by a partial floor that served as a private dining area. Two staircases led towards the enclosed restaurant and flourishing around the steps were lush plants. Underneath the suspended restaurant was a general bar. Rows and rows of glass bottles twinkled from reflected sunbeams and there was already a budding crowd waiting to order drinks.

“Lou,” Harry disbelievingly murmured. He dragged his gaze from the view and looked at Louis, “I love it.”

The skin by Louis’ eyes crinkled and his teeth dug into his bottom lip as a grin stretched across his face. His skin was illuminated by the rosy sunset and Harry couldn’t imagine ever wanting to be with someone else. He cupped Louis’ neck and pulled him in. Louis went easily, grinning into a kiss as his hands gripped Harry’s jacket.

When their lips parted, Harry rested his forehead against Louis’ and deeply inhaled. He had never felt so full before, his heart wildly thrumming inside his chest. Louis barreled into his life and ripped down every wall that Harry had built around himself. Three words were heavy on his tongue and all he wanted to do was live in that moment for the rest of his life.

“You’re perfect,” Harry quietly said as if it was a secret.

Louis nudged their noses together before he pulled back. He softly grinned at Harry, starlight iridescently twinkling in his irises. His cheeks tinged with a blush, but he didn’t bother to hide it like he normally would. Harry intertwined their hands together and lifted them, gently pressing a kiss into the back of Louis’ hand.

Harry swallowed the three words and led them towards the bar. They found an empty slot at the bar and he gestured for the nearest bartender with a raised hand. He wrapped his arm around Louis’ shoulders and pulled him flush against his side as a young man stopped in front of them.

“What can I get you two this evening?” He politely asked with a gentle grin.

“Two glasses of Malbec, please,” Louis responded for them.

The bartender nodded and stepped back to prepare their drinks. Harry kissed Louis’ temple and lightly dragged his thumb against the nape of Louis’ neck. Two glasses of red wine were set in front of them and Louis paid, insisting that Harry didn’t pay for anything that evening. When Louis got his card back, they grabbed the stems of their glasses and shuffled away from the bar.

A revolving door led from the bar to an outside deck and Louis tangled their fingers together as he
walked towards it. Harry looked down at their joined hands, feeling butterflies excitedly flutter in his stomach at the simple sight. They went outside and a gust of fresh air welcomed them, the gentle hum of the city murmuring below.

“This is incredible,” Harry said as he looked over the view.

Louis nodded, “It really is, innit?”

They rested their sides against the railing and Harry raised his glass, tilting the lip of his glass towards Louis.

“What should we drink to?” Louis quirked his head as he raised his glass.

Harry lifted his shoulders in a partial shrug, “To getting it right?”

Louis laughed, his nose scrunching and tongue slightly poking out. He carefully knocked their glasses together with a nod.

“To getting it right.”

****

Their train didn’t arrive back to Manchester until two in the morning on Monday. Harry was exhausted from the weekend and his legs were stiff from the three hour trip. Louis slept throughout the ride, his head tucked into the crook of Harry’s neck and legs hooked over Harry’s thighs. He was barely awake as Harry grabbed both of their bags and ushered them off the train. Taking an Uber back to Harry’s studio, they finally made it in bed by two-thirty.

“Y’sure you don’t mind me staying?” Louis sleepily mumbled even though he was already underneath the covers.

Harry huffed out a laugh and cuddled against Louis’ back. He kissed the nape of Louis’ neck and hummed in affirmation. Their ankles looped together at the foot of the bed and Harry wrapped his arm around Louis’ chest. Louis kissed the pulse point along Harry’s wrist then let out a sated sigh.

For someone who never slept with anybody for the past twenty-one years, Harry found himself surprisingly attached to the notion of spending the night with Louis. He slept his best with Louis in the same bed as him, reveling in the way their bodies stayed connected throughout the night. Louis’ breathing eventually evened out and Harry let himself be lulled to sleep by the sound of it.

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The bed shifted next to him and the motion gently stirred Louis awake. He blinked his eyes into focus and watched Harry clamber out of bed with uncoordinated limbs. Louis listened to the sound of Harry pouring a glass of water, feeling himself grin when Harry climbed back up the stairs.

“Morning,” Harry smiled at Louis as he lazily scratched his stomach.

Louis’ eyes followed the movement and focused on the low dip of Harry’s briefs. Harry leaned from side to side, the muscles of his abdomen extending in lethargic movements. Louis always thought that he had good self-control, but watching Harry stretch in just a pair of short black briefs seemed to prove him wrong.

He crawled off the bed and promptly dropped to his knees. Harry made a surprised noise when Louis hooked his fingers along the waistband of Harry’s briefs and ducked his head forward. Louis
mouthed at the outline of Harry’s cock and hummed when he felt it twitch under his lips.

“Fuck, Lou,” Harry exhaled and fisted both of his hands into Louis’ hair.

Louis pulled Harry’s briefs down. He wet his bottom lip as Harry’s cock heavily bobbed between his thighs.

“You’re so fuckin’ hung,” Louis moaned as he wrapped his fingers around Harry’s length.

Harry rocked his hips forwards, his cock sliding in Louis’ grip. Louis parted his lips and darted his tongue out, catching the head of Harry’s cock on his tongue. Harry’s movements stuttered and tightened his grip in Louis’ hair.

“Sweetheart,” Harry whimpered when Louis wrapped his lips around the tip.

Louis outright moaned at the petname and relaxed his throat, reveling in the feeling of Harry’s weight on his tongue. He bobbed his head forwards and quickly worked his hand along Harry’s length. His tongue pressed into Harry’s slit and hungrily swallowed the beads of precome that leaked from the tip.

“Fuck, just like that,” Harry praised, his deep voice coated with lust.

He pulled his mouth off of Harry’s length and craned his neck to mouth at Harry’s balls. A carnal moan poured out of Harry’s lips when Louis sucked one of his balls into his mouth. He swirled his tongue and twisted his fist around the wet top of Harry’s cock. Spit gathered at the corners of his mouth, slowly dripping down onto his chin.

“Already so close, Sweetie,” Harry warned him.

Louis made a needy whine and took Harry back in his mouth. He sank down on Harry’s length and lowered his fingers. Passing Harry’s balls, he ran the fingertips along his perineum.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Harry stammered, his hips uncontrollably bucking forwards.

He traced his finger over Harry’s rim and both men moaned in unison. Louis swirled his tongue around the crown of Harry’s cock, his fingertip applying a light pressure against Harry’s entrance. When Harry’s thighs started to twitch, Louis opened his throat and deep throated Harry.

“Oh, fuck, fucking fuck,” Harry whined and his he yanked Louis’ hair.

Harry pumped his hips forwards and fell apart. Louis hungrily moaned as Harry came, his hand slowly dropping to his lap. When Harry’s cock gave one last weak twitch, he slowly pulled Louis’ back by his hair. Louis licked his lips and let Harry direct his head upwards.

“On the bed,” Harry breathily exhaled. He cupped Louis’ jaw and slipped his thumb into Louis’ mouth, “Wanna eat you for breakfast.”

Louis whimpered around Harry’s thumb, already breathing heavy when Harry pulled the digit back. He quickly shed his t-shirt and briefs before climbing back on the mattress. Not having much shame, Louis dropped to his forearms and kept his arse in the air.

“ Fucking hell,” Harry groaned as he keeled behind Louis.

Louis closed his eyes and fisted his fingers into the duvet in anticipation. When Harry palmed his arse with both hands, Louis let out a deep sigh. He pushed back into Harry’s grip and tugged his
bottom lip between his teeth. Harry’s fingertips gripped into the muscle of Louis’ arse, pushing his cheeks together before spreading him open.

“Fuck,” Louis moaned when he felt Harry blow cool air over his entrance.

Harry’s thumbs traced the ring of muscle, sending electric shocks down the dip of Louis’ spine. He jerked forward when Harry pressed a wet kiss over his entrance. His cock was flush against his abdomen, already fully hard without being touched.

Louis’ mouth made a perfect circle when Harry flattened his tongue and licked a fat stripe over his rim. A high pitched whimper slipped from his lips as Harry licked over him a second time.

“Taste so fucking good,” Harry moaned out before he quickly started to lathe over Louis’ rim.

Louis whined, “Oh my god.”

His thighs trembled as Harry started to lick him out in earnest. With every passing second, his thighs spread apart wider and his muscles were becoming lax. Harry pointed his tongue and prodded at Louis’ rim, humming into his skin as if Louis was the loveliest thing he had ever tasted.

Harry assuredly licked over his rim and Louis subconsciously pressed his hips back into the feeling. Wrapping his arm around Louis’ waist, Harry pulled Louis backwards as he continued to lathe over Louis’ entrance.

“Feels so fuckin’ good,” Louis slurred out, feeling delirious from Harry’s ministration. “You’re so fuckin’ good at that, Petal.”

Harry moaned against Louis’ rim and gently nipped at the sensitive skin. Louis’ thighs shook and his knuckles bared white from his grip. Soft whimpers were tumbling from Harry’s mouth as he alternated between long deliberate strokes and quick prods of his tongue.

“Fuck,” Harry brokenly said as he rested back on his haunches.

Harry spat onto Louis’ rim and slick slowly dripped down to his balls. Louis throatily moaned and collapsed flat on his chest. His spine arched as Harry kept his hips held upright as he ducked back down.

“M’ gonna come,” Louis gasped when heat coiled in his gut.

“Want you to come,” Harry reverently said, his fingers roughly digging into Louis’ skin.

Louis let out a relieved moan when Harry wrapped his hand around his neglected cock. Harry pointed his tongue and pressed past Louis’ rim with a sure lick. He was slurring out a litany of curses as Harry fucked him open with his tongue, keeping in time with every stroke of his fist.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Louis’ eyes pinched shut, his thighs uncontrollably shaking.

Harry moaned against his entrance and Louis let himself go. He came into Harry’s curled fist with a high pitched whine. Ropes of pearly come covered his chest and his body trembled with an aftershock.

“Fuck,” Harry murmured, slowing down his strokes and then dropping his hand.

Louis rolled onto his back and stared at the ceiling with wide eyes. His chest heaved with labored breaths. Stars danced across his vision and there was a moment where he wondered if he was going
to be alright.

“Fucking shit,” Louis eventually managed. He looked at Harry and breathlessly laughed, “You really go for it, don’t you?”

Harry impishly smirked, “Breakfast is my favorite meal.”

Louis gaped at him before he grabbed a pillow and smacked him upside the head.

“If you ever say that again, we’re breaking up.”

“But,” Harry panted out a laugh, “It’s true!”

“Harry.”

“Louis.”
Harry deeply inhaled through his nose and tightened his grip around the neck of a tequila bottle in his hand. It would be the first evening of going out with Louis’ friends and to say he was nervous was an understatement. He had met Niall a handful of times, even felt remotely comfortable around Louis’ flatmate. Harry reckoned that it would be nearly impossible not to be won over by the boisterous boy.

However, Niall wasn’t what he was anxious about. It was rather the small group of blokes that Louis deemed to be his closest group of friends. Harry chose not to comment on the fact that if they were all that close, he probably would have met them before the impending bar crawl.

Music pulsed through the door and there was a compilation of rowdy voices that seeped into the corridor. Harry exhaled twisted the doorknob, pushing open the door to Louis and Niall’s flat.

“Wey! Happy Saint Paddy’s you handsome fucker!”

Not even a second after the abrasive greeting was out, Harry had his arms filled with an already impeccably drunk Niall. Harry barely managed to not drop the tequila as he awkwardly held his hands out to the side. Niall’s arms were snug around his waist and taking one look around the room, he saw that four other men were watching the exchange.

“Um,” Harry awkwardly patted Niall on the back, “Hello to you, too.”

“Niall,” Louis jumped up from his seat on the couch with exaggerated an eye roll, “Have some dignity, will you?”

Niall pulled back and dopily grinned at Harry. He pointed his finger at Harry’s chest, “M’ wearin’ you down.”

Harry let out a sharp laugh, “You’re drunk is what you are.”


“Fucks sake,” Louis groaned and pulled Niall off of Harry, “I can’t even tell if you’re trying to sound like a fuckin’ creep.”
Niall ignored Louis’ comment while he eyed the full bottle of tequila in Harry’s grip. An impish smile stretched over his face before he promptly plucked it from Harry’s hands.

“I’ll be taking that,” Niall decided and then sauntered towards the kitchen.

Harry didn’t bother fighting Niall on it, just laughed as he ungracefully set the bottle down on the island’s surface. Louis groaned, effectively pulling Harry’s attention back to him.

“Sorry,” Louis apologetically winced, looking over his shoulder towards Niall. He turned back to Harry and his expression softened, “Hi.”

Harry grinned at him and responded just as quietly with, “Hi.”

Louis raised himself to his toes and placed a kiss on Harry’s cheek. Harry leaned into the feeling, his right hand automatically reaching out to grip Louis’ hip. He squeezed the soft skin of Louis’ waist before Louis rocked back down.

“Why is that Niall seems to be the only one drunk?”

Louis huffed out a laugh and shook his head, “Little bugger has been drinking since four.” A fond grin twitched at the corner of his mouth, “Says it’s his right as the only proper Irishman here.”

Harry seriously nodded, “Sounds legitimate.”

“It is if you want to be on his good side,” Louis chuckled. He tilted his head to the side and lowered his voice, “Ready to meet ‘em?”

Harry nodded and bit the inside of his cheek. He glanced over Louis’ shoulder to see that only one of the unfamiliar faces was still watching them. The boy was stocky with light brown hair, his eyebrow curiously cocked upwards.

“Means a lot to me that you’re doing this, Babu.”

Harry looked back at Louis and saw blatant earnestness painting his expression. The corner of his mouth jaunted upwards, his affection for Louis beating out his nerves. He ducked his head down and kissed the corner of Louis’ mouth. He dragged his lips towards the shell of Louis’ ear.

“Would do anything for you, yeah?”

When he pulled back, Louis was staring up at him with open adoration. The skin by his eyes crinkled and he slowly nodded, “Me too.”

Harry ducked his head down and tried to fight the swarm of butterflies that were rampantly fluttering in his gut. Louis tangled their fingers together and led him towards the small group. He cleared his throat and Harry flushed underneath the immediate attention of everyone in the flat.

“Lads,” Louis grandly gestured towards him, “This is Harry.”

Harry generally waved and tried for a small smile, “Hi.”

The stocky boy who had been intently watching them, pushed himself to his feet and held out his hand. Harry hesitated for a second before he took it. Stocky tightly gripped his hand and Harry did his best not to let surprise show on his face. He returned the slightly overbearing grip and shook the boy’s hand.

“Stan,” Stocky introduced himself. “Just gonna say it now,” He let go of Harry’s hand and promptly
tacked on, “If you hurt our Lou, I’ll kick your arse.”

“Stanley!” Louis hissed, his cheeks flushed pink.

Ironically, Harry felt himself relax for the first time since he left his studio. There was a chance he had pre-determinately judged the depth of Louis’ friendships and for once, he truly hoped that his perception was wrong.

Harry genuinely said, “Fair enough.” He jutted his thumb towards Louis, “But, I’m pretty sure he would kick my arse first if I ever did.”

“Obviously,” Louis snorted and leaned his weight into Harry’s side.

“Feel free to join in, though,” Harry told Stan, slightly shrugging his shoulders.

That seemed to pacify Stan because he made a pleased hum and nodded his head. He walked towards the kitchen helped Niall set up a line of shot glasses.

Next to hold out their hand was a ginger boy. He had kind eyes and gave Harry a completely different vibe than Stan. He was leisurely in his handshake and didn’t bother to put on a protective front.

“Ed,” He introduced himself. “Honestly,” Ed shrugged, “I didn’t plan on giving the talk until the third outing.”

Harry’s eyebrows shot upwards, “Really?”

“Yeah,” Ed simply said and shrugged once more. “But, right. What Stan said goes for me, too.”

“Very heartfelt,” Louis snorted. “Really good job there as a mate.”

Ed was completely unperturbed by Louis’ jab and Harry had a feeling that not much actually did bother him.

“Calvin,” The last boy introduced himself, foregoing a handshake for a small lift of his shoulders.

“Nice to meet you,” Harry shoved his hands in his pockets. When Calvin didn’t say anything else, Harry coughed then carefully drawled out, “So…Shots?”

There was an affirmative yelp from the kitchen, one that Harry definitely knew belonged to Niall even though he was faced the opposite direction. They filed towards the island where six shot glasses were lined up with clear liquid filled to the brim. Louis placed one hand on Harry’s lower back and reached for a shot with the other. Harry mirrored his action and expectantly raised the glass.

“To attemptin’ and probably failin’ this bar crawl,” Niall cheered, raising his glass into the air.

“Toasts,” The other five boys said in unison, glasses clinking together.

Harry tossed back the shot and clenched his eyelids shut at the unforgiving taste. He set the petite glass back down and smacked his lips before opening his eyes. Taking one look around their make-shift circle, Harry saw that only Niall’s face wasn’t laced with distaste. He was somewhere between feeling impressed and concerned for the other man.

After four more rounds of tequila, two of which Louis demanded that Niall sit out, the group stumbled towards the first bar on the list that Niall had created. Harry didn’t know up until the minute they were leaving the flat, that it wasn’t even a legitimately sponsored bar crawl. Apparently, it was
just something that Niall made them do every year to celebrate the holiday. For some reason, that made Harry like it even more.

Surprisingly enough, they were remarkably well-composed for the first two bars. It wasn’t until the third location that Harry’s vision started to blur around the edges and Louis’ gait was a disjointed stumble. The group was nestled against the lip of a crowded bar, Niall wildly flagging down the bartender for a round of car bombs. Harry kept Louis carefully bracketed between his arms, making sure that nobody pushed into him. He may have been relatively gone, but he still made Louis his priority.

Taking his second Irish Car Bomb of the evening, Harry slammed his glass down and proudly looked at Niall. The chipper blonde was already beaming back at him, his eyes glassy and struggling to remain opened.

“I like you,” Niall loudly declared.

Harry dopyly nodded, “Like you, too.”

Niall’s hand swooped through the air before he gestured between Louis and Harry, “So glad yer not a pineapple.”

Harry snorted out a laugh, “Pineapple?”

“Niall,” Louis whined and drunkenly swung his hand forward to clasp it over Niall’s mouth. “Shuddup.”

Stan let out a throaty laugh, his head lolled back. He wiped his eyes and barely composed himself enough to ask, “You two still doing that?”

“Y’gotta let Pineapple go, Lou,” Ed jerkily shook his head.

“Code Pineapple?” Harry expectantly looked between Louis and Niall, his head tilted in confusion.

“Code Pineapple?” Niall cackled out as if he couldn’t help himself.

“Code Pineapple?” Harry expectantly looked between Louis and Niall, his head tilted in confusion.

Niall nostalgically nodded, “Just a somethin’ we came up as kids.”

“Basically,” Louis begrudgingly carried on for Niall, “If we met someone who we thought could possibly, potentially, might be, a murderer – ”

Harry’s eyes widened an obscene amount when he cut Louis off, “Murderer?!”

Louis nodded and weakly patted Harry on the cheek, “S’okay. You turned out not to be a pineapple.”

“But you thought there was a chance I was?!” Harry smacked Louis’ bicep.

“And look at ye now,” Niall cheered, his hands extended towards the pair.

The rest of the group carried on, but Harry was still gaping at Louis as if he was the most ridiculous person to have existed. Harry supposed that Louis might have been.
“Stop judgin’ me,” Louis whined, his foot stomping into the ground.

Harry shook his head, “You’re unbelievable.”

“In bed,” Louis quickly tacked on, looking incredibly proud of himself.

“That too,” Harry cackled and leaned forward to kiss Louis on the forehead.

“Fucks sake,” Louis petulantly said, “You haven’t properly kissed me once today.”

“We’re with your friends.”

“Does it look like I give one bloody fuck that we’re with me mates?”

Harry snaked his hands up Louis’ arms until they cupped his neck. Louis made a pleased noise from the back of his throat and Harry bowed his neck down. He faltered just before his lips landed on Louis because there was someone gripping his shoulder.

“Fucking what?” Louis incredulously garbled, whipping his head around to see who was pulling Harry back.

Harry’s eyebrows were knitted in confusion as he looked over his shoulder. His jaw slightly drooped when he saw Liam and Zayn just a foot behind them. Both looked a bit hesitant at Louis’ brashness and Harry didn’t blame them.

“Liam Payne,” Louis groaned and rested his weight into Harry’s side, “You have the fuckin’ worst timing in the world.”

“So sorry, lads!” Liam quickly said and Harry couldn’t even be annoyed because Liam looked like a put out puppy.

Zayn clasped his hands on Liam’s shoulders, “He’s been bent on talking t’you two since London.”

“M’ just – I’m sorry for how everything happened,” Liam scratched the back of his neck.

Harry shrugged his shoulders, “It was out of your hands.”

“Still,” Liam puffed out, seemingly slightly distraught over what happened.

“Liam,” Harry meaningfully widened his eyes, “It’s okay.”

Liam frowned, “But – ”

“Listen, mate,” Louis cut him off, “Don’t be sorry.” A mischievous glint crossed over his eyes, “Honestly, your study did a lot for us.”

Harry couldn’t help the toothy grin that stretched over his face. He slung an arm over Louis’ shoulders and nodded in agreement.

“Trust me,” Louis added when Liam didn’t say anything, “We’re good.”

Liam looked a bit better at Louis’ words, eventually nodding with a content smile. Zayn approvingly grinned at the exchange and took a step back towards the dancefloor that stretched across the far end of the bar.

“Good luck, yeah?” Liam gestured between the two of them. “From what we saw,” Liam jutted his
thumb over his shoulder towards Zayn, “You two are really somethin’ together.”

“Thanks,” Harry bit back a stupid grin. “Good luck to you two.”

With a final wave, Liam and Zayn disappeared into the throng of people. Harry fully faced his body towards Louis, both hands intertwined over the dip of Louis’ spine. Louis was beaming at him, his eyelids heavy from alcohol and cheeks flush from laughter.

“We really do owe them so much,” Harry mused, slowly swaying them from side to side.

Louis nodded, his eyes darting over Harry’s face until they landed on the curve of his lips.

“Kiss me,” Louis breathed.

With colorful lights strobing over them and people bustling around their sides, Harry did just that.

Harry pulled Louis flush against his front and kissed him the way that he had wanted to since the beginning of the night. Louis’ lips tasted of Guinness and his slighter frame felt almost dainty underneath Harry’s hold. Their mouths slotted together and the hectic world started to dissipate into nothingness around them. As thundering music became nothing more than a hushed background hum, Harry felt himself slip into love.

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It was the tenth of April and Louis was one step away from killing his boyfriend.

“Just a bit more,” Harry called from up ahead.

Louis lolled his head back and groaned, “Remember when I told you that we should be more adventurous?” He kicked a small rock off the dirt path, “I lied. This is stupid.”

Harry looked over his shoulder, paper map clasped in his hands and a wide grin stretched over his sun-kissed face. He wore a faded tie-dye shirt and his pair of overalls, the washed-out material already smudged with dirt from their trek. When Harry looked back down at the map, his pair of black sunglasses slightly slid down the bridge of his nose.

“According to the map –”

“Are you sure you even know how to read a map, Harold?”

Harry waved Louis off and made a non-committal sound from the back of his throat. Louis kicked his black trainer into the dirt like the petulant child he was. Whereas Harry was dressed like a flower child from the sixties for their daytrip, Louis opted for a more practical pair of speckled joggers and a grey pull over.

When they came back from their failed case study the month prior, Louis made a toss-away comment that they should have more adventures together. Preferably, adventures without the accompaniment twelve other people. Harry was remarkably quick to jump on board, already coming up with different ideas that he had toyed with over the years.

What Louis hadn’t expected, was for Harry to decide that their first trip should be a two and a half hour trek up north towards Lake District. Apparently, Harry’s favorite poem was inspired by a patch of flowers on some specific hill by some body of water. He insisted that they had to go and be just as inspired as the poet.
It was absolutely ridiculous, but Louis bit his tongue and let Harry run away with making plans. He just fondly shook his head when Harry bought a legitimate map of Glencoyne Park, insisting that it made the adventure more authentic. Louis spent more than just one night sitting between Harry’s legs as he pinpointed the exact spot where the flowers were meant to be and jotted down notes about the poem’s anthology. He made them tea and quietly listened to the steady drawl of Harry’s voice.

All of Harry’s planning was what led them to climb a steep hill, shoes caked with mud and blades of grass, on the afternoon of April tenth.

Harry’s camera bag heavily weighed on his shoulders and Louis was exhausted from aimlessly wandering along the same dirt path. According to Harry, they weren’t lost, but Louis chose not to believe him. It was easier to take out his state of slight irritation if Harry was wrong.

He watched Harry’s shoulders stretch underneath his shirt when he lifted his camera to pan over their surroundings. More times than not, the lens fell on Louis and he couldn’t even find it in himself to pretend to not be endeared. There were times that Harry would gently beam at Louis once his hands had dropped, camera returning to its place around his neck. It was as if every time he saw Louis through the sight, he had captured the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

“Should be just above this ridge,” Harry excitedly said, his dimple carving into his cheek.

“Thank bloody fuck,” Louis huffed under his breath and slightly quickened his gait to match Harry’s.

The melodic sound of birds began to get louder and the spring air somehow smelled fresher as they reached the crest. Louis reached out and tangled their fingers, feeling the innate need to hold Harry’s hand as they experienced the impending view together. Louis held his breath and felt Harry squeeze his fingers as they took the final step to the top.

Louis’ jaw went slack as he looked over a sea of golden daffodils. The expansive bed of blooms kissed the lip of a shimmering lake, seamlessly melding together underneath the sun coated sky. On the other side of the lake was a mountain that dwarfed the world in which it was surrounded by. He craned his neck to catch a glimpse of Harry, feeling himself release the breath he was still holding.

Harry’s sunglasses were pushed into his hair, clearing any abstruseness from his profile. His irises danced with the purest form of starlight and the apples of his cheeks were painted with a dusty rose as he took in the view. There was an assured sense of eternal beauty laced within his lips and a promise of unadulterated adoration in his gaze. Louis knew that Harry’s expression was one that he would never come across in anybody else. He was absolutely sure of it.

“I love you.”

Harry snapped his head towards Louis, supernova eyes instantly locking on Louis’ mouth as if he would be able to see the trace of the three words. Maybe he could, Louis supposed. He had never felt more transparent than he did standing over a flood of gilded petals.

“What – You,” Harry quietly stammered, fully angling his body to face Louis’.

Louis reached for Harry’s other hand and slipped his fingers into the empty spaces between Harry’s. He shuffled forward until the toes of their shoes touched.

“I said,” Louis tilted his head to the side and faintly squeezed Harry’s hands, “I love you.”

There weren’t any written words that could possibly describe the way Harry looked at Louis before he kissed him.
Harry framed Louis’ jaw with his hands, pads of his thumbs reverently stroking over Louis’ skin. Their lips blossomed underneath each other, every sure press bleeding adoration. Louis wrapped his arms around Harry’s middle rocked into the kiss. Harry slid his hands to Louis’ neck and leaned back a fraction of an inch.

“I love you, Louis.”

Louis tucked his head into the crook of Harry’s neck and let himself fall into the purest form of safety that Harry had unconsciously become for him. His heart was anchored, no longer aimlessly drifting through his life as Harry’s words rolled over him like a steady current. He felt as if he was finally coming home when Harry wrapped him in his arms.

They gently rocked back and forth, sinking further into each other with every passing minute. The hum of a boat’s engine poured over the lake, creating a steady rhythmic pattern to follow. Harry rested one palm on the small of Louis’ back and took his right hand in his own. The sound of the wind tumbling through tree leaves became their orchestra. Louis let Harry lead them in small steps as blackbird calls intertwined together to create a lulled melody for them to dance to.

“‘And then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with daffodils.’”

Louis blinked up at Harry, cocking his head to the side, “What’s that?”


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Harry stepped off of the bus platform and automatically had his hand outreached towards Louis. He grinned at the sight of Louis instantly being bathed by moonlight when he jumped onto the pavement. A bouquet of daffodils was tightly clutched in Louis’ grasp and Harry’s camera was slung around his neck. With intertwined fingers, the couple walked back to the studio.

An electric buzz built between their tangled hands as they walked inside. Harry shut the door behind them, briefly resting his back against the surface while he watched Louis carefully place the flowers and camera onto the table. He pushed himself upright, kicked off his shoes by the doorway, and then flicked on his stereo.

I found a love for me.

Louis turned to face Harry, the corner of his mouth tilted into a grin. Harry strode across the floorboards and stopped just in front of Louis.

Darling, just dive right in and follow my lead.

Harry cupped one hand on Louis’ neck and the other on his waist. His eyes flitted from Louis’ to his lips, watching the way they parted on an exhale. Eyelids lulling shut, Harry arched his neck and kissed Louis.

I never knew you were the someone waiting for me.

Louis sighed into the kiss, his fingers grabbing purchase around the straps of Harry’s overalls. Harry tiled his head to the side and pressed his tongue past Louis’ parted lips. Their mouths wetly smacked together as the song started to build towards the chorus. Tongues pressed together in reverent caresses that sent electric sparks along Harry’s spine.

His fingertips dragged down Louis’ front until they reached the hem of his hoodie. Harry toyed with
the material for a moment and gently pulled Louis’ bottom lip between his teeth. He pinched the lush skin the let go as he started to lift the hoodie. Taking a step back, Harry pulled the material over Louis’ head, his white t-shirt quickly following suit.

*Darling, you look perfect tonight.*

Harry ducked his head down and kissed the top of Louis’ shoulder. His lips lethargically pressed a strand on kisses along the smooth skin, slowly moving until his tongue dipped into the pool of Louis’ collarbone. He nosed along Louis’ neck, feeling the steady thrum of Louis’ pulse before kissing over it.

Louis’ fingers worked over the clasps of Harry’s overalls, unhitching the metal until they fell loose against Harry’s sides. He pulled away from the blossoming bruise that he was working into Louis’ throat and tugged his shirt off, leaving both of their upper bodies bare.

*I found a love to carry more than just my secrets.*

“Lou,” Harry exhaled into Louis’ mouth. He nudged their noses together, “I love you so much.”

A faint whimper fell from Louis’ lips, his arms wrapping around Harry’s neck to pull him even closer. Harry gripped the back of Louis’ thighs and scooped him upwards. Louis’ ankles hooked together, his thighs resting atop of Harry’s jutted hipbones. With both hands securely holding Louis to his chest, Harry carried him up the stairs.

*We are still kids, but we’re so in love.*

Harry carefully lowered Louis onto the center of the mattress and then climbed on after him. He bowed his spine and kissed over Louis’ chest, nosing against the soft downy hair that dusted his sternum. Louis’ back arched into the feeling, his hands lifted above his head.

*I know we’ll be alright this time.*

“Petal,” Louis panted out when Harry closed his lips around Louis’ nipple.

Harry’s tongue lathed over the sensitive nub before teasing it between his teeth. A high-pitched mewl spilled from Louis’ lips and his thighs tightened around Harry’s waist. He blew cool air over Louis’ nipple and moaned when Louis carded his fingers into his hair. Louis pulled him upwards, immediately pressing their lips together in firm kiss.

They broke apart for air, both men wetly breathing against each other’s lips. Harry snaked his hands along Louis’ arms, stopping when he reached his hands. He tightly intertwined their fingers and pressed Louis’ hands into the duvet. Harry leaned back and looked down at Louis.

*Now I know that I have met an angel in person.*

Never before, had he felt so full of love.

Harry brought their mouths back together and tried to press every emotion he was feeling into Louis’ lips. He let go of Louis’ hands, moving to grip Louis’ waist instead. Louis made a content hum from the back of his throat and let his thighs fall open against the mattress. Harry nipped at Louis’ bottom lip then soothed his tongue over the slight divots that he left behind.

He hooked his fingers underneath Louis’ joggers and the waistband of his briefs. Harry rested back on his haunches as he slowly shimmed the clothing down Louis’ hips. Louis propped himself up on his elbows and lifted his hips so Harry could get the material over the swell of his bum. His jaw
drooped as Louis’ length rested heavy against his hipbone.

Once his clothes were discarded to the side, Louis sat upwards and pushed Harry onto his back with an impish glint in his eyes. Harry beamed up at Louis as he quickly made work of Harry, apparently more impatient than he was leading on. He bit against the knuckle of his index finger as the denim was stripped off his body. Louis didn’t waste much time before he was tugging off Harry’s briefs as well.

“What – Um,” Harry stammered as Louis hovered over him. He cleared his throat and ran a hand along Louis’ side, “How do you want to…?”

Louis kissed Harry’s cheek and rested onto his side, their legs instantly tangling together. He cupped Harry’s jaw and thumbed over his bottom lip. Harry blinked up at him and traced his fingers along the knots of Louis’ spine.

“Do you have a preference?” Louis quietly asked as he slowly kissed along Harry’s jawline.

Harry shook his head, “I like both.”

He could feel Louis’ mouth stretch into a grin against his skin. Louis nipped at Harry’s jawbone then leaned back, his palm flattening over the base of Harry’s jaw.

“Same,” Louis accentuated with a kiss to Harry’s mouth. He languidly dragged a hand down Harry’s sternum and mischievously smirked, “Could do both?”

Harry felt arousal pool inside his gut at the thought of getting to fuck and be fucked by Louis. He eagerly nodded leaned forward to kiss Louis. His palm lowered from the dip of Louis’ waist until it rested over curve of Louis’ arse cheek. Louis bucked his hip into Harry’s thigh as he kneaded the thick muscle.

“Fuck,” Louis whimpered, the skin between his eyebrows pinching together.

Harry pinched Louis’ skin, “Want you to ride my face.”

“Oh my god.”

Louis pushed himself upwards and Harry helped steady him as he carefully swung a knee over Harry’s chest. He cupped Louis’ waist and smoothly pulled his hips down. Harry’s mouth watered as Louis lowered himself, his pink rim hovering just above Harry’s lips. Louis trailed his hand along the top of Harry’s thigh before circling his fingers around the base of Harry’s length.

Harry moaned and his hips bucked upwards as he palmed Louis’ arse with both hands. He spread Louis open and poked his tongue out to trace a wet circle just around Louis’ rim. Louis made a needy whine above him, his thighs twitching around Harry’s chest. Harry shut his eyes and did the swirling motion again, barely brushing against Louis’ entrance.

“Fuck, Harry,” Louis whimpered, his hand slowly circling the head of Harry’s cock.

“Sweetheart,” Harry quietly exhaled against Louis’ skin.

Louis must have heard him because he throatily moaned and arched his spine forward, lips wrapping around the tip of Harry’s cock. Harry groaned and pulled Louis’ hips down further. Barely having to crane his neck upwards, Harry licked a heavy stripe over Louis’ rim. The sweet taste of honey bathed his taste buds, only spurring him on deepen his strokes.
Harry lapped along Louis in time with Louis’ mouth eagerly working over his length. He flicked his tongue over Louis’ rim, slowly feeling the tight muscle relax underneath every assured lap of his tongue. Harry pressed a wet kiss against Louis’ rim and listened to the whimpers Louis made in response.

“Feels so good, Love,” Louis breathily said.

Harry’s head slammed back into the duvet with a carnal moan at the petname that easily came out of Louis. Sparks of heat smattered throughout his body, setting every bit of him aflame with adoration and lust. He plumped his lips and kissed Louis’ rim once more before pointing his tongue and pressing it against Louis’ entrance.

Louis’ hips pressed down and Harry’s grip against his thighs tightened. Harry let out a muffled groan as Louis gradually began to swivel his hips. Slick was messily wetting his chin as Louis grinded against his face with deliberate movements.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Louis stuttered out when Harry’s tongue slipped past his rim.

Harry fucked his tongue inside of Louis. His fingers moved closer to Louis’ rim to keep him spread open. He leaned back and looked up at Louis’ sheening pink rim, the muscle fluttering when he blew cool air over it. Louis’ hand moved quicker along Harry’s length as Harry brought his mouth back to Louis’ hole.

His jaw was deliciously sore as he worked Louis open with his tongue. Fingernails dug into his thighs and Harry kept eating him out until Louis was reduced to a slur of helpless whimpers.

“Taste fucking perfect,” Harry worshipfully told him as he rubbed the pad of his thumb over Louis rim.

Louis incoherently whined and swallowed around Harry’s length. Harry’s eyes rolled to the back of his head as Louis’ throat constricted around his cock. He shallowly pumped his hips upwards and pressed the tip of his thumb past Louis’ rim.

“Shit,” Louis said through a raw voice. He shifted forward, “M’ gonna come if you don’t stop.”

Harry bit back a petulant whine as Louis climbed off his chest. He sat up and watched Louis get onto his hands and knees. Louis looked over his shoulder and expectantly raised his eyebrow. Harry huffed out a laugh and reached over his bed towards a brown box that held his supplies. He pulled out two condoms and a bottle of Astroglide.

Settling between Louis’ parted legs, Harry flicked open the cap of the bottle and poured out a dollop of lube onto his fingers. He rubbed the slick between his fingers, warming the cool liquid before wiping it over Louis’ rim. Louis pliantly hung his head and rocked his hips backwards.

Harry soothingly rubbed his left hand over Louis’ calf as he pressed his index finger past Louis’ rim. Louis faintly whimpered as Harry slipped into his heat, pausing at his second knuckle. He rubbed his thumb over Louis’ dainty ankle and then shallowly pumped his finger. When Louis’ rim was relaxed enough, Harry pressed his digit all the way forward until his third knuckle was flush against Louis’ arse.

“Alright?” Harry squeezed Louis’ ankle.

Louis was immediately nodding, “Yeah, keep going.”

Harry ducked his head forward and kissed Louis’ right arse cheek. He pulled his finger back and
corkscrewed it on the next push forward. Louis was a beautiful whimpering mess as he was fingered open. Every dip of Harry’s finger was met with a breathy whimper and a rock of his hips.

Pressing his index and middle finger together, Harry slowly pressed two fingers inside of Louis.

“Fucking hell,” Louis panted out as his body adjusted. “Your fingers are so bloody long.”

Harry hummed and hovered his mouth over Louis’ rim. He worked both fingers up to the third knuckle then paused. Darting out his tongue, Harry licked at Louis’ stretched rim. Louis’ response to his mouth was instantaneous, his weight slumping forward so he was rested flat against his chest.

“Fuck, yeah,” Louis brokenly moaned. His hands fisted into the duvet, “Just like that.”

Wrapping his free arm around Louis’ waist, Harry kept Louis’ arse in the air as his tongue and fingers opened him up. He crooked his fingers and massaged Louis’ walls with assured strokes. The pad of his middle finger traced over Louis’ prostate in a circular motion.

“Oh fucking fuck,” Louis sobbed into the crook of his arm. He pushed his hips back, “Hazza, Babu, I’m gonna come – Fuck. M’ gonna come if you don’t stop.”

Harry dragged his fingertip over Louis’ prostate with one last firm press. He slowly pulled his fingers out, dumbstruck at the sight of Louis’ rim adjusting around the ridges of his knuckles. Louis dropped flat on his stomach before he slowly rolled over. Harry grinned when he saw the dopey smile that stretched over Louis’ face. His eyes were glassy, making his irises impossibly bluer. Louis was beautiful and Harry was in love with him.

Resting back on his haunches, Harry picked up one of the foil packets. He ripped the sachet open and slipped the latex over his length. Louis wrapped his legs around Harry’s waist and watched as Harry drizzled lube onto his cock. Working a quick hand over his shaft, Harry made sure he was slick enough before shuffling flush against Louis.

Louis reached for Harry’s shoulders and pulled him down. Harry pressed their foreheads together and shakily exhaled as he aligned himself with Louis’ entrance. Pausing for just a moment, Harry plumped his lips and kissed the plush of Louis’ lips. Louis tangled his fingers into the curls that spilled down the nape of Harry’s neck and sighed into the kiss.

Harry gradually rocked his hips forwards, swallowing the whimper that slipped from Louis’ mouth. Louis tossed his head back and his lips created a perfect circle when the crown of Harry’s cock was fully inside of him. He tucked his head into the crook of Louis’ neck, reveling in the way Louis’ rim clenched around him as he carefully slid deeper.

Mouthing at the junction of Louis’ throat, Harry rested his left forearm beside Louis’ head. Harry brought his right hand to cup Louis’ waist and rubbed nonsensical patterns into his skin. He sucked a kiss into Louis’ neck, his hips smoothly grinding forward until he bottomed out.

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With his groin nestled against Louis’ arse, Harry pinched his eyes shut and did his best not to come on the spot. He focused on the way Louis raggedly breathed underneath him with his thighs tightly circled around Harry’s waist to keep him close. Harry raised his head to get a better look at Louis, staving off his own urge to pump his hips.

“Sweetheart,” Harry exhaled as he looked over Louis’ expression for any trace of pain. He kissed Louis’ cheek, “Okay?”

Louis opened his eyes and his gaze was slightly hazy before it locked onto Harry’s. He opened his mouth, but choked back a moan and tightened his hold in Harry’s hair.
“Need you to tell me you’re okay,” Harry nosed along Louis’ jawline.

“Shit,” Louis managed to get out, his voice rawer than Harry had ever heard. He nodded and tugged Harry’s head back upwards, “M’ okay.” Louis kissed him then let his head drop back, “Love you.”

Harry outright mewled and hungrily kissed Louis’ collarbone. He leaned backwards until just the head of his cock was inside. Just before he about to slip out, Harry snapped his hips forwards. Both men moaned in unison when Louis’ stretched rim met Harry’s balls.

“Fuck, I love you,” Harry gritted out.

He pushed himself upwards and steadied both of his hands against the mattress. Louis lolled his head to the side and wetly kissed Harry’s wrist. With the new leverage, Harry finally allowed himself to start fucking Louis open with deep thrusts.

Louis rocked his hips to meet every movement, a delirious litany of moans coming out of his mouth. Every drag of Harry’s cock along Louis’ walls felt euphoric. Harry slightly angled his hips to the right and felt his cockhead press into Louis’ prostate.

“Do that again,” Louis immediately wined, his hands sliding down Harry’s spine.

Harry bucked forward at the same angle and watched the way Louis arched his back in response. He had never seen anything lovelier than Louis when he began fall apart. His entire body reacted when he got closer to coming and Harry couldn’t imagine ever getting used to it. Louis blindly reached his hand out and whimpered as his fingers danced over the duvet. Pausing with his waist bracketing the swell of Louis’ arse, Harry tilted his head to the side.

“Want me to stop?”

Louis made a high-pitched whine and shook his head. He pushed himself up onto his forearm and grinned when his eyes settled on something off to the side. Harry frowned, but realization dawned on him as Louis reached to grab the discarded bottle of lube. He clenched his eyes shut and roughly exhaled.

Flicking open the cap Louis squeezed out a generous amount of lube onto his fingertips. When Louis reached around him and rubbed slick fingers over his entrance, Harry pushed back into the sensation. Louis thighs fell apart and he rocked down onto Harry’s shaft as he pressed his index finger past Harry’s rim.

“Oh, Fuck!” Harry loudly moaned, his forehead falling onto Louis’ chest.

Louis clenched his rim around Harry’s cock and slowly slid his finger all the way inside. Harry was instantly overwhelmed by the sensation, feeling fuller than he had ever been before. He didn’t know where to focus, instincts in overdrive from simultaneously fucking and being fucked by Louis.

“That’s it, Petal,” Louis cooed when Harry’s rim began to relax around his finger.

Harry whined into Louis’ neck as he was gradually stretched open. He stuck to deep grinds of his hips, wanting to stay inside of Louis while he got fingered open. Louis didn’t spend much time pumping his first finger before he added the second. Harry collapsed down onto his forearms and stopped moving as his body tried to adjust.

“Lou,” Harry wetly panted, their chests flush together. He wrapped both hands around Louis’ back and held him tight, “ Fucking amazing.” Harry circled his hips, “Feels so fucking amazing.”
“Christ,” Louis whined, his fingers quickening their pace. “Never done this before,” He rolled his hips downwards and weakly moaned, “Fuckin’ love it.”


Louis let out a carnal noise and crooked his fingers. He barely passed over Harry’s prostate, but Harry had to hold his breath and force himself not to come yet. Every nerve in his body was pressuring him to just let go and he would have if he didn’t want to sit on Louis’ cock so badly.

“So – Shit, I’m close,” Harry stammered. He dragged his nails along Louis’ ribs, “You have to stop – Oh, God. Fuck. Sweetie, stop or I’m gonna come.”

Louis sounded almost mournful as he slowly pulled his fingers past Harry’s rim. He rocked his hips backwards and then roughly slammed forward, his balls smacking against Louis’ arse. Harry felt slick drip between his thighs when he clenched around nothing, cock still deeply buried inside of Louis’ slick heat.

Harry pulled out and wrapped a hand around the base of his cock to stop himself from coming. He hissed as he pulled off the condom, tossing it over the side of the bed without much thought. Louis watched him through hooded eyelids and pushed himself to a kneeling position. He cupped Harry’s jaw with his clean hand and kissed him, instantly parting his lips. Harry whimpered as his tongue dipped inside of Louis’ mouth.

He angled his head to the side and reached for Louis’ neglected cock. Harry hungrily swallowed Louis’ moan when he started to jack him off with a firm grip. His thumb pressed into Louis’ slit in time with his tongue flicking against the roof of Louis’ mouth.

“Wanna fuck you,” Louis wetly exhaled against Harry’s lips.

“Yeah,” Harry quickly nodded, fully unabashed by how bad he wanted it. He kissed Louis once more before pulling back, “How d’you want me?”

“ Fucking hell,” Louis whined, pushing Harry’s hand off his cock. He huffed out a laugh, “Could come just from you saying that.”

Harry cheekily grinned, “Would rather you come inside me, though.”

Louis glared at Harry, “Not helping.”

“Sorry,” Harry rolled his eyes, his tone suggesting anything but.

Foregoing a sarcastic answer, Louis shuffled forward and gently pushed Harry backwards.

“On your side.”

Harry easily followed the direction, raising his outer leg when Louis gripped his calf. Louis rested Harry’s leg over his shoulder and straddled the thigh that was flat against the mattress. His thigh stretched as Louis experimentally leaned forwards.

“Does this hurt?” Louis quietly asked, genuine concern flickering over his expression.

“No,” Harry honestly answered. He rested his upper body weight on his forearm and reached for Louis’ waist, “I’ve gotten pretty flexible from yoga.”
“Christ,” Louis moaned, “You’re a fuckin’ minx.”

Harry barely bit back a pleased noise as Louis slid a condom over his length. He slicked himself with more lube then gripped one hand on Harry’s raised thigh and the other around the base of his cock. Feeling the head of Louis’ cock brush over his entrance, Harry sucked his bottom lip into his mouth. Harry tightened his hand along Louis’ waist and pinched his eyes shut as Louis pushed inside of him.

His rim stretched around Louis’ cockhead and it set off a dull burn that was just on the right side of being blissful rather than painful. Louis’ eyes bore into his own as he slipped into Harry’s heat, his eyebrows pinched together in concentration. Air punched out of his diaphragm when was Louis fully bottomed out.

Louis ran his hand over Harry’s side and remained still as Harry adjusted around him. Harry’s thighs trembled, a strand of whimpers tumbling from his lips on their own accord. His chest ballooned and he deeply inhaled, holding his breath for a moment before he exhaled out of his moth.

“You look so gorgeous like this, Petal,” Louis cooed. He tilted his head to the side and kissed Harry’s calf, “Feel so gorgeous like this.”

Harry’s fingers roughly gripped the duvet, “Oh, fuck.”

“I love you so much,” Louis told him. He squeezed Harry’s thigh, “Do you have any idea how important you are to me?”

Every word out of Louis’ mouth helped Harry relax, his body starting to welcome Louis between his legs. He vigorously nodded, not trusting his own voice to manage how much Louis meant to him.

When Louis slowly swiveled his hips, a sharp whine slipped out of Harry.

“M’ gonna move, Petal,” Louis whispered, kissing Harry’s skin once more. “Gonna make you feel so good.”

Harry eagerly nodded, wanting to take anything that Louis would give him. He already felt incredible and Louis hadn’t even truly started to fuck into him. Louis pumped his hips backwards and then shallowly canted them forwards. The head of his cock dragged against Harry’s walls, eliciting electric sparks to surge throughout his body.

Louis’ fingertips dug into Harry’s skin as he built up a rhythm. When the tip of Louis’ cock nailed his prostate, Harry’s voice shot out halfway through a guttural moan. Heat quickly built inside his gut and he was surprised that he had even managed to last as long as he did.

“I want – Oh, fuck,” Harry choked out on a particularly rough slam of Louis’ hips.

“What d’you want?” Louis breathlessly asked. He deeply ground his hips and pulled Harry in by his thigh. He nipped at Harry’s calf, “What was that, Love?”

“Fucking hell,” Harry tossed his head back. He moved his hand from Louis’ waist circled his cock, “Wanna ride you.”

Louis instantly pulled out and pinched his eyes shut. Harry’s whimper echoed inside the studio, sounding obscene even to his own ears. He rolled falt on his back and reached between his legs. Pressing two fingers inside of himself, Harry let out a relieved noise.

“You – Fuck, Bab, you can’t just say that,” Louis gritted out. He opened his eyes when he saw Harry eagerly fucking himself with his fingers he made an affronted groan. “Oh no, you don’t,”
Louis wrapped his hand around Harry’s wrist and unceremoniously pulled his fingers out.

Harry kicked his legs out, “I need to come.” He petulantly pouted up at Louis, “Fuck, I need to come so bad.”

“You’ll come, Love,” Louis reassured and sat at the head of the bed. He patted his lap, “Gonna come on my cock, yeah?”

Harry feebly got to his knees and straddled Louis’ thighs. He reached behind him and gripped the base of Louis’ length. Louis ran his fingers along Harry’s waist and was looking up at him with blown own pupils. Harry’s jaw went slack as he sank down onto Louis’ cock.

Louis wrapped both of his arms around Harry’s waist and pulled him down as he bucked his hips upwards. Harry gripped both sides of Louis’ neck and kissed him, openly moaning into his mouth. He sucked on the tip if Louis’ tongue and swiveled his hips into a tight figure eight.

With the tip of Louis’ cock pressed against his prostate, Harry felt his orgasm unfurl. His thighs clenched around Louis’ and he lolled his head back as his cock twitched between their bodies. Louis sucked a kiss into his throat as Harry clenched around him.

“Fucking shit,” Louis moaned as his cock jerked inside of Harry.

Louis’ cock pulsated against his prostate and there was a moment where Harry didn’t see anything but white. He fell forwards and Louis was immediately stroking his back. His pulse rabbited inside his neck and he locked his arms around Louis’ neck until he fully came down from his orgasm.

After a minute or so, Harry lifted himself off of Louis. He collapsed onto the bed, completely unbothered that they duvet was filthy and needed a good wash. Harry sleepily blinked up at Louis and pinched his waist. A loose-lipped smile stretched over Louis’ lips before he tucked himself along Harry’s side.

Harry wrapped him in his arms and turned so their chests were flushed together. Louis hooked his thigh over Harry’s hip and nuzzled into Harry’s neck.

“You’re amazing,” Harry whispered as his fingers lightly danced over Louis’ back.

Louis pursed his lips and kissed Harry’s neck. Harry sighed into the delicate touch and closed his eyes.

It was quiet, no louder than a whisper, but Harry heard Louis murmur, “You’re my favorite person and I love you.”

Harry’s heart swelled inside his chest and he held Louis closer, deciding that they could wait to clean themselves up. Louis was everything to him. Ever since he was young, Harry knew that if he was to fall in love, that person would be it for him. Once he gave his heart to someone else, it would belong to them and he would never be free to belong solely to himself. Lying in bed, intertwined with Louis, Harry knew that giving Louis his heart was the best decision he could have ever made.

“You’re my favorite person and I love you.”

****

“Could I have a moment, Harry?”

Harry halted just before leaving the classroom, eyebrows pinched together before he slowly
backtracked towards Mrs. Sanchez. He glanced out the doorway and saw Louis waiting for him with his back against the parallel wall. When Louis grinned at him and took a step forward, Harry held up his index finger and shot his boyfriend an apologetic smile.

“Sure,” Harry somewhat drawled out, shoving his hands into the pockets of his jeans. He took one more look at Louis and then turned his attention towards the middle-aged woman stood at the front of the room.

His film professor grinned at him, kind smile lines pinching her olive skin. Mrs. Sanchez circled her desk and rested back against the wooden surface, her arms folding over her chest. She gestured for Harry to sit down, so he awkwardly shuffled back to his seat. He pulled out a chair and clasped his hands together on top of the desk.

“I went through your submitted reel,” She began her eyes calculatedly watching Harry’s expression. He circled his finger around the platinum ring nestled on his middle finger. Harry waited for her to continue, unable to read if she was pleased with his final submission or disappointed.

“There was a new subject in your material and I have to admit,” Mrs. Sanchez threw in a small laugh, “I was a bit surprised to see something more personal from you.”

Harry frowned at that, slightly bristled by the idea that his previous work wasn’t deemed to be personal enough when he had spent years of filming and editing. He diverted his gaze and uncomfortably shifted in his seat.

“I meant that as a compliment, Mr. Styles,” She told him and then pushed herself off the desk.

“Thank you, Professor,” Harry responded, unsure what else to say.

Mrs. Sanchez lifted a messenger bag from behind the desk and Harry sat up straighter in his seat when she pulled out a thick white envelope.

“Your reel circulated between short dramas and documentary style shooting. Both styles were remarkably executed and exemplify your depth as an aspiring filmmaker,” She grinned at him. Mrs. Sanchez glanced at the envelope and tilted it from side to side, “As it would seem, I am not the only person who thinks so.”

Harry’s fingers gripped the lip of the desk, heart jack-hammering inside his chest as she stepped closer. His stomach felt as if it was turning in on itself and his palms started to sweat. There was a brief moment where Harry thought there was a high possibility of him throwing up. He clenched his fist and tried to ground himself when his professor continued to speak.

“I took the liberty of sending your reel to an old colleague of mine, along with a recommendation for an internship,” Mrs. Sanchez passed him the envelope.

His hands shook as he flipped the envelope over, one of his palms immediately slapping over his mouth when he read the bold company name in the return address. He couldn’t bring himself to even open the envelope, eyes locked on the engraved emblem. Mrs. Sanchez laughed, barely pulling his attention away.

“Congratulations, Harry.”

****

Louis was pacing outside Harry’s classroom. His hands tightly gripped his waist as he stared at the
empty doorway. He considered eavesdropping after the first three minutes, but figured that was crossing some sort of line. So, he decided on pacing. It had been about ten minutes since Harry was called back inside by his film professor and Louis’ imagination had started to run wild.

There was an embarrassingly far too recognizable sound of scuffing of boots that made him snap his head towards the classroom. Louis stopped his restless steps and anxiously tugged on his bottom lip as Harry slowly walked into view. His eyes were a red rimmed and the tip of his nose was pink. Louis felt his heart drop and he immediately rushed forward to cup Harry’s jaw, eyes frantically darting over Harry’s features.

“Did she make you cry?” He incredulously asked, already imaging six different ways to make a body disappear. Louis thumbed at Harry’s cheek, “M’ gonna kick her arse. I don’t care if she’s an old lady, I’ll still kick her arse.” He rocked upwards and pecked Harry’s nose, “Niall would definitely help, too.”

Harry wetly laughed and shook his head, “No arse kicking today.”

Louis frowned, “What happened?” He made a small whimper when Harry sniffed, “You’re all blotchy and sad looking.”

“Cheers, Sweetheart,” Harry snorted.

“Harry,” Louis whined.

“I got an internship after graduation,” Harry disbelieving said. He scrubbed a hand over his face, “Sanchez sent my reel in and recommended me.” Harry looked at Louis with wide eyes, “Lou, I got an internship at Heyday Films.”

“Wait,” Louis’ eyebrows furrowed together, “What’s that?”

Harry laughed and looked at Louis with the same fond expression he always made when Louis didn’t understand a film reference. Louis impatiently pinched Harry’s side and anxiously shifted his weight from foot to foot.

“You’ve heard of Harry Potter and I Am Legend, yeah?”

Louis’ nose wrinkled, “Uh, obviously?”

Harry meaningfully widened his eyes and rolled his hand in the air. When realization hit, Louis wasn’t sure if the sound that came out of mouth was a yelp or a sob. He jumped into Harry’s arms and almost knocked him to the ground. Lucky enough for Harry, he had four months of dealing with Louis’ brash movements. He instantly caught him.

“Babu!” Louis loudly exclaimed, his voice reverberating throughout the nearly empty hallway.

Harry laughed and circled his arms underneath Louis’ thighs to keep him upright. Louis smattered kisses over Harry’s neck, feeling incredibly filled with pride. He leaned back and cradled Harry’s face in his hands.

“M’ so proud of you,” Louis told him with a significantly quieter timbre. He kissed Harry and sighed into his mouth before pulling back, “So fuckin’ proud.”

“Thank you,” Harry beamed at him, ducking forward for one more kiss before carefully setting Louis down.
Louis excitedly shifted his weight back and forth, clasping Harry’s hand in his own. He squeezed Harry’s fingers, “You are definitely getting your arse played with when we get home.”

Harry raised an eyebrow, “Home?”

The implication was enough for Louis to embarrassingly blush. Since they started officially dating, Harry’s studio practically became his second home. More nights than not, Louis slept there and he even had his own drawer in Harry’s wardrobe. Last week, Louis bought groceries and instead of bringing them back to his flat, they all went in Harry’s fridge and pantry.

“Hey,” Harry quietly drawled out when Louis didn’t respond. He pulled them to a stop gently smiled at Louis, “You called my studio, home.”

“Was a bit weird, wasn’t it?” Louis awkwardly laughed.

Harry shook his head, “Not at all.” He arched his back and kissed Louis’ forehead, “I liked it.”

Louis gradually smiled, feeling butterflies excitedly thrum in his stomach. He grinned at Harry, “Yeah?”

“Definitely,” Harry pecked him on the lips.

“Alright,” Louis giddily said and started to walk again, “Let’s go home.”

****

With a paper bag in one hand and Niall trailing one step behind, Louis pushed open the door to Manchester Blooms. He looked over the floor and frowned when he didn’t immediately see Harry at the register.

“Where’s Boyfriend?” Niall brashly asked, plowing through the doorway with more fanfare than necessary.

Louis’ nose scrunched, “Y’know it’s a bit weird that you call ‘im that.”

Niall waved him off, “He loves it.”

“Has he ever actually said that?”

Niall grinned at him and smacked his lips, “Nope.”

“Not to mention it’s a bit misleading,” Louis folded his arms over his chest, “Seeing as how he’s not your boyfriend.”

“You’re just sore because he called me cute.”

Louis’ head snapped towards the newly added voice.

“Boyfriend!” Niall happily chirped before he scampered over towards the back of the shop.

Harry laughed and closed the door to the office behind him. He opened his arms just in time for Niall to barrel into them, hugging being a relatively new development in their friendship. Louis still wasn’t sure how he felt about it. It might have had something to do with Niall telling Harry that if he was gay, he would date him. It definitely had something to do with Harry agreeing that he would date Niall, too.
Not that Louis was still bitter. It had been a week, after all.

“Oh, okay,” Louis grumbled as he strode across the floor. He unceremoniously dragged Niall off of Harry and wrapped his arms around Harry’s waist, “Mine.”

“Calm your tits, mate,” Niall rolled his eyes.

Harry squeezed Louis’ waist and kissed the top of his head, “Hello.”

Louis grinned up at him and kissed underneath Harry’s chin, “Hi, Babu.”

“Disgusting,” Niall snorted under his breath before strolling towards the greenhouse. “I’ll be out ‘ere with the plants.”

When Niall disappeared through the double doors, Harry pulled Louis in and kissed him. Louis sighed into the kiss, gently nipping Harry’s bottom lip before stepping back.

“It’s not that I don’t love seeing you,” Harry drawled out as he slowly rocked them from side to side, “But…What’re you doing here?”

Louis felt a light blush creep along his neck as he took a step back and passed Harry the bag. Harry’s eyebrows pinched together as he peeked inside, slightly resembling a curious kitten. A fond yet confused smile stretched his lips when he pulled out a paperback book.

The cover was slightly worn since it was a hand-me-down book, the black cover faded to a matted grey. Louis had nearly passed over the title when he was thumbing through books, but he did a double take when he read the author. Printed in neon yellow, was the name, Charles Bukowski.

“There’s a bookshop down the road and Niall wanted to stop in,” Louis scratched the back of his neck, looking away from Harry’s intent gaze. “I found it and – I mean, you have his other book, yeah?” He rambled on, slightly stumbling over his words. Louis knotted his hands together, “I saw it and remembered the name from the first time I was at yours.”

Harry looked down at the book cover of *Ham on Rye* and then back at Louis. He let out a breathless laugh and cupped Louis’ jaw. The way Harry kissed him was different than the first kiss. There was a certain amount of adoration he poured out into the kiss and Louis felt every ounce of it. He smiled into the kiss and rested his hands against Harry’s chest.

When Harry pulled back, he was toothily beaming at Louis. He kissed Louis’ left cheek, then his right, and then a quick peck to his nose. Louis couldn’t help the small giggle that slipped out at the affectionate gestures.

“Thank you,” Harry quietly said. He wrapped Louis into a hug, his chin hooking on top of Louis’ head, “It means a lot to me.”

Louis hugged Harry back and tried to laugh it off, “If I knew you’d get so worked up over a book, I would have done this months ago.”

Harry snorted and shook his head, “No you wouldn’t.”

“No,” Louis agreed on a laugh, “I wouldn’t.”

“You did it because you love me,” Harry sang-song.

Louis groaned and tried to push Harry away, his cheeks bright crimson. He rolled his eyes and rested
his hands on his hips.

“I’m fond of you,” Louis corrected him.

“Very fond,” Harry impishly grinned.

Louis groaned, “Right. Last time I ever do something nice for you.”

Niall popped his head back in the shop, “Is it safe to come back in?”

“Louis might kill me, I can’t quite tell,” Harry mused aloud. He gestured for Niall to come all the way in, “Probably best you’re here to witness.”

Louis defensively pulled his shoulders back, “Niall would be on my side.”

Niall easily agreed, “S’true, mate.”

Harry made an affronted noise, “I thought we had something here, Niall?”

“We do,” Niall assured. He pointed between Harry and himself, “You’re like me mistress and Lou’s the husband.”

Louis let out a sharp cackle at Harry’s insulted expression. His head lolled back as he continued to laugh, hands rested on the top of his stomach. Niall was quick to join in, pointing at Harry’s petulant pout.

“Alright,” Harry clapped his hands together and cut them off, “I’m kicking you both out.” He shooed them towards the door, barely biting back a smile, “I have filing to do and you’re both horrible people.”

Niall schooled his expression and held his hand over his heart, “Sorry it came to this, lover of mine.”

Louis groaned with disgust, “Fucks sake, Niall!” He swatted Niall upside his head, “Never call Harry lover again.”

“Oh!” Harry laughed out, “But he can call me his mistress and that’s fine with you?”

“On that note,” Niall grinned, completely unperturbed, “I’ll be waitin’ outside.”

Louis shook his head and looked back at Harry when the door closed. Harry was deliberately frowning, his bottom lip obscenely jutted out. He rolled his eyes and stepped forward, kissing the pout off of Harry’s mouth.

“See you tomorrow, yeah?” Louis tugged on Harry’s work apron.

“Yeah,” Harry nodded. He bashfully tacked on, “And, um, thank you. For the book.”

Louis smiled and kissed Harry one more time and back-tracked towards the door, “I love you.”

Even though they already had told each other the three words an obscene amount of times the previous two weeks, the sentiment still sent a warm trill throughout Louis’ veins. He didn’t know if there would ever be a point where they wouldn’t make his heart stutter. Judging by the crinkles that formed along Harry’s eyes, he seemed to not be the only one.

“I love you, too,” Harry grinned, both hands tightly clasped around the book.
Louis fought off a giddy laugh, just barely, and left the shop. Niall was waiting for him and they easily fell in step as they wandered back towards their flat.

“Hey, Lou?”

He looked over at Niall’s slightly apprehensive expression and tilted his head, “Yeah?”

Niall glanced over his shoulder towards the shop and then back at Louis, “What’re you gonna do after graduation?”

“Hopefully get a fuckin’ job,” Louis snorted.

“No, I mean,” Niall thumbed over his shoulder, “With Harry.”

Louis frowned, “What’d you mean?”

“What are you and Harry gonna do?”

Louis spat out a surprised laugh, “I dunno…Have sex? Probably meet each other’s families since they’ll both be there.”

Niall groaned, “I don’t mean right after the bloody ceremony, dickhead.”

“You’re not making any sense, mate,” Louis cocked his head to the side, their steps gradually slowing.

“Fucks sake,” Niall stopped walking and crossed his arms. “For the love of God, tell me you two have talked about your relationship after graduation.”

“What’s there to talk about?” Louis’ nose scrunched. He held out his hands, “We both graduate. We love each other.” Louis shrugged, “What else is there to do?”

Niall looked at him as if he had just spoken complete gibberish.

“What?” Louis defensively asked.

“Are you gonna move to London with him?”

Louis’ eyes widened, “Um.”

Niall narrowed his eyes and pointed towards the direction of the shop, “Go back.”

Louis incredulously laughed, “What?”

“March your arse back to that shop and talk about it,” Niall sternly said.

“M’ not gonna talk to him about it right now!” Louis shook his head. He cut his hands through the air, “It can wait until he’s not surrounded by flowers.”

Niall cocked his eyebrow, “You have to talk about it.”

“I know that,” Louis grumbled and turned to start walking. When Niall didn’t automatically start walking, he sighed, “Niall, I will, okay?”

Niall hesitantly started to walk, “Ask him after class tomorrow.”

“Why are you so set on this outta nowhere?” Louis groaned.
“Cos,” Niall shrugged, “I’ve never seen you look at someone like that.” He elbowed Louis in the side, “I don’t want you to cock it up.”

“That was oddly nice,” Louis chuckled. He elbowed Niall back, “Thanks, Ni.”

“I mean, if you fuck it up, I can’t have him in my life anymore either.”

“And this moment is over.”

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Harry was lazily dragging his fingertip over the desk’s surface when he heard a huffy exhale from in front of him. A smile twitched the edge of his mouth, already knowing who the sound belonged to. He slowly looked up to see Louis pouting and dolefully stubbing the toe of his trainer against the ground.

“I’m mad at you.”

A shocked laugh came out of Harry and is eyebrows shot upwards. Louis pulled out his chair and sat down, his arms immediately folding over his chest.

“That so?” Harry angled his body towards Louis.

“Yes,” Was all Louis had to offer him.

Harry hummed, “And what exactly have I done?”

Louis covered his face with his hands and dramatically slumped over. He responded to Harry, but it came out as a muffled sound because of his palms. Harry glanced towards the front of the room, noticing that Mr. Aoki was getting settled behind his desk. Harry subtly put his hand on Louis’ knee and scooted closer towards him.

“Want to try that one more time?” Harry lowered his voice to ask.

There was a slight grunt from Louis, but he didn’t move.

“Hey, Sweetie,” Harry squeezed Louis’ thigh, genuine concern starting to fill him. “What’s going on?”

Louis uncovered his face and turned to look at Harry. His eyes were impeccably sad and it felt like Harry had been punched in the gut. He gently rubbed his hand over Louis’ thigh, waiting for him to say something.

“You’re gonna go to London.”

Harry slightly reared back at that, his jaw slackening. Louis tugged on his bottom lip and then looked towards the front of the room. Mr. Aoki began their review for the impending final, but Harry’s attention was fully focused on Louis. He kept his hand on Louis’ thigh, his thumb rubbing mindless patterns into his leg.

The thing was, Harry had thought a lot about what was going to happen after they graduated. Whereas Harry had a set plan of where he was going to be and what he was going to do, Louis didn’t. A part of him just hoped that Louis would go with him to London, but he didn’t feel comfortable asking. They were in such a good place and Harry didn’t want to ruin it.

As the lecture droned on, Louis kept his attention on the review, but Harry could tell that he wasn’t
actually paying attention. His lip remained worried between his teeth and he was nearly rigid by the time class finished. Harry only let go of Louis’ thigh when they were dismissed and Louis made a move to stand.

Harry followed Louis out of class and didn’t say anything until they were outside of the building. He gently wrapped his hand around Louis’ bicep and pulled him to the side. Louis was looking down at his shoes, hands anxiously wringing together. Harry slid his hand from Louis’ arm and intertwined their fingers together.

“Lou,” Harry started, waiting for him to look up. When he did, Harry helplessly shrugged, “I – That job is my dream.”

“I know,” Louis sighed. He scrubbed a hand over his face, “And I want you to go, Hazza.” Louis dropped his hand feebly squeezed Harry’s hand, “I really do.”

“But – Is, um. Is it that you don’t?” He winced at his own ineloquence. “I mean…Do you not have interest in living there?”

“You,” Louis darted his eyes to the side, “You’d want me there?”

“Of course,” Harry instantly said, feeling even more confused that Louis would have gotten a different impression.

Louis met Harry’s eyes again, a bit of sadness edged away.

“You never said that,” Louis mumbled.

“Honestly,” Harry gently laughed and shook his head, “I didn’t think I had to.”

“Words of affirmation, remember?” Louis humorlessly laughed, his cheeks tinged pink. “But,” He briefly cut himself off, “How would that even work?”

Harry leaned against the building’s siding, “What do you mean?”

“Who would I even live with?” Louis slightly flailed his hands out. “I don’t know anyone else going there.”

“You could live with me?” Harry frowned, thinking that it was the obvious decision.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Louis scoffed.

He didn’t want to admit it, but Louis’ words stung. It must have shown though because Louis stepped closer and cupped Harry’s jaw.

“Sorry,” Louis quietly said, his thumb gently running over Harry’s cheek. “But, that’s a big step.”

Harry slightly narrowed his eyes, “Lou, we basically already live together.”

“But – That’s different,” Louis stammered.

“How is it different?” Harry laughed. He started counting off on his fingers, “We sleep in the same bed about six out of seven nights a week, your clothes are at mine, you spend time at the studio when I’m not even there, oh, and you even called it, home.”

Louis fidgeted with the hem of his Henley, “Well, when you say it like that.”
“Is it that you wouldn’t want to live together?” Harry hesitantly asked.

“That’s not it,” Louis’ eyes widened. He sighed, “It’s just not what normal couples usually do after not dating all that long.”

Harry rolled his eyes, “They also probably didn’t end up dating after faking a relationship.” He shrugged, “Hate to break it to you, but we’re not exactly normal, Sweetheart.”

That made a smile lift the corner of Louis’ mouth.

“Also,” Harry lowered his voice, “I don’t start my internship until September.” He ran his hands over Louis’ shoulders, “That’s almost five months from now, Love.” Harry gave him a small squeeze, “We don’t have to have everything sorted right this minute. We have time.”

Louis nodded and Harry could see the tension leaving his body. He wrapped his arms around Harry’s middle and tucked his head into the crook of Harry’s neck. Harry hugged him back, his fingers soothingly carded through Louis’ hair.

“Sorry I was a bit crazy,” Louis mumbled.

Harry huffed out a laugh, “You say that like it’s a new concept.”

Louis snorted and let his arms drop. He looked up at Harry and pursed his lips. Harry grinned and kissed him. When their lips separated, Harry gave Louis one last reassuring squeeze before taking a step back. He held out his hand and instead of interlacing their fingers together, Louis hauled it over his shoulder and wrapped his arm around Harry’s waist. Harry bit back a comment about Louis being needy, figuring that he probably needed the reassurance just as much. They walked back to Harry’s studio like that, hips bumping and easier conversation flowing between them.

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“Oh my god, I look complete shit. Harry, I can’t do this. Fake an illness for me.”

“It’s a phone call. It doesn’t matter what you look like right now.”

“She might be able to sense it.”

“How the hell would my mum be able to sense that?”

Louis whined and didn’t bother to stop the pacing he had been doing for the past ten minutes. Harry was straddling one of the chairs at his kitchen table, his chin propped on the backing while he stared at Louis.

“I love you so much,” Harry paused as he sat upright, “But I’m going to need you to calm down.”

“Calm down?!” Louis incredulously crowed. “I’m about to meet –”

Harry interjected to correct him, “Talk to.”

“The mother of my Babu –”

“Aww, that was cute.”

Louis barreled on, “And you want me to calm down?!”

Harry’s mobile shrilly rung from its spot on the table and Louis’ eyes darted towards it as if it was a
ticking bomb. He yelped and rushed over to Harry’s chair. Harry sighed and picked up his mobile, eyes on Louis as he answered.

“Hello, Mum.”

Louis pinched Harry’s side and gestured for him to turn around. Harry fixed him with a deadpan glare, but spun around so Louis could sit in his lap. Louis straddled Harry and hooked his ankles together underneath the seat. He watched Harry’s expression as he talked to his mum.

The corner of Harry’s mouth twitched, “Yeah, he’s here.”

There was a very prominent feeling in Louis’ gut that he was going to throw up.

“Hold on, I’ll put you on speaker,” Harry said as he pulled the mobile from his ear. He reassuringly turned the call onto speakerphone, “Can you hear me?”

A feminine voice chirped from the other line, “Yes, I can.” She gently laughed, “Louis, dear, are you there?”

“Yes, I am,” Louis nervously said. He tilted his head to the side, “Nice to, um, sort of meet you, Mrs. Twist.”

“Please call me Anne,” She encouraged with a friendly lilt in her voice. “Mrs. Twist is far too formal for my baby’s first boyfriend.”

Harry gaped at the phone as if it had personally burned down the crops of his ancestors. Louis cackled a sharp laugh, instantly feeling more comfortable.

“Mum!” Harry yelped as a blush painted his neck. “You – You can’t just say that to people!”

“Please keep saying that to people,” Louis tacked on.

Harry shot him a glare.

“You sound lovely,” Anne cooed and a part of Louis wondered if she was just relieved that he was a real person. “Oh! She quickly exclaimed, “Will your family still be coming with us to dinner after the ceremony? I want to finalize the reservation.”

Louis tried not to get distracted by the fond expression stretching over Harry’s face as he replied.

“We will,” He assured her. Louis toyed with one of Harry’s curls, “Thank you for inviting us,” Louis threw in a small laugh, “I know me mum is dying to meet everyone.”

“Of course, dear!” Anne gushed. “Harry,” She cleared her throat, “I wasn’t sure if you wanted me to extend an invite to –”

“Absolutely not,” Harry cut off his mum.

Louis eyes widened at the sudden curtness, but he had a good guess as to who it was about. Harry flashed him an apologetic smile and took the call off speaker phone. He tapped Louis’ thigh and Louis got the hint to get up. He watched as Harry walked out to the hall, his hand tightly balled by his side. Louis worried his bottom lip as the door shut behind him.

Ever since his conversation with Gemma, Louis had been waiting for the right time to bring up Harry’s father. When Harry walked back into the studio about five minutes later, he figured that would be the moment.
“Sorry,” Harry mumbled, shuffling over towards the couch.

Louis gingerly walked over and sat next to Harry. He cupped his hands underneath Harry’s legs and lifted them so they rested over his lap. Harry let out a heavy sigh and sank back into the couch, his eyes locked on the coffee table.

“Was she asking about your dad?”

He saw the muscle in Harry’s jaw clench as he brusquely nodded, gaze remaining on the table.

“Harry,” Louis carefully started, “What – Um, what happened with your dad?”

There was a heavy silence between them and for a moment, Louis thought that Harry wasn’t going to respond.

“I never got along with him growing up,” Harry quietly said. He fidgeted with his ring and shrugged, “I didn’t like the things he wanted me to like.”

Louis soothingly rubbed his hand over Harry’s leg, “Like what?”


“Was he always like that?”

“Well, I’ve always been like this,” Harry gestured to himself. He shrugged, “So, maybe? I probably just didn’t notice it until I was a bit older.”

Louis slowly nodded and waited for Harry to keep talking.

“He’s – He’s just –” Harry slightly flailed his hands out. He finally looked back at Louis and scrubbed a hand over his face, “He’s a fucking horrible person, Lou.” Harry humorlessly laughed, “You know, my dad wouldn’t even let me wear what I wanted to for the longest time.”

Louis frowned, “Wouldn’t let you?”

Harry nodded, “One time I had a pink jumper – Mind you I was only about thirteen – And he told me pink was a faggy color.”

“The fuckin’ cunt,” Louis spat out, unable to help getting riled up.

“Exactly,” The corner of Harry’s mouth twitched upwards. He sighed, “Just a lot of things he said fucked with me, you know?” Harry traced his fingertip over Loui’s hand, “Used to be a lot more optimistic I think. About people, I mean.”

Louis reassuringly squeezed Harry’s thigh, “I’d be a bit surprised if you were after that.”

“I don’t want to be this, like, jaded person,” Harry earnestly said, his voice nearly a whisper. He rested his temple against the back of the couch, “And I think I’ve gotten better since – Well. Since you came around.”

Louis’ heart seized inside his chest and he scooted even closer.

“I think you’re pretty amazing,” Louis murmured. He rested his head on the couch and gave Harry a small smile, “Y’know, if it’s any consolation.”

“Thanks,” Harry squeezed Louis’ hand over his leg.
Louis paused for a minute before he asked, “Do you talk to him at all?”

“No,” Harry snorted. “Well,” He rolled his eyes, “The only time he talks to me now is if he needs something.”

His eyebrows furrowed together, “What’d you mean?”

“Robin, Mum’s husband, has always been pretty well off,” Harry gestured towards the studio. “I mean,” He let out a sharp laugh, “He bought this fucking building.”

“Right,” Louis’ nose scrunched, “Forgot about that bit.”

Harry nodded, “And my dad knows that.” His expression soured, “And he knows that Robin would buy me something if I asked.” Harry winked at Louis, “He’s quite generous when he wants to win over his wife’s son.”

“Christ,” Louis exhaled.

“Yeah.”

He remembered something Harry had said a while back, his head tilting to the side as Harry’s words flashed over his thought process.

“Is – When we went to that wine bar,” Louis began, “Is that why you said people don’t want to know people unless they’re getting something from it?”

“Yeah,” Harry looked down at his lap. “Dad only pretends to care now because he wants financial help.”

Louis’ mind raced over Harry’s words, his gut unnervingly clenching and twisting. He felt impossibly heartbroken that Harry ever had to deal with somebody being cruel to him. Someone who should have been there to support him and let Harry grow into the incredible person he was meant to be, completely altered Harry’s life by diminishing what was unique about him. An innate part of Louis wanted to protect Harry from the world, keep him in their field of daffodils where people couldn’t hurt him.

He shook his head, unsure what to say other than, “I’m so sorry, Hazza.”

“It’s okay,” Harry laced their fingers together, “I’ve kind of come to terms with it.” He squeezed Louis’ hand in his own and carefully smiled at him, “Got you now, don’t I?”

Louis brought their hands to his mouth and kissed the back of Harry’s hand. He nodded and pursed his lips once more. Harry sighed and shut his eyes, apparently content to laze on the couch that afternoon. Louis settled into the couch and kept running his thumb over Harry’s hand.

“Always will, Petal.”

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28/5/17

A sea of black gowns lined uniformed rows inside of Whitworth Hall. Ceremonial trumpets accompanied the never ending list of graduates as they filtered across the ornately decorated stage. With a scroll of paper already gripped between his hands, Harry was craning his neck to get a better look at the podium.
“Louis Tomlinson.”

Harry jumped from his seat and hooked two fingers over his bottom lip. A loud wolf-whistle pierced the auditorium and Harry beamed when Louis’ neck instantly snapped in his direction. Louis ducked his head down, but Harry didn’t miss his blush that was caught on a suspended monitor. He beamed as Louis shook hands with the head of his college and grabbed a white scroll in return. When Louis shuffled off the stage, Harry sat back down.

The girl who was sat by his side for graduation shot him a questioning look, a smile playing at the corner of her ruby painted lips.

“That’s my boyfriend,” Harry proudly stated with a nod.

She grinned at him, “I had a feeling.”

The rest of the ceremony rolled through, but Harry was just itching to get to Louis. He wanted to wrap Louis in his arms and make up for their loss of time due to cramming for finals. When the band began to play the closing fanfare, Harry’s legs were anxiously bouncing with pent up energy. Harry waited for the rest of his of his row to file out before he was practically darting from the building.

By the time he jogged outside into the cloud painted sky, his cap was slightly falling off of his head. He frantically looked around the obscene mass of people. Harry saw families joining together with tears on their faces and all he wanted to do was find his own family. He needed to find Louis.

“Babu!”

Harry halted his frenetic steps and whipped towards the right. Louis was bouncing up and down, his head barely passing over the sea of graduates. Harry beamed and pushed through the crowd, not wasting any time before he hauled Louis into his arms.

Louis was giggling into the crook of his neck as Harry picked him up. He let out an unadulterated laugh when he set Louis back down, instantly cupping Louis’ jaw to bring their mouths together. Both men grinned into the kiss and eventually, Harry decided that he had to pull back before things became socially indecent.

A small pair of hands jabbed into Harry’s side, effectively pulling his attention from Louis. He looked over his shoulder to see Jules expectantly smiling at him. Clutched between her hands was a bouquet of pearly peonies.

“I didn’t know you were coming?!” Harry cocked his head to the side, his cheeks rosy.

“Yeah, well,” Jules passed him the flowers, “Wanted to support my favorite person.”

“Watch it,” Louis chided and tucked himself against Harry’s side.

“Fuck off, Tomlinson,” Jules snorted, no actual malice in her voice. She waved him off, “I had ‘im first, anyways.”

Harry sniffed the flowers and pulled Jules into a hug. He curled his body around hers and lowered his voice, “Thank you.”

“You better stop by the shop this summer,” She mumbled and Harry knew that it was as close to ‘I’ll miss you’ as he was going to get.

“Oh, hello.”
Harry pulled back from Jules to see Niall walking up to them. He bypassed Harry and held out his hand to Jules.

“Niall Horan,” He beamed at her, his cap already tugged off and clasped in his hand. He tilted his head towards Louis, “This cunt’s best mate.”

The corner of her mouth twitched upwards as she shook his hand, “Jules.” She jutted her thumb towards Harry, “That twat’s best mate.”

“They’re the worst aren’t they?” Niall flicked his hand towards Louis and Harry, ignoring the slap that he got from Louis in response.

Jules seriously nodded, “Fuckin’ nightmares.”

Harry looked between the two of them and was mildly horrified to see Jules fighting off a grin. Niall wasn’t better off, his weight rocking from his heels to the tips of his toes. Both of their cheeks were lightly tinged pink and Harry had to stop whatever was going on.

“No,” Harry quickly shook his head, “Absolutely not.”

Niall furrowed his eyebrows, “What?”

“Yeah, Harry,” Jules narrowed her eyes, already knowing exactly what he was going on about, “What’s the problem?”

“Don’t mind him,” Louis chirped as he pulled Harry away from the pair. “Go on. Mingle,” He not-so-casually tacked on before hauling Harry off to the side.

Harry groaned and looked over his shoulder towards the pair. They were taking a step closer together and Harry tried to pull himself free of Louis’ grip. Louis huffed out a laugh and determinately yanked him away, not stopping until they reached the courtyard where there were fewer people.

“They’re gonna –” Harry cut off and lamely flailed his hands in front of him.

“She’ll be fine,” Louis shrugged, “Niall’s a good enough bloke.”

“I know,” Harry snorted. “She’s gonna eat him alive.”

“He might be into it,” Louis waggled his eyebrows.

Harry groaned and scrubbed a hand over his face.

“Can we stop at mine before we go to the restaurant?” Louis asked.

“Um,” Harry checked the time on his mobile and winced, “We really don’t have enough time. Not even for a quickie.”

“What? No – Christ,” Louis swatted Harry’s bicep. He rolled his eyes, “I just need to grab something.”

“Oh,” Harry’s flushed.

“Idiot,” Louis exhaled on a laugh. He shook his head and tangled their fingers together, “C’mon.”

“Your idiot,” Harry grumbled under his breath as they walked in the direction of Louis’ building.
Louis squeezed his hand, “My idiot.”

Fifteen minutes and a few rushed kisses later, the couple was making their way into Louis’ flat. Harry waited by the door as Louis darted towards his room, saying that he would just take a second.

“What did you need, anyways?” Harry called out.

Louis reappeared with a blue gift-bag in his hand and a private smile on his face. Harry eyed the bag, his brows pinched together.

“Happy graduation, Babu,” Louis quietly said, handing Harry the bag.

Harry frowned as he set his flowers to the side, “Why’d you get me something?” He took the bag and looked back at Louis, “You didn’t have to get me anything.”

“Would you just open it,” Louis rolled his eyes, the toe of his dress shoe scuffing into the floorboards.

Harry eyed him once more before he carefully pulled a few pieces of tissue paper from the bag. He peeked inside and felt his entire body go rigid. There was a soft laugh from in front of him and Harry snapped his head upwards. His jaw was slack as Louis expectantly gestured for him to take his present out of the bag.

With an impossible amount of care, Harry pulled a new camera lens from the bag.

“Surprise?”

Harry gaped at the piece of equipment that had a lush red bow knotted around the barrel. He shook his head in disbelief, eyes darting between Louis and the lens.

“You – You actually got,” Harry floundered for words. “Lou,” He shook his head, “How’d you even afford this?”

“When I started packing for the move back home,” Louis scratched the back of his neck and lifted his shoulders, “I decided to sell some stuff I didn’t need.”

Harry’s pupils blew out, “Louis, you sold your stuff?!” He frantically shook his head, “I can’t take this. It’s –”

“Hazza, calm down,” Louis quietly laughed and stepped closer to rest his palm against Harry’s neck. He thumbed over Harry’s racing pulse point, “I couldn’t take it all with me anyways. Really, I was gonna do it anyways.”

Harry swallowed the protest on his tongue and looked back at the lens in his hand. He let out a surprised watery laugh, put it back inside the bag, and gently set it on the floor. Louis was already reaching out for him when Harry closed the space between them. Harry cradled Louis’ head to his chest and wrapped the other over his shoulders. Louis tucked himself against Harry’s front.

“Sorry it took so long,” Louis murmured.

Harry closed his eyes and firmly kissed the top of Louis’ head. He knew that they were probably running late to meet their families, but he wanted to live in the moment just a minute longer. He carded his fingers into Louis’ hair and sighed when he felt Louis’ lips press a delicate kiss along the junction of his neck. Holding him impossibly closer, Harry let out an exhale.
“It was definitely worth the wait.”

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