Multi chapter AU. Robert's just been promoted for the paper he works for, one of the youngest music editors the paper's had. One of his first jobs is to interview Aaron Livesy, a famous musician who's notoriously difficult to get an interview with.

Notes

I am purposefully trying to make this different to Fickle Fortune, though the rich and famous angle is the same. If it's too similar, I'll pull it and work on something else. But smittenwithsugden (thank you!!) gave me the idea and I really fell for it, so I hope you enjoy!
Robert closed the door to his office, his brand new London office, feeling pleased. He’d just been given a promotion, now he was the editor of the arts and music section of *The Standard*, so he had final say of what was published, and what went into the paper. Or more accurately, what was published online. They still called it a paper despite the fact that online circulation was ten times the amount of print these days.

He was twenty eight, and it was unusual for them to give editorial control to someone so young, but Robert reasoned to himself, it was the “younger” side of the publication, keeping up to date with music and trends and everything else. And he’d earned this, he was proud of this accomplishment. Something he'd achieved that was all his.

This wasn’t his dream job, what he really wanted in the long run was to be the editor. If he did his job well for a few years, maybe when the current editor resigned, maybe he’d be considered for the position. And he was good at job interviews, always had been able to charm the people he needed to. That was ideally where he’d like to be. Just had to keep his nose clean, keep his head down and do the job properly. Shouldn’t be too difficult, surely?

Robert was midway through his day when Lucy knocked on the door, peering into the office. “Yes?” Robert said, tearing his eyes off the computer screen.

“Big day for you,” she said with a smile, dropping a folder on his desk. Robert couldn’t help but smile back.

“Thanks,” Robert said sincerely.

“Yeah, that wasn’t what I meant,” Lucy said, nodding at the folder. “Aaron Livesy’s giving us an interview.”

“Really?” Robert said brightening up significantly. “Why? He hasn’t given an interview in a year.”

This was perfectly true, Aaron Livesy was notoriously difficult to get press interaction with. Despite the fact that he was one third of the country’s most popular band, Messenger. They rarely gave interviews, and for some reason, that seemed to make them even more popular with the public. For not “pandering” to the media or some such rubbish like that. And when they did, Aaron tended to be the one the public wanted to hear from, and the one who was the most quiet.

“Apparently their agent said he picked us,” Lucy said.

“Why?” Robert asked.

“Well, my critical side would say it’s because we didn’t pan their second album the way everyone else did. Oh, and we didn’t keep running features on who he was sleeping with six months ago when he came out as gay, so there’s that.”

“Is it the whole band, or just Aaron Livesy?”
“Just him. As far as I know.”

“I’m taking this one,” Robert said firmly. No way was he trusting such an important interview to one of the fresh out of Uni cover writers. He got to cherry pick these days.

“Thought you might,” Lucy said with a grin.

“Thanks Lucy,” Robert said, scanning through the documents in the folder. Background information on the band, nothing he didn’t already know. He’d have to have been living in a hole to not have heard of them over the past three years or so. Let alone working on the music section of a London newspaper.

Aaron woke from a doze, rather than a full sleep. He never could sleep sharing a bed with someone else. “Hey,” he said quietly, nudging the man lying naked next to him whose name he couldn’t quite remember. “I gotta go,” he said quickly, getting out of bed and throwing some clothes on. He didn’t normally do this. One night stands, yes, but not actually passing out and enduring the awkward morning after conversation. Thank God it was a hotel room rather than his house. That really would be awkward.

“Mm, s’early,” the man groaned.

“Come on, I’m really late,” Aaron said.

“So... last night was fun,” the man (who had brown eyes Aaron now saw) was smirking at him. But Aaron couldn’t exactly argue, it had been fun. “Wanna…”

“My life’s a mess,” Aaron said. “I’ll be in a different city tomorrow, a different country next week and…”

“Yes, yeah, I get the picture,” he said, still smiling as he got up and put his jeans on. Aaron allowed himself to admire this stranger’s body, remembering a few highlights from the night before, before shaking his head. He needed to get out of here.

Aaron picked up his phone and dialled Christina, his agent. When she answered, he tried to get out of this interview. Because he didn’t want to do it. “Hey, listen…”

“No, Aaron, you are not doing this to me, not again,” she said, very tiredly. “I can’t cancel on your behalf again, no one will trust a word I say!”

“I don’t want to discuss my private life to a stranger,” Aaron said, wondering why that was a controversial opinion. “I want to play a guitar, and make music and the list ends there. Why are people so interested in who I’m sleeping with?”

“Because if you don’t, everyone assumes you’re sleeping with Adam.”

“Yeah, well, let them,” Aaron said obstinately.

“Aaron…” she said quietly. “You know you have to do it.”

“Yeah, I know,” Aaron said, rubbing his face, hard. “I’ve just been really enjoying putting it off for six months, that’s all.”

“One half an hour interview then you can never think about it again,” she wheedled.
“Fine,” Aaron relented, though he didn’t want to.

“Thank you,” she said. “It’s great to work with someone so amenable.”

Aaron let out a short laugh. “Are we getting final say on the article?”

“No,” Christina said after a moment's hesitation. “But he’s young and inexperienced, he shouldn’t write anything too terrible about you. It goes against the public mood anyway.”

“On that reassuring note,” Aaron said, hanging up the phone to her laughing voice. He looked at the clock and sighed. He had two hours before he had to meet up for this damned interview that was the bane of his life right now. Why did liking men mean everyone suddenly had a magnified interest in his sex life? Ridiculous. Adam didn’t have to go through this crap for liking women. And Alex, the other third of the band… well, she got away with everything. She enjoyed the party scene, she enjoyed being rich and famous and the nightlife in the clubs throughout most of Europe. Which Aaron personally felt grateful for, the social butterfly taking some of the heat off of him. At least in the public eye.

Aaron opened a text, giving the details of his driver who’d be picking him up soon. But for now, he’d catch up on some of the sleep he missed out on the night before. If he was to go through the verbal ringer, he needed some rest first.
Robert had never “got” it. He’d seen pictures plastered over every tabloid in the country, millions of albums sold, music played constantly everywhere, and he’d never really seen the attraction. He knew the music was good, but the attraction of the three people themselves? No. He’d never understood it. Alex was the woman, the redhead who had joined the band last, on advice that they needed a female vocalist, she was very attractive in an obvious way, petite, pretty. Didn’t do it for Robert. Adam was just… always smiling, so much so that he actually came off as lacking a bit of intelligence, so happy go lucky. And Aaron, the front man, he was the brooding silent one. The one who seemed happiest behind a microphone, not in front of the worlds media.

Robert knew from his job that Aaron and Adam had been around for about two years before they really made their big break. Playing in half empty halls, sleeping in cars, really slumming it until they’d broken into the big time. It made them interesting to Robert, especially as a journalist. Not one of these over manufactured bands and singers who always claimed to have “worked so hard to get here” despite the fact they were only fifteen. Or some ridiculous nonsense. No, Robert knew Aaron had made it big the hard way. But he’d never really seen the attraction. As Aaron Livesy walked into the restaurant, going to ask about the reservation, Robert now got it. He understood completely in one moment of clarity.

Aaron wore jeans that didn’t quite fit him properly, but enough to show off his best assets, a black hoodie and a scowl. The waiter pointed out to Robert who fixed a smile on his face as he walked over. It was a restaurant they used for major interviews, because it was discreet, and the newspaper had a running tab here. Robert stood up to shake his hand. “Robert Sugden.” He was stubbled, hair had just a little bit of gel in it, and cameras did not do him justice. He was much better looking in reality, and what’s more, he seemed completely unaware of it, shifting uncomfortably. Robert had heard that he was modest, but that’s the kind of thing you don’t tend to believe in this particular line of work.

“Aaron,” he said in greeting, sitting down and looking like he wished he was anywhere else, hunched over a little in his seat as if trying to make himself smaller.

“Relax, it’s half an hour out of your day,” Robert said. “And I don’t bite. Well, not usually anyway,” he added with a grin. Aaron didn’t return it. “Do you mind if I record this?”

Aaron shook his head in a practised way. “No, that’s fine,” he said. Robert tapped on his phone and left it recording on the table as a waitress took their drinks order.

“Aren’t you going to ask me anything?” Aaron said, twitching as the waitress delivered his lager.

“I’m waiting for you to be comfortable,” Robert said calmly.

Aaron snorted. “You’ll be waiting a long time, I don’t really do this. Especially not without the other two to back me up.”

“You don’t really… like the attention, do you?” Robert noticed. Not an interview question, just an observation.

“No,” Aaron said, catching his eye. “I… Look, off the record,” he said glancing at the phone, recording this. “I don’t read the papers, the magazines, the online forums. I never wanted this, I just wanted to play. I don’t get the interest in me, or us I should say. I just can play a guitar, it doesn’t make me special.”
For anyone else, Robert would think this would be false modesty, but Aaron genuinely looks uncomfortable, and it’s a theme that’s been present ever since they made it into the mainstream.

“We can either dodge around it for the whole interview, or have five uncomfortable minutes while I ask you about coming out,” Robert said. Aaron rolled his eyes, but didn’t object. He hadn’t spoken to the media for a solid six months for this specific reason.

“What are you going to ask?” Aaron said bluntly, straight to the point.

“What made you decide to come out?” Robert asked.

“Necessity,” Aaron said evasively.

“Are you going to avoid every question I ask?” Robert said. “People are waiting for you to say something.”

“I didn’t want this,” Aaron said. “I didn’t want it to be a big thing, I didn’t want to become some kind of poster boy for the LGBT community. I just want to be me, without the rest of it. Who I sleep with doesn’t matter.”

“Why did you come out then?” Robert asked. “If you didn’t want the attention? I’m guessing there’s not been anyone special, because we’d have heard, which means…”

“I had no choice,” Aaron said calmly. “Someone filmed a video of me with a man. They tried to sell it and thankfully my agent picked it up first. She couldn’t hold it forever, so… I wasn’t ashamed, and I wasn’t going to deny it, but I just… had to get in there first. I didn’t want the video sold, and after I’d come out, then it became irrelevant.”

“The video…” Robert asked.

“Oh, nothing pornographic I’m sure you’ll be disappointed to hear,” Aaron said, flashing his eyes at Robert daringly. “But me kissing some guy… yeah it would have been enough.”

Robert cleared his throat, surprised at the honest answer.” How did your band mates react?”

“Adam… I’ve known him since we were kids. It wasn’t news to him, I’ve never lied to him. And Alex, she was fine. Just made some joke about how I’d be stealing the men she goes for.” Robert let out a quiet laugh.

“Is there anyone special in your life?”

“No,” Aaron said, reverting to the expected answer now he was back on firm ground. “I’m only young, no rush to settle down is there?”

“Now, about the upcoming tour…” Aaron relaxed a little more, familiar territory, giving the standard answers. But Aaron couldn’t help but notice Robert’s very unprofessional smirk, the way his eyes lingered. Robert was most definitely flirting with him. When Robert’s eyes grazed down to the top of Aaron’s zip on his hoodie, that’s when he’d had enough.

Aaron’s face looked like thunder, and he reached over, pausing the recording on Robert’s iphone. “What, you think if you flirt with me you’ll get somewhere? That I’ll be so desperate for your smug arse you’ll get the scoop of your life?” Robert looked at Aaron, not what he’d expected at all. “Stick to the interview, I’m not answering any questions about what I find attractive in men. Not you, by the way,” he added as a dig.
“Aaron, I am not an unethical reporter. Your agent asked for this interview. Don’t bite my head off because you’d rather be anywhere else.”

“Can see that, can you?”

“You’re not as mysterious as your silent brooding persona gives off,” Robert said sharply. He pressed the screen on his phone to start recording the interview again.

“So, you’re already starting to write for the next album?”

Aaron was still glaring at him, but answered the question easily enough, his voice level. The rest of the interview was about the album and the bands sell out tour, nothing personal. And as it went on, Aaron became more comfortable, obviously preferring to talk about something he was passionate about rather than himself.

By the end of the interview, Aaron was actually feeling a little embarrassed. It was clear Robert was a professional, and maybe he’d imagined the flirting because it was a sensitive subject with him.

“Sorry,” Aaron grunted when Robert was gathering his things, having sent the recording of the interview to the office, to back it up. “I might have been overreacting.”

“To what?” Robert asked. Then caught Aaron’s eye. “Oh. The flirting? Yeah, you weren’t imagining it. Just wasn’t doing it for professional reasons.” Aaron actually smiled, and it made him look younger, his eyes lighting up. It also made Robert’s stomach drop an inch or two. Because this man was so gorgeous.

“I should go,” Aaron said. Robert nodded, watching as he turned to walk away and Robert didn’t know what made him do it, call him back.

“Aaron?”

“Yeah?”

“You said... before. If you didn’t want to be rich and famous, what did you want from this career choice?” Robert asked. He couldn’t help himself, he was curious about Aaron. And this wasn’t for the paper, this was because he wanted to know.

“I wanted to escape.” Aaron left before Robert could ask anything else, wonder what that confused statement meant. Escape what?
Chapter 3

Robert’s filed away the report on the interview, and he did it in double quick time. It was a positive piece, even though he could have reported on how grumpy and miserable Aaron was to be there. Once he’d written that and locked it into the system, he went through the papers back catalogue, wondering what they’d published on Aaron and the band before. He was new to the editorship of the music section, so he wasn’t entirely sure. And quite honestly, he hadn’t been paying attention.

There were all the usual articles, sold-out tours, best-selling albums, including a couple of pieces that Robert had written himself, but didn’t actually remember. Most of it was just repeating facts and numbers, rather than anything interesting. Such as “Messenger’s second album, Hereafter has beat the record for fastest selling album in the UK with 750,000 copies sold in it’s first week. Their 28 date UK tour…” and similar. It was just information that Robert had been given, and he’d typed them and moved on. It’s just… right now, he was interested, and he hadn’t been until now.

There were all the usual articles and speculation when Aaron had come out, fuelled by the fact he hadn’t given a personal statement, but beyond that there was only one personal article. It was going around Aaron’s house in pictures, with very few words accompanying it. It was a series they’d run about nine months ago. Adam and Alex had had the same treatment, but Robert ignored them, because they weren’t who he was curious about.

Aaron (apparently) owned a mansion just outside Leeds which was where he called home. Though… looking at the pictures, Robert doubted that. It looked like a show home, it didn’t look like anyone ever lived there. And yes, it was PR, so of course they weren’t going to show the dirty washing or the kitchen with empty beer cans or wine bottles on every surface, but it just seemed too perfect, and false. There weren’t even any photographs up in the living spaces. Nothing personal, and it all looked neat, expensive, but it wasn’t really Aaron. Then Robert shook his head at himself. He’d met the man for thirty minutes, what the hell did he know about what Aaron would look for in a house? Robert closed the tab to the papers archive and stopped looking. This wasn’t helping. And no matter how good Aaron looked in a pair of jeans, no matter how much Robert felt really attracted to him in real life, nothing was going to come of this, right?

Robert sighed, having just come to this conclusion when his phone rang. He answered it, sinking back into the rhythm of the work day and the job that needed to be done.

“How’d it go?” Adam asked, smiling as Aaron let himself in to his hotel room.

“Oh, wonderful,” Aaron said sarcastically. “I always enjoy talking about my private life to random strangers.”

“Here,” Adam said, throwing him a can of beer, which Aaron opened, drinking almost half of it. “And I’ve got some more bad news for you.”

“What now?” Aaron asked dully.

“Your mothers been calling me,” Adam said. ”I can't shake her, Aaron.”

“Oh, for God’s sake,” Aaron said under his breath, collapsing onto the nearest chair. “Can’t she get the message, I don’t want to talk to her.”

“Yes, we all know that,” Adam said. “Apparently my phone number is easier to get hold of than
“yours.” Aaron tipped his head back. He’d not spoken to Chas, an actual in depth conversation in years. There was so much bad history there that he found it much easier to avoid her calls. And it’s not like he didn’t have a lot to deal with in his life.

“Give me your phone,” Aaron said. Adam frowned. “I don’t want her to have my number.” Adam threw him the phone, and bracing himself, Aaron called her.

“Adam, have you spoken to Aaron?” Chas’s worried voice said.

“It’s me.”

“Oh,” Chas said, silent for a couple of seconds. “Aaron, how are you?”

“I’m fine,” Aaron said, still keeping his voice neutral. If he got emotional, he’d get angry. And he didn’t want to get angry.

“Aaron, love, why don’t you let me see you? It’s been so long.”

“I don’t want to get into it,” Aaron said.

“Love, please, I’m your mum.”

“Now that it’s convenient you are,” Aaron said tiredly.

“That’s not fair.”

“I ran away from home for more than three years before you got into contact with me,” Aaron said. “You only did when I started having enough money to throw around. So, no, I’m not particularly fair.”

“It’s not like I didn’t try!” Chas cried into the phone line. “I reported you as a missing person, I looked everywhere, you didn’t have a phone, you never called home. You weren’t in any prison or hospital or morgue, how was I supposed to find you?” Aaron didn’t really care how logical her arguments were, it still hurt. “And on top of that, to find out you’re gay in the press? You didn’t think that was worth a conversation?”

“This is why I don’t call,” Aaron said firmly. “I don’t need the lecture or the guilt trip. Instead of raking over the past, you could focus on now. I don’t want to look back.”

“How’re you doing?” she asked after they’d both taken a deep breath.

“Okay,” Aaron said. Then he offered an olive branch. “There’s going to be an interview with me in The Standard tomorrow.”

“Oh?” she asked eagerly. “Just you, or Adam and Alex as well?”

“Just me,” Aaron said. “I don’t actually think I’ll come out of it well, I was a bit of a git to the reporter.”

“Oh,” Chas said again, a completely different tone to her voice. “Well, that’s okay. Where will you be next?”


“Well, take care,” Chas said. “And it wouldn’t hurt to check in with your mum from time to time.”
“I know,” Aaron admitted. “Bye mum.”

“I love you.” Aaron hung up without reply, passing Adam his phone back.

“Aaron, mate, it’s not her fault,” Adam said reasonably. Aaron glared at him. "It's not ALL her fault."

“You’re on my side,” Aaron said. “You know what I was like when I left and I’m not ready to forgive.”

“Fine, dropped!” Adam said, knowing that Aaron’s past was at the very least a sensitive subject. He didn’t want to go digging either. The door opened and Alex dropped onto the bed, both men staring at her.

“What the hell have you done?” Adam asked, half surprised, half amused.

“Dyed my hair, what does it look like?” she said.

“Blonde?” Adam asked, quite pointlessly.

“Freddie left me,” she said dully, leaving Aaron and Adam to catch each others eye for a moment. “I’m too much hard work apparently. Though practising piano for four hours every night is really low maintenance.”

“Forget him,” Aaron said gently. “You were way too good for him anyway.” She smiled weakly.

“What are we drinking?” Both men smiled.

Robert picked up his mobile absently, lost in editorial photographs he apparently had to choose from because his staff hadn’t got used to him yet to make their own decisions.

“Yeah?” he said, still flicking through the file.

“Hi.” Robert dropped the photos. He knew that voice. “Er, it’s Aaron. Livesy. The other day, you er…”

“No, of course I remember you,” Robert said, cutting him off. “Not like your tour posters aren’t plastered everywhere on my commute to work, is it?”

Aaron laughed, almost seeming embarrassed. “Yeah, right.”

“Is… there a problem?” Robert asked hesitantly, the interview having gone to print last night.

“No,” Aaron said. “I just wanted to... thank you for the interview. You made me come off way better than I actually was.”

“Isn’t spin my job?” Robert quipped back. “It’s fine, don’t worry about it.”

“Oh,” Aaron said. “Okay. Just… well, thanks.”

“Aaron, there’s no need,” Robert said. “Are you all right?” he asked into the quiet.

“Yeah, I was… doesn’t matter,” Aaron finished tiredly. Robert’s heart stopped for a moment as he quickly thought this through. There was no reason for Aaron to be calling him at all. A listers didn’t call journalists personally to thank them, it wasn't done. Was he… interested? Or was Robert really
misreading things?

“How’d you get my number by the way?” Robert asked.

“You’re a sub editor of a London newspaper,” Aaron said. “You’re not exactly unavailable.”

“But this is my personal number,” Robert said. “It’s not my work line… so why…”

“Sorry, did I call you on the wrong phone?” Aaron said, but he is definitely teasing now.

“I wondered why you went to the effort,” Robert said, matching his tone with a low voice all of his own. “Most people don’t bother.”

“I’m not most people, Rob,” Aaron said. “Bye.” Robert looked at his phone, trying to save the number Aaron had called from. He couldn’t, it was blocked. He sighed, but then guessed that wasn’t a surprise. But things with Aaron had the potential to get… interesting.
Chapter 4

Alex was steadily getting drunk in the hotel room, trying to “get over” her heartbreak. She suggested going to a gay bar, because she wanted to dance with men who didn’t want to sleep with her, which for some reason made sense in her drunken state.

“No,” Aaron said. “I’m not in the mood.” Adam and Alex stared at him, Alex only for a few seconds because she was busy trying to coordinate pouring whisky into her glass.

“No?” Adam asked. “That’s not like you.” Adam knew that one perk of being famous that Aaron did enjoy was being able to get into those exclusive bars, usually with the first round of drinks on the house.

“Don’t feel like going out,” Aaron said evasively. The last thing he wanted to do right now was go out on the pull. He couldn’t stop thinking of blonde hair and freckles, which he was sure were scattered over Robert’s face. But he hadn’t got close enough, or been looking at him long enough to be entirely sure.

“Have you met someone?” Adam asked, being perceptive which wasn’t usually his strong point. “I know you took someone home with you the other night.”

“God, I can’t even remember his name,” Aaron said truthfully.

“But you have met someone,” Alex said, chipping in. How she was still speaking in sentences, let alone following the conversation, Aaron had no idea.

“You’re going to have a hang over tomorrow. And we’ve got an album signing.”

“Tha’s what makeups for,” she said. Well, slurred.

“Have you?” Adam pushed, totally ignoring her.

“I just don’t want to go out,” he said. “Don’t read anything into it.” Adam let it go. “Plus, she’s going to have enough of a hang over for the three of us tomorrow.” Adam nodded in agreement.

Robert bought their new album, Echoes and Grace on the way home from work that night. In the privacy of his own home, he listened to it from start to finish, trying to actually hear the lyrics, rather than just catch five or ten seconds here and there. Or it being the background music to wherever he happened to be. They created pop, but it had an edge. The songs which the band wrote themselves (Robert, being old fashioned and approaching thirty had bought the physical CD rather than downloading it, and he’d checked the writing credits) and the beats were catchy, the melodies good, and the lyrics, when you actually stopped to listen to them, were incredibly powerful. Robert hated to admit that he actually liked the music, when he’d been personally critical of it for years now. He looked at the album sleeve, at photos of the three of them. Most of them were tour shots, and on stage, Aaron looked more comfortable than Robert had seen him yet. Clearly actually singing was the part of the job he liked to do. There was one black and grey shot (clearly posed but made to look candid) from the tour bus, the three of them laugh. Aaron actually was laughing, you could see it in his eyes.

Robert sighed, and put the sleeve back into the case and stopped listening. This was torturing himself, he’d likely never meet Aaron again anyway. And though he was confident in his own charms, some people said overly confident, it wasn’t like he had a realistic shot. No, give up that
dream.

It had been a hell of a morning. A couple of the old hands in his department were reluctant to take orders from someone so young, so Robert decided to get out of the office for lunch. Fresh air and non stale coffee sounded like a good combination. He revelled in his coffee for a few moments before he searched for Aaron on his phone. Something he’d deny was fast becoming a habit. The fact that his phone automatically added “Livesy” after typing in Aaron was not a sign of unhealthy interest, of course not.

According to twitter, there was a CD signing about three streets away from him. Robert looked at his watch, debating. This was absolutely insane, he had to be at work. And he wasn’t some obsessed fan, he just wanted to talk to him again. Without Aaron’s phone number that was going to be damn near impossible, and getting it off his agent wouldn’t be likely either. But those eyes… “Oh God.” Feigning enthusiastic interest in his coffee, he walked in the general direction, nothing more.

Once he turned around the street corner, Robert realised it was a big mistake. The crowds of people and the security on standby were huge. No, this was wrong. The gabbling of fans, anywhere from six year olds with their parents, right the way up to adults who should know better, Robert thought uncharitably. But then he was irritated, because he’d love to get Aaron alone. Yeah, like hell was that happening now. Didn’t stop him from standing on the street corner, watching the shop and the eager fans. What had a smile and a gorgeous pair of eyes turned him into? This wasn’t worth it.

Robert finished his coffee, and looked for a bin to throw it in. Before he could, one of the security guards approached him, and Robert backed off half a step. He was quite a big man, and he wasn’t aware of doing anything that would particularly wind up a security guard.

“What?” Robert asked with more confidence than he felt. The man said nothing, just gave him a piece of paper, with a scribbled number on it. Robert frowned, then realised what had happened. Aaron must have spotted him. God, that was going to look so bad, like he was stalking him, when really it had been a spur of the moment decision. If that, more curiosity. Robert looked around quickly, trying to find him as the security guard left, and it took him a few seconds to spot the car with the blacked out windows. That was frustrating, couldn’t even see if Aaron was there, though he likely was, as it drove off. The noise level of the fans had decreased significantly, and Robert felt both simultaneously an idiot, and quite pleased that he apparently had Aaron’s number. Though there were still high odds that someone was playing a practical joke on him. His phone buzzed and he sighed, returning to the office, scrap of paper tucked safely in his jacket pocket.

“Want to explain what that was about when we were leaving?” Adam asked. Aaron looked out the window, biting his bottom lip.

“Saw someone I liked,” Aaron said, not directly answering the question.

“So… what’s wrong with him?” Alex said, picking up the pause in his voice in a way Adam didn’t.

“He might be a journalist,” Aaron admitted. Adam laughed and Alex scowled.

“Oh, that’s such a mistake,” she said.

“I haven’t made a mistake yet,” Aaron said fairly.

“But you want to,” she observed. “You don’t give your number to just anyone. I had to wait six months until you trusted me with it!”
“It wasn’t that long,” Aaron said fairly. “And I saw you every day, I didn’t need to call you.”

“Aaron,” she said lowly. “You know…”

“Let’s not read too much into it,” Aaron said, cutting her off. “What time’s our flight?” Adam let them change the subject, and Aaron was grateful.
“I’m not a stalker, promise.” Robert hesitated over the text message, wondering whether to send it. He thought about it, then decided what the hell. Aaron was clearly interested, having gone out of his way to make sure Robert had his phone number. He hit send.

“No? Shame. I’ll have to find some other people to hand my phone number out to.” Robert laughed at the reply, and it had only taken three minutes. That was a good sign. Robert was currently in his office, and the glow he felt from flirting with Aaron couldn’t be underestimated. It’s not like it would go anywhere, right?

“What’re you doing tonight? You free?” Robert sent, before he could talk himself out of it. Aaron must be interested, Robert wouldn’t have this phone number otherwise.

“I’m in Paris” came the reply.

“You’re already hard to get, you don’t need to go to another country to prove it.”

“Oh, you want to get me then?” Aaron flirted, though Robert couldn’t see the accompanying smile.

“Oh, that’s a grin,” Alex said, seeing Aaron’s thumbs tapping his phone. “Hot date?”

“We’re in Paris, who would I be meeting?” Aaron asked, though he was in too good a mood to scowl.

“I guarantee there’ll be an attractive Frenchman you’d love within a hundred metres of this building,” she quipped. “I can help you find one,” she teased.

“Maybe I like Englishmen,” Aaron said.

“Go on,” she said. “Tell me about him.”

“I don’t actually know much,” Aaron said. “He’s a journalist, tall. Gorgeous and he wasn’t intimidated by me.”

“You’re a very intimidating man,” Alex said sarcastically and Aaron rolled his eyes. He wasn’t but a lot of people in the business tended to treat him that way at first. “Have you got a picture?” Alex asked. Aaron didn’t, but he wondered if Robert would appear on the papers website. It took a while to find the staff section, and when he did, it wasn’t the best picture in the world. Didn’t show Robert’s eyes off, and his freckles weren’t visible either.

“It’s not a great picture,” he said.
“What’s he like in bed?” Alex asked, eyes alight.

“You know, not everything’s about sex,” Aaron snapped. She laughed.

“Have you actually been out with him?”

“No,” Aaron said. Then admitted, “I want to.”

“What’s stopping you?”

“Er, I’m currently in a different country?” he reminded her.

“So?” she said. “After our radio interview in…” she looked at the clock “ten minutes, fly back to London, or take the Eurostar, take him out, romance him, have fantastic sex, sleep for an hour or two, then fly back for our early morning PR stunt.”

“Alex…” Aaron warned darkly.

“What?” she said. “What’s the point of being rich if you can’t spend it doing delicious things you shouldn’t?”

“Is that the logic you used when you tattooed your foot?” Aaron quipped.

“I live with it,” she said, waving her hand. “You have a string of men you sleep with whose names you never remember. This guy must be different.”

“It’s not a string of men,” Aaron countered, stung. “I like a drink, and I like sex every now and then. Is that a problem?”

“No,” she said, smiling at him. “Are you saying this guy’s not different?”

“I don’t know enough yet.”

“Go on, live a little,” Alex teased. “And anyway, if you’re not with me tonight I might have a shot at getting the gorgeous men to come home with me instead of you.”

“You’re heartbroken,” Aaron reminded her.

“Yeah,” she said, the smile dimming somewhat, shrugging her shoulders. “But that doesn’t mean I can’t try to patch my heart up with a distraction, does it?”

“It won’t work,” Aaron warned.

“Fun, though,” she said. “Well, until I dissolve into a puddle of tears. Now, are you going to call to try and arrange to get on a flight? Or do I have to browbeat you into it some more?” Aaron grinned at her. He’d been resistant like hell to Alex joining the group at first, but he did like her. Even though at first it had been through reluctance.

Aaron texted Robert asking for his address.


“Thought you might want company. I can’t exactly go to a bar without the media following me.”
Robert smiled, then another text came through. “*Even though you are the media.*”

Robert typed out the address willingly. Not like anything could happen what with Aaron in a different country.

“*Yeah, but I’m not the stalkerish kind of media,*” Robert replied.

“*On current experience, I doubt that,*” Aaron said, making Robert laugh.

“*Not to cut this short, but I really have to confirm the print run. We’re late as it is.*”

“*Don’t worry. Got a flight to catch anyway.*” Robert hesitated. Was he joking? Surely Aaron wasn’t returning to London just to spend time with him. Because that was crazy.

“Robert?” Lucy said, knocking on his office door. “We need…”

“I know,” he said, cutting her off and returning to work. He could really do with a whisky right about now.

Robert had been home ten minutes, in his empty tiny London flat when the doorbell rang. He put down his glass of whisky which he hadn’t drunk enough of after the stressful day, and opened the door. Aaron Livesy stood there. With a man who looked like his security guard.

“Er… hi?” Robert said, a little stunned.

“Can I come in or are you going to stand there staring?” Aaron asked, lips twitching into a grin.

“Yeah, sure,” Robert said, moving aside. “But I don’t need an audience,” he added. Aaron nodded at the guard, who left and Aaron closed the door.

“You go everywhere with protection like that?”

“You stop seeing it after a while,” Aaron said, uncomfortable.

“No,” Aaron said heavily, making Robert smile.


“Beer’s good,” Aaron said. Robert went and got one, before looking at Aaron.

“Now, before I really let my ego have a boost,” Robert said. “Did you seriously come back to the country to see me?”

“Don’t like French food,” Aaron deadpanned, though his eyes were glittering and Robert smiled. Aaron downed half his beer in one and Robert raised his eyebrows. Apparently bad days were catching. Robert took a sip of whisky and put the glass down when he saw Aaron standing unusually close to him. Robert dipped his head to kiss him, that’s all the movement it needed for their lips to touch. Aaron’s lips were demanding, deepening the kiss and Robert groaned, pushing their bodies close so they touched everywhere, his hands making sure Aaron couldn’t move away from him, surrounding his face. He tasted so good, and Robert slipped his hand down from the back of Aaron’s neck, to his belt in seconds, the want almost visible in the air.

“Look, Robert…” Aaron started, backing off. But Robert wasn’t buying that, and he didn’t let Aaron
step away completely.

“I’m not an idiot,” Robert said. “There’s too many signs for me to be misreading this.”

“No, I do want you,” Aaron said. “But…” Robert sighed heavily on that word. “You’re a journalist and I can’t have you parroting back whatever might happen between us to the rag you work for.”

“Aaron…”

“It’s my life,” Aaron said. “And I want you, but not enough to risk everything else I’ve worked for for years.”

“It’s a newspaper, it’s not a gossip column,” Robert said with a frown. “We do have some integrity.”

“I know, but…”

“Anyway, one night doesn’t have to be more,” Robert said. Though the intensity in Aaron’s gaze made his voice waver. “Does it?”

“No,” Aaron said, eyes dipping to Robert’s lips. Robert took the invitation. He wasn’t one to turn down opportunities like this, and Aaron was hot as hell. He wanted that body underneath him right now.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Brief one sentence mention of Aaron's self harm here. Nothing major, just warning!
Enjoy!

Aaron didn’t sleep, didn’t even try to. He never could sharing a bed, and even if that was possible, he needed to be awake for his schedule tomorrow. And if he dropped into a doze for an hour or two, all the coffee in the world wouldn’t wake him. He knew that from experience. So when Robert fell asleep, very quickly after their second round of sex, Aaron got out of bed quietly and went for a shower. He couldn’t do tomorrow smelling of sex, if nothing else he wouldn’t be able to concentrate, let alone the fact it was unprofessional. He washed himself carefully, because his body felt tender, sensitive, the way he usually did after good sex. And that had been fantastic sex, even though using Robert’s lime scented shower gel didn’t really do it for him.

Drying off, he hung the towel up and moved through the living space naked, knowing what he was looking for. He had three hours at least before his security guy would be back for him, to safely get him on the plane, and instead of sleep, he wanted some paper. Come on, Robert was a journalist, he had to have a printer somewhere. It wasn’t snooping exactly, he just wanted to find it. And it wasn’t like Aaron was going through everything he owned, but he found the printer in the living room cupboard. He grabbed a few sheets of paper and a pen which he found on the kitchen side before getting back into bed, carefully, not moving the mattress too much.

It had started when he was a kid, when he was too young to know any better. Trapped in hell, he’d tried to cut himself to channel the abhorrent feelings coursing under his skin. But then he’d worried that someone would notice, he had football practice at the time, and school… he thought someone might see. So instead, one day he’d written stuff down. And it helped get it out of his head, which was crawling with a thousand thoughts at a time. It helped in a way Aaron could never understand, it was enough to know it did. And those thoughts had slowly become lyrics, without even meaning to. Just a bit of tweaking, editing, and that’s how this had really started. Now, whenever Aaron felt anything, he had to write. Even if nothing came of it, writing it down helped him process things in his own mind. And it wasn’t like he currently had anything better to do.

“Whatyoudoin?” Robert slurred, turning over.

“Sorry,” Aaron said. “Did the light wake you?” Aaron had left the bedside lamp on on his side of the bed, and Robert winced at the brightness.

“What’s going on?” Robert asked.

“Can’t sleep,” Aaron said. “Being picked up in forty minutes anyway, so…”

“The bed’s not that uncomfortable, is it?”

“No, I don’t sleep next to strangers,” Aaron said, in a way that made Robert’s heart drop. “It’s not
“So you’re scribbling on paper?” Robert asked curiously. “Why?”

“Because scribbling on bits of paper has left me with a very healthy bank balance,” Aaron said with a smile. “Just… something to do. It’s habit by now.”

“So you don’t sit in writers rooms, trying to force out your next hit song?” Robert asked with a smile.

“No,” Aaron said. “Adam tweaks the music, he’s better at that than I am, but most of the lyrics… they’re me.” Aaron suddenly feels embarrassed because he doesn’t talk about this, ever. And certainly not with his hopefully not just one night one night stand. He put the paper on the bedside table before turning back to Robert. “Sorry for waking you.”

“It’s okay,” Robert said softly. “I don’t mind. Now, lets talk about the fact I’m apparently worth a sleepless night, and a quick country hop for sex?”

Robert’s smug and Aaron rolled his eyes. “Don’t flatter yourself, I was horny,” Aaron said. Robert laughed, and pinned him under his body weight, firm to the mattress.

“If that was the case, you didn’t have to leave Paris, did you?” Robert pushed. “I should be flattered, honestly, crawling to me just so you could have…” Aaron playfully slapped his shoulder and Robert slipped into a full laugh while Aaron groaned, pushing him off.

“I want to see you again,” Robert said bluntly. Subtlety was gone, he wanted more, anything Aaron had to give.

“I’m not going to be in London for a while,” Aaron said.

“You weren’t in London a few hours ago,” Robert said, enjoying the spike to his ego.

“Seriously,” Aaron said. “I can’t just drop everything. We’re doing the continental PR, then back in the UK for about ten days off, then we start out UK tour. Then the European one.”

“How long’s that going to take?” Robert asked, heart dropping.

“Four months or so. It’s a big tour.”

“Oh,” Robert said quietly. “So this… really was one night?”

“Well,” Aaron said, grinning slightly. “I hope not.” Robert smiled, both of them distracted by a knock on the door. Aaron sighed, the smile fading. “I have to go. That’ll be my security.”

“This… seems like a routine,” Robert noticed, feeling a little hollow. Was he another notch on Aaron’s bedpost? Because he didn’t want to be, he wanted more.

“No, it’s not,” Aaron said. “Trust me, I’ve never flown to a different country for a late night fling.”

“Until now,” Robert pointed out, smiling at being the exception.

Another knock on the door and Aaron groaned. “All right, I’m coming!” Aaron snapped, throwing his T shirt on and looking for his jeans. Giving Robert quite a good view of his arse, and he smirked. Work was going to be a pain tomorrow on so little sleep, but he didn’t care. Or later today, really.

Once Aaron was dressed, he leaned over the bed and kissed Robert gently. Much too soft for a one night screw.
“Not to sound too desperate, but… text me?” Aaron asked, flushing slightly.

“I will,” Robert promised. “I want a repeat performance.” Aaron laughed as he headed out the door, Robert closing his eyes happily into sleep.

After he’d woken up, dressed and showered, Robert noticed something. Aaron’s scribbled scraps of paper were still on the bedside table. Robert paused, knowing he shouldn’t look. It was private and Aaron wouldn’t have intended to leave it here in the first place. Looking at the words would invade Aaron’s thoughts, so it was with great restraint that he left the sheets of paper exactly where they were. He wouldn’t forever, at some point he would be nosey and look, a fatal flaw of his, curiosity. But for now, he went to work.

Three days later Robert was sat in his office, still smiling from that night with Aaron. They’d been texting on and off ever since, long gaps due to work and whatever it was Aaron was doing, but Robert couldn’t help his mind drifting back to that night. The sex had been fantastic, and in some of the quieter moments at work he couldn’t help reliving it, how open, how full of desire and want Aaron had been. He just wished he’d had more than a few hours. Aaron was a star, he’d have people fawning over him all day. Robert sometimes thought he took a little longer to make a permanent impression, and if he had his way, Aaron would be here with him now.

Insecurity was not a feeling Robert was familiar with, not when it came to relationships. Call him big headed, or over confident, whatever, but he was aware he was attractive, and he used his charm well. It worked. But what good was that when the man he wanted was currently in Copenhagen? With people who were probably a lot fitter, and a lot better off for Aaron than he was. No, insecurity did not sit well with him.

He was just about to shake it off, get back to work when an email came through. He opened it, then froze. It was a collection of photos, photos they weren’t going to use for the paper, and Robert’s heart sunk through the floor. Aaron Livesy with his hands and mouth all over some fit European. Looked like they were taken at the back of a club, and Aaron was completely lost in lust, eyes closed and he was a hundred percent not aware of the cameras. They weren’t going to publish them because it was more of a gossip magazines kind of thing, rather than actual reporting, which is why he was being emailed them. An option to sell them on to another publication, who would want them.

“No,” Robert said. He didn’t want to see those photos again, the hollow feeling in his gut so all consuming and instant and… God. Aaron with his body pressed against a stranger. Well, that was that then. Robert gave the nod to sell them on in his short email reply. Someone would pay a lot for them, and he couldn’t reasonably hold them back. It would look suspicious. And if Aaron was sleeping with someone else, then he lost the right to care too. Though that didn’t stop him feeling disappointed, hurt and bitter. Hurt most of all. He thought they had something, clearly he was wrong.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Considering I knew exactly what was going to happen in this chapter, it took ages to write. Thank you for the encouragement, and I hope this doesn't disappoint!!

Aaron had a nagging irritating feeling, like an itch down his back he couldn’t reach. He kept checking his phone, but nothing. No texts, no messages. Well, he had messages, just none from Robert and it was starting to get worrying. Aaron hadn’t realised how much they’d been texting until it was cut off. And he was actually starting to get worried, so he sent a brief “you okay?” message, and waited. He still didn’t get a reply. And after more than an hour, Aaron shelved his pride. He needed to call, just to check Robert was okay. Not been in a car crash or anything.

“Yes?” Robert answered, distracted. He clearly hadn’t checked caller ID.

“It’s me,” Aaron said, and there was just a slight pause.

“Aaron, I can’t, I’m busy.”

“So, I’m not paranoid,” Aaron said, feeling the heaviness wash over him. “You are avoiding me.”

“I’m not…”

“You’ve been busy all week and managed to text me, now you don’t want to talk?” Aaron asked.

“I don’t know how other people act around you, but I won’t accept other people in this... whatever we are, Aaron. And I’m not going to beg you to want me, so this is pretty much the end as far as I’m concerned.” Robert’s voice sounded cold, detached but it had at least given Aaron some information. It *was* something he’d done then.

“Before you end this call, you want to tell me what I’m supposed to have done?” Aaron asked.

Robert sighed very heavily. “Pictures have come out. Which, working where I work, I’ve seen. Professionally, nothing wrong with them. But from the perspective of the man you’re sleeping with... yeah, I've got a problem with them.”

“Robert, I don’t know what pictures you mean,” Aaron said blankly. “A lot of people take photos of me.” Robert sighed again.

“Hang up.”

“What?!” Aaron snapped “Why?”

“Hang up and I’ll send you them,” Robert said. “Don’t think anyone’s printed them yet.”

“Fine,” Aaron said coldly, disconnecting the call. If Robert was prepared to believe the worst of him just because of the press, maybe the man wasn’t worth it. Being great in bed didn’t make up for...
actually Aaron had no idea what he was being accused of. Clearly something, because Robert hadn’t spoken to him like this before. Cold, distant. Not with the usual smirk Aaron had been imagining. In fact, Aaron had just about talked himself into letting Robert go, because he didn’t have the patience for someone who’d overreact like this when the pictures came through to his phone.

“Oh, shit,” Aaron said under his breath. He now knew exactly what Robert had been thinking, and why his personality seemed to have shut off in the last few hours. Aaron fumbled with his phone in his desperation to call Robert back. Robert didn’t even say hello, just asked “Did you sleep with him?” His voice was laced with jealousy and possessiveness, that after one night made Aaron pause. Yes, there was a connection, and he liked him, but that level of possessiveness? Then Aaron had an image of another man in bed with Robert and he understood the jealousy. Unfortunately, those thoughts made him speak just a little slower than he should have done. He didn't reply quickly enough.

“That’s what I thought,” Robert snapped, ending the call. Aaron’s cursed his slow response and called Robert again, but it was going straight through to answer phone. “Oh for God’s sake…” Aaron cursed. He tried twice more before throwing his phone across the room where it hit a wall and broke into pieces. Might not be very productive, but he was frustrated.

“What’s got into you?” Alex asked. “They need us in five minutes.”

“Robert’s not talking to me,” Aaron said.

“Why?” Alex said, willing to bite.

“He thinks I’ve cheated on him,” Aaron said.

“Beeecauuuuse…” Alex asked, drawing out the word.

“The delightful paparazzi have sent him photos, that… kind of make it look like I have.” Aaron picked up his phone, sliding the battery back in, and waiting for it to power up. “I need to see him.”

“You can’t.”

“Hang on, you were the one who advised me to catch a plane last week to spend a night with him,” Aaron reminded her.

“Yeah, you were miserable,” Alex said. “Thought it’d get it out of your system.” Aaron sighed. “He’s different for you, isn’t he?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Aaron said. “This life that we’ve got... It doesn’t work, you can’t make anything other than casual sex work. You know that.”

“I know it’s difficult. It’s not impossible,” she said. “I made it work with Freddie for a while.”

“Yeah, but…”

“Look, it didn't end because of our job,” Alex said. “But you can’t leave for London now. We need you.” Adam came into the room, wide smile and nodded that they were ready. Aaron sighed, but duty called.

Robert was miserable. It had been three days since he’d had that brief conversation with Aaron. He’d been ignoring Aaron’s calls through sheer stubbornness. And because he didn’t want to hear any excuses, the pictures spoke volumes. But then his calls had stopped coming at all. And it hurt, it hurt
a lot more than it should do for such a brief relationship. But he liked Aaron a lot, and it’d been a while since he’d felt this way for anyone.

It was two in the morning when Robert woke with a start, hearing a hammering on his door, and he got up, groaning and answered it. Aaron stood there, almost buzzing with energy, and he looked angry. “What’re you doing here?” Robert asked in surprise.

“You won’t talk to me,” Aaron said, though he did pause to look at Robert’s body. He hadn’t bothered putting a shirt on and Robert got a thrill out of knowing that Aaron did want him.

“So the rational reaction of “he’s not answering my calls” is: let’s grab a flight and head to London so I can wake him up in the middle of the night? Aaron…”

“I can’t explain if you won’t listen,” Aaron said. “Can I come in?” Robert nodded, because this wasn’t the kind of conversation he needed to have on the doorstep. “Do you always think the worst of people?” Aaron asked.

“Aaron, it was right in front of my face,” Robert said bluntly. “I’m not making it up.”

“Okay, I’m going to say this once,” Aaron said. “Next time you get wound up by something the press or the photographers tell you, try checking the date.”

“What?” Robert asked, freezing for a moment.

“Check the date,” Aaron repeated. “Yeah, they aren’t photo shopped, but I know they had to be before I met you. Because I’ve not been with anyone else, so check the date. If we’re going to do this, especially with you working at a newspaper, you’re going to hear things about me that you won’t like. Give me the benefit of the doubt, Rob.”

“God, I feel like an idiot,” Robert said, shaking his head. He’d been so focused on the actual images, he hadn’t checked the date they were taken. He’d just assumed. God, he knew better than that, working for a paper. Stupid mistake. But seeing Aaron touching someone else had been awful, and he hadn’t been able to get the images out of his head.

“Yeah,” Aaron said, smiling and relaxing a little now. “Are we good?”

“I got jealous,” Robert admitted.

“Yeah, I noticed,” Aaron said. He smiled, then kissed Robert briefly. And Robert sighed into it. Aaron tasted good, and the relief that Aaron hadn’t in fact been lured off by some fit European made him almost melt into the younger man. The fact that he still wanted Robert. Aaron’s hands found his hips and he held him close.

“I don’t share,” Robert said firmly. “If we are… doing this, I don’t share.”

“I got that,” Aaron said, pressing another kiss to Robert’s mouth. “For the record, I don’t either. Now, I have two and a half hours before I have to go. With any luck, I won’t have caught my breath by the time I get on my flight.”

“Two and a half hours?” Robert asked, now eager and getting turned on. “I like a challenge.” Aaron laughed into his ear, pulling Robert into the bedroom.
They had barely got their breath back, and Aaron lay on his side, head resting on his hand and looking at Robert. “You got to go?” Robert asked, reading the silence, his voice a little hoarse.

“Not for twenty minutes or so,” Aaron said.

“Where’re you off to this time?” Robert asked.

“Berlin.”

“Oh,” Robert said. “When’re you going to be back in the country? You know, assuming that you don’t hop onto another plane to meet me in the middle of the night.”

“About ten days,” Aaron said. “Back here for a break before we kick off the UK tour.”

“Oh,” Robert said, this time brighter. “So I’ll actually get to wake up with you and find out what that’s like?” he teased. Aaron rolled his eyes, but didn’t argue it.

“I do have a flat in London,” Aaron said. “Outside London, actually, if we wanted to stay there instead…?” There’s a hint of an invitation there and Robert’s not fool enough to make fun of him, or joke that Robert’s place clearly isn’t good enough for the likes of him. Aaron had just the barest hesitation that let Robert know his one night stands didn’t get offered this. “I mean, usually when I’m working I stay in a hotel, because I’m near the other two and it’s just easier, but…”


“Something I wanted to ask you,” Aaron said. “Did you keep… the stuff I scribbled down last time I was here?”

“Yeah, I did,” Robert said. “It’s in the top draw.”

“Did you… read it?”

“Yeah, I did,” Robert said, a little ashamed but he didn’t want to lie. “Not at first, but after a day or two, I just… sorry. I know I shouldn’t have, but I didn’t get to where I am by ignoring my curiosity.”

“You can’t… tell anyone,” Aaron said. “My management gets pissed off if lyrics are released before…”

“Aaron, I’m not a journalist around you,” Robert said. “I’m not sleeping with you for the scoop of my life.”

“I know that,” Aaron said seriously. “I’m not interesting enough anyway.”

“I’d argue that,” Robert said with a smirk. Aaron smiled, then moved away so he could grab the sheets of paper, a little crumpled and a lot scribbled on. Aaron looked at the words as Robert did the same. It was hardly legible in the first place, Aaron’s scrawl and disjointed thoughts written over each other. Not much of it made any sense, though Robert could read the few odd words, odd phrases in the sea of ink. *Kiss me before the sun falls down. I never slept, but I dream. Is it hopeless?* Most of the rest seemed to only be intelligible to Aaron, Robert hadn’t been able to make much sense of it. But Aaron’s lips moved as he looked at it, so clearly it made sense to him.
“Thanks,” Aaron said. “Thought you might have chucked it.”

“No,” Robert said. “I wouldn’t have. You didn’t even mean to leave it here.”

“No,” Aaron said. “Rather distracted.” Robert grinned, completely unashamed. “Listen, we kick off the tour in London. Four dates. Do you… want me to get you tickets? I mean, if you wanted to, you don’t have to, but I’ll need to reserve them…”

“You want that?” Robert asked, eyes bright.

“Nah, forget it, stupid idea,” Aaron said, rolling his shoulders. “Sorry.”

“Hey, if you’re offering,” Robert interrupted. “And anyway, if I’m not talking to you by then, could always sell the tickets for an absolute mint.” Aaron playfully slapped his shoulder and they both laughed, Robert pushing his mouth against Aaron’s neck. Aaron sighed, the laughter fading into want and desire, whenAaron’s phone beeped. The alarm that meant he really had to go, he was pushing it even as it was. Robert sighed as Aaron started getting dressed, pulling his clothes back on.

“You know you’re proving a nightmare for work,” Robert noticed. “I’m not getting any sleep these days.”

“Oh, I feel so bad for you,” Aaron said sarcastically and Robert chuckled as he grabbed his phone, Aaron calling for a taxi to take him to the airport.

“You ever reserved tickets for someone before?” Robert asked, wanting to push it. “Concert tickets?” Robert said bluntly.

“Er, yes,” Aaron said. “But that was my mum. We… don’t get on very well, and honestly, having her and her friend watching a show was easier than actually having to meet up with her.”

“Why don’t you get on with her?” Robert asked.

“Er…” Aaron looked uncomfortable.

“You don’t have to tell me,” Robert said.

“It’s fine,” Aaron said. “She left me when I was eight. I didn’t see her from that point until the band started getting some recognition. Suddenly wanted to find her son when he started getting rich.” Aaron shook his head.

“Did you go into care?” Robert asked quietly.

“No, my dad,” Aaron said. “He’s er… not a good man.” The subject was closed, Robert knew that from the tone of his voice. “I needed to get away. And somehow a few years later, I ended up here, late for a flight to Berlin.” Aaron leaned across the bed and kissed Robert, much deeper than a goodbye peck, and murmured “bye” before leaving.

Once the door was closed, Robert lay back in the bed, smelling of sex and sweat and Aaron, but he was thinking. This was the second time in their short relationship Aaron had said something like this about his childhood. “I needed to escape” at the end of their interview. And now “I needed to get away.” It didn’t take a genius to work out he’d had a bad childhood. But Robert wanted to know more, he couldn’t help it. Aaron was well and truly under his skin.
Later that day when Robert got back to the office after a very quick lunch out, he could tell that things had changed, and he’d missed something key in the twenty minutes or so he’d been out.

“What’s going on?” Robert asked, seeing Lucy pulling her hair out of her face impatiently.

“Messenger are breaking up,” she said.

“What?” Robert said with half a laugh in his voice. Because that was ridiculous, there was no way Aaron would be able to hide that from him last night. “No, that’s insane.”

“They appeared on German TV and radio this morning without their front man,” Lucy said, repeating the facts. “And the other two both looked tense.”

“I’m sure there’s a reasonable explanation,” Robert said, playing for time.

“They said Aaron Livesy was ill,” Lucy said.

“There you go then,” Robert said.

“They lied. A few fans snapped pictures of him at Gatwick airport this morning,” Lucy said with wide eyes. “There’s the images. I mean, they’re denying it obviously, but they’ve got a sell out tour, they’re hardly going to say yes, this is the end.” Robert looked at the photos, though he didn’t need to. Aaron had his hood up, but it was unmistakably him, trying to hide but being unsuccessfully in the middle of the airport.

“What’s the weather like in Berlin?” Robert asked.

“Er… “ Lucy said, shaking her head. “I have no idea. Why’s that matter?” But Robert’s tapping away on his phone to find out. It is not that much of a surprise to him that a storm approaching hurricane level is hovering above Germany. And flights have been grounded until further notice. Perfect. Robert didn’t say anything further, just went into his office, but Lucy followed him.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but you don’t seem thrilled,” she said. “We could spin this story out for months, it’s great fodder. Especially when it gets dull and we have to resort to reporting on new art exhibitions in London’s galleries.”

“It’s not true,” Robert said. “And even if it is, how exactly is that going to make me look? I had an interview with Aaron Livesy a few weeks ago, and didn’t pick up on it? Journalist of the year, there.”

“How do you know it’s not true?” Lucy said.

“Don’t ask questions you don’t want the answers to,” Robert said, his tone making it clear that he wasn’t going to answer properly. Lucy sighed, but left the office, and Robert got his phone to text Aaron.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Not your fault,” came the very quick reply. “I wanted to see you.” Robert smiled. “Busy day? I can hear the speculation from here.”

“Yeah,” Robert texted. “I’m going to have to cover it, you know?”

“I know. Trust me, whatever you print isn’t going to be near the lecture I’m going to get from management. x”
“Sorry,” Robert sent, again.

“I’m not.” Robert grinned.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

I apologize profusely for the song lyrics in this chapter. I don't write song lyrics, and I couldn't find anything appropriate that I could steal (with credit) so I had to make them up. And that's not what I do, so feel free to skip right past them. Thank you for all the wonderful encouragement, it means so much to me! And I hope you enjoy this chapter!

Aaron was surprised at the level of press when he finally got off of his plane and out of Berlin airport into the waiting car. Even for a man who'd come out as gay while in the spotlight, being part of one of the most wanted bands on the planet right now, the level of press surprised him. “Shit,” Aaron cursed under his breath as he fought his way through the photographers and the shouted questions to the back of the car, the security trying to help. Once they were driving off to the hotel, Aaron could breathe. He really hadn’t thought this would be a big thing. He just wanted to see Robert, he hadn’t thought beyond that point. Now he was in a world of trouble, and he knew it.

“Yes,” he said briefly, answering his phone.

“Aaron, how are you?” the falsely sweet voice of James, the bands manager said.

“Yeah, okay, I screwed up,” Aaron said, pre-empting it. “I know I did, I’m sorry.”

“What the hell was so important that you left your friends to go home?” James asked. “Dead cat?”

“No,” Aaron said. “I needed to see someone.”

“Psychologist?” James said, deadpan.

“No, I needed to meet someone I’m seeing,” Aaron said. “And it couldn’t wait.” It could have waited, but Aaron didn’t want it to. Robert was under his skin.

“Right,” James said. “Does he have a problem? I mean, what skeletons are in his closet if you’re going public with him?”

“Woah, slow down,” Aaron said quickly. “I am not going public with him, it’s still really new. And it’s also nobodies business.”

“That doesn’t work when you’re you,” James said. “Come on, people are going to dig because you’ve made it look like the bands on the verge of splitting up, they’ll find out.”

“No, they won’t find out who it is,” Aaron said surely.

“Well, you’re going to have to make up a good excuse,” James said. “Oh, and Alex and Adam? Not thrilled with you.”

“Yep,” Aaron said, thinking quickly. “Right. Spin it that I was visiting my mum, I’ll call her and she’ll back me up.”
“I thought you didn’t get on with her,” James said.

“I don’t, but she wants to get back in my good books,” Aaron said. “She’ll do what I say.”

“Well, get back to me when you’ve spoken to her.” Aaron agreed, then made an uncomfortable call to Chas who’d heard all the gossip.

“Please mum, I need a favour,” Aaron said, cutting across her rambling. “If anyone asks, I was seeing you.”

“Okay,” Chas said. “What were you really doing?”

“I er… I’ve met someone,” Aaron said. “And I didn’t want to leave him.”

“Oh, that’s great!” Chas said with enthusiasm and Aaron sighed.

“Just stick to the script,” Aaron said darkly. “Can you do that for me?”

“Of course I can,” she said. “Just take care love.”

“Yeah, I will,” Aaron said, not scoffing the way he usually did. By the time Aaron had called James to let him know the story was good, the car had parked outside the hotel. Aaron went up to the suite the band was in, ignoring the reception desk (he’d received a text with the room information).

When he opened the door, he saw Alex and Adam, neither of whom looked pleased. “Well, I’m really getting it from all sides today,” Aaron said, attempting to lighten the mood. Adam’s eyes glinted with humour, but Aaron knew he wasn’t forgiven, not even close.

“We didn’t even talk about the tour, all we talked about was why you weren’t here,” Adam said. “Where were you?”

“London,” Aaron said. “I needed to see him,” he added to Alex, though she wasn’t mellowing. “For God’s sake, we’re working!” she snapped.

“I’m sorry,” Aaron said. “James is working on a cover story, saying I was visiting my mum. It will be okay. Come on, in a few weeks they’ll have forgotten all about this, it’s not like we’re going anywhere, is it? And I actually like touring, that’s the fun part.” She sighed, though the anger was fading and Aaron knew it was just the stress of being continually questioned from the media. Aaron didn’t much like that either.

“What’s special about this one?” Adam asked. “So much so that you’d skip the country?”

“I don’t know,” Aaron said, sitting down tiredly. “He’s different. It’s not like… those guys I meet in the backrooms of clubs, he’s not like that.” There was a deeper attraction there, a deeper connection. It wasn’t about the sex, if good sex (great sex) was all he was after, he could get that anywhere. But he loved the way Robert looked at him, he loved the way that Robert didn’t make him feel like a lab subject just for being famous. He treated him normally, and Aaron appreciated that. But that wasn’t why Aaron kept crawling back to him. He really liked him, and it had been a while since he’d felt this way about someone. The need he’d felt to reassure Robert that he hadn’t been cheating had been so potent that jumping on a plane back to London hadn’t even been a question. He’d felt the need to do it, and he had the money and he’d thought he had the time. So why not?

“I’m sorry,” Aaron said, sincerely. “I’ll be exactly where I’m supposed to be from this point on.”
“Good,” Alex said fervently. Then, after about forty seconds of uncomfortable silence, she asked. “Was it at least a good night?” Aaron couldn’t help his grin, even biting down into his bottom lip, and she smiled.

They’re waiting for the last interview of the day, prepped with extra interview questions from Aaron’s unscheduled trip and the gossip from it. Adam looked twitchy.

“Want to work on the music for this?” Aaron asked, handing over a sheet of paper to Adam as kind of a peace offering. He knew he was in the wrong and needed forgiving.

“Oh, you did do some work then?” Adam asked easily, looking at the scrawled lyrics, easily able to decipher Aaron’s handwriting after so long.

“I was delayed at an airport, not much else to do,” Aaron said. “It’s only the first half anyway. But thought it might give you something to do that isn’t scowling.” Adam laughed easily, the ice breaking and gave it a read.

I never slept, dreaming with eyes open.
I don’t do this, I don’t let myself feel.
It was one night, nothing else.
More than that was never the deal
Hearing the distant sirens in the city.
Safe with you here in the warm
Counting the freckles on your face
When did this become the norm?
But in an hour I’ll be gone, because I’m…

Chorus:
Leaving in the morning
I don’t dare to sleep
It’s not worth missing a second.
How can I be in so deep?
Time won’t stop even for a beat
How can I make fate mine to cheat?
But I’m leaving in the morning.

“You’ve got it bad mate,” Adam said.

“Shut up,” Aaron said, elbowing him and they both dissolved into laughter, the easy kind that had drawn them to each other as kids in the first place. Aaron had found it very difficult handing over his innermost thoughts at first, it feeling so against his instincts, but he’d got used to it by now. It was how it worked, creating the music. And Adam might be laid back, but he knew music and it just worked.

“What makes this guy special?” Adam asked. “Do I even get a name?”

“Robert,” Aaron admitted easily enough. “I can’t tell you what makes him special. He’s not my… normal type.”

“What, muscular, tanned, fit and thick as…”

“Thank you!” Aaron interrupted and they laughed again. “Look, I’m sorry about this morning. I really thought I had the time to make it back.”
“You’re not leaving though,” Alex said, wanting the reassurance. “You could. You could be great solo.”

“I don’t want to leave,” Aaron said firmly, seeing her worry there. “Shall we get on with this?” Alex nodded, a nervous smile on her face.

Robert sat in his office, watching an online stream of the interview in Germany. It had taken him a while to find a working link, but he wanted to see Aaron. The three of them looked a little awkward, hardly surprising with the furore that morning that Robert helped create, he thought uncomfortably. But he can see the sparring between the two men and the way Alex fiddled with her hair. It wasn’t irreparable damage, thank God. Though Robert does send Aaron a text. “You need more sleep, you look knackered.”

Aaron replied with a wink emoji and Robert grinned.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

A lot of heavy conversations here that I hadn't planned! Hope it reads okay anyway, and thank you so much for the encouragement.

Robert was getting excited, almost like a kid at Christmas, though he was pretending that wasn’t the case at all. Aaron came back into the country on Friday, and he had a whole week off until rehearsals for the tour started. A whole week that Robert would spend with Aaron, which was more combined time than they’d ever spent together. Robert was pretending he wasn’t looking forward to it like mad, but Friday afternoon dragged like hell. He knew Aaron was home, he’d text him, but Robert couldn’t leave the office until they locked the paper for the weekend deadline. It wasn’t a particularly late finish, not for him, but 6pm was a lot later than he’d have liked under the circumstances.

Totally unashamed about how quickly he was calling Aaron, he dialled through as he walked to his flat and could almost hear the smile in Aaron’s voice. “Right, I’m done for the weekend, where are you?”

“Someone would say you’re eager,” Aaron said.

“I’ve not seen you in ages,” Robert said, completely unashamed. “Yeah, I am eager.”

“So am I,” Aaron admitted. “I’m at my place, could you… could we stay here tonight?”

“Yeah,” Robert said. He’d already packed a bag of overnight things at home, because Aaron had suggested this in a text message before, so all he had to do was grab it. “Give me your address?”

“Actually…” Aaron sounded uncomfortable. “I’ve sort of… hired a car, with a driver and he’s outside your flat. I don’t want you to be longer than you have to be. I mean, it’s stupid and…”

“No,” Robert said. “I don’t think that’s stupid at all. I’ll grab some stuff then I’ll be on my way.”

“Good,” Aaron said. “I’ll pick up dinner. Chinese okay?”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “Chinese is good. You don’t cook?”

“Are you kidding me?” Aaron said, making Robert laugh. “No, I don’t cook. That is not one of my talents.”

“I can cook,” Robert suggested, almost shyly. “Tomorrow if you want.”

“Yeah,” Aaron said. “I’d like that.” Robert smiled.

“I’m going to go,” Robert said, shifting his keys in his pocket as he walked up to the fourth floor. “See you in a bit.”

“Bye.”
At first, it was a little uncomfortable, being driven to see Aaron. It felt unnecessary, Robert was perfectly capable of getting there himself. But once they’d got out of the centre of London, he started to relax and appreciate it. It was easier, and if Aaron wanted to spend his money on a car, there was nothing stopping him. It was probably a novelty he should sit back and enjoy, because it wasn’t like this was going to be happening often.

The driver turned right suddenly and Robert peered around, looking for something that might scream “Aaron” at him. Nothing did, and the driver stopped outside a house, rather larger than anything Robert could ever hope to buy. It wasn’t overly grand, but it sure as hell wasn’t a bolt hole flat the way Aaron had implied. Robert thanked the driver and went up to the door, which opened before he could so much as knock. Aaron had clearly been waiting for him. He wore a short sleeved black T shirt, showing off his forearms and ill fitting jeans. He looked much better than Robert’s memory and he swallowed against the lump in his throat. Aaron’s eyes were sparkling with joy, Robert hoped anyway. He certainly didn’t have his usual grumpy brooding persona and before Robert could think any further, Aaron kissed him. It was light and gentle, and Robert grinned before going back for a deeper more passionate kiss, one that had Aaron groaning as Robert’s hands grabbed onto his hair, not letting him move away.

“I’ve missed you,” Robert said, eyes bright, hand sliding down to his hips.

“Yeah,” Aaron agreed. He nodded his head in invitation and they both went into the house, instinctively knowing they wouldn’t make it to the bedroom.

“Your kitchen floor is incredibly uncomfortable,” Robert said, speaking lowly as Aaron’s head rested on his shoulder, both of their bodies sticking together with sweat.

“My kitchen floor wasn’t designed for desperate sex,” Aaron countered.

“Shame.” Both men laughed. “How was Europe?”

“Fine,” Aaron said, nuzzling into Robert’s neck. “Glad to be home though.”

“Yeah?” Robert asked hopefully.

“Mm.” Aaron shifted off his body and Robert shivered, suddenly feeling cold and they slowly pulled their clothes back on, both men feeling over sensitive after their reunion. Robert’s stomach rumbled as he caught the scent of a Chinese takeaway. “Probably cold by now,” Aaron said.

“Sorry,” Robert said, not sounding it in the slightest and Aaron laughed.

“I don’t mind it cold,” Aaron said, starting to unwrap the food.

“Oh, I thought you got waited on hand and foot,” Robert countered. A dark shadow passed over Aaron’s face, and Robert felt stupid. “Sorry. What did I say…?”

“You’ve a lot to learn about me,” Aaron said.

“Well, I’m not going anywhere.” Aaron smiled, more freely at that.

“Good.” They didn’t speak much as they ate their meal, both of them hungry, only touching when Aaron passed him a beer from the fridge.
“I’ve got to ask you something that’s been… bothering me,” Aaron said when their plates were clear. Robert nodded, waiting though Aaron looked uncomfortable. “When we were talking and texting… you mentioned an ex girlfriend.”

“Yeah,” Robert said blankly, not following the logic. He had, in unflattering terms, because he worked with her. Laura, she had been in the sports section for a while and he’d bumped into her one day.

“Are you… hiding your sexuality? I mean, I know it’s not my business, but my life is hectic and I need to know, and I won’t hide forever and…”

“Aaron,” Robert said, stopping his rambling. “I’m not hiding. I’m also not gay.” Aaron scoffed and shook his head, the happy mood of just five minutes ago having dissipated. “I’m bi.” That did stop the defeated sighing from Aaron. “I like both, I like men and women. And I really like you.” His lips twitched into a small smile. “Being with you won’t make me gay, any more than being with a woman would make me straight. I didn’t mention it, because… it doesn’t really matter. It is who I am. Or I didn’t think it mattered,” he added, looking at Aaron seriously.

“No,” Aaron said. “I just… I’m not going to do the pretending you’re straight thing. It’s exhausting and I don’t have the time for it. If we’re going to give this relationship a good go, I mean.”

“You’ve done that before,” Robert realised at his reaction. “Been with someone who claimed they were straight?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said heavily. “I got it, I understood why, but… even before I came out in public, the people who knew me knew the truth. I know it’s difficult, but… I can’t hide who I am anymore, not for anyone. It hurts me too much. Maybe that’s selfish. Probably is, your sexuality isn’t anything to do with me, but I won’t hide, Robert. Which is why I brought this up in the first place.”

“Aaron, I’m not in hiding,” Robert said, reaching for Aaron’s hand and lacing their fingers together. “I also think it’s not really anyone else’s business.”

Aaron let out a huff of a laugh that wasn’t really amused. “And I’d love to live in a world that agreed with you. Unfortunately, people will always gossip about me because of who I am. You know that, you’re in the business of gossip.” Robert rolled his eyes.

“If my sexuality is a problem for you, just… tell me now. Tell me and I’ll go,” Robert said heavily. He didn’t want to, but he also didn’t want to argue about it. He didn’t need it thrown in his face all the time, especially as this relationship was so new.

“No,” Aaron said easily. “I just needed to know. We’ve not exactly spent much time actually in the same place.”

“Okay,” Robert said, letting it go. Aaron leaned across the table and kissed him sweetly.

“So, want the grand tour?” turning the subject to something lighter.

“Yeah, about that,” Robert said. “This is hardly a “little flat” outside London is it?”

“Yeah, well,” Aaron said with a shrug. “It’s not… I don’t invite people here. I’m rarely ever here either. So, want to look around?” Robert nodded, more than happy.

It was a nice house, neat, upmarket, but it didn’t really look like anyone lived here. It wasn’t until they got to the bedrooms that Robert really could see some personality. There were platinum records on the walls, photos of the band and certain tours, a bookcase filled with CDs and records.
“Right, I don’t actually sleep here,” Aaron said and Robert noticed he seemed embarrassed. Almost ashamed.

“Where do you sleep then?” Robert asked. Aaron moved to a door that Robert had assumed was an en suite bathroom, and he saw a small dark room, duvet and pillows on the floor. Robert frowned in silent question.

“I can’t really do more than doze in bed,” Aaron said. “It comes from so long being on the road at the beginning. I ran away from home and for years, we slept in back rooms, back seats of cars, any floor we could find. I have to sleep on the floor these days otherwise I don’t really feel rested.”

“That’s why you’re always awake when we share a bed,” Robert realised.

“Well, I’m awake when I share a bed with anyone. I can doze, but not really get any kind of proper rest. I need a floor Rob. And this is not something I want advertised, it’s private and…”

“I’m not here as a journalist, Aaron,” Robert said firmly.

He nodded. “It just…I know I’m odd, I know it’s weird and I don’t want…”

“Hey,” Robert said, trying to reassure him, pulling him into his arms. “It’s fine, it’s you. Don’t worry about it.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re not going to run because I’m some kind of freak who will never be able to sleep next to you in a bed like a normal person?” Aaron’s voice was shaking and all Robert wanted to do was protect him. He ran his hands up and down Aaron’s back, trying to reassure him.

“Of course I’m not.” Robert kissed him, for reassurance. Aaron sighed against his lips.

“Thanks,” Aaron said, trying to hide how much it meant to him. “Thank you.”
Chapter 11

Absolutely overwhelmed with the response to this fic!! I’m not sure how long I’m going to be able to update daily, but we’ll see. Hope you enjoy this chapter and thank you for making it this far!

Robert twitched, feeling agitated. He shouldn’t be, he was in a feather bed, the most comfortable bed imaginable almost sinking into the mattress. He should not be having trouble sleeping. Aaron had curled up with him and they’d shared a few tender embraces for endless minutes before he’d said goodnight, closing the door to that tiny room where Aaron could find some rest. Robert understood, he wasn’t completely unfeeling, but... but. His dreams of waking up with Aaron, sleepy embraces, lazily making love while they were still half asleep... well, those fantasies seemed destined not to come true.

Aaron could tell him not to if he wanted, but Robert was prepared to take the risk. He took the duvet off the bed, grabbed a pillow. He carefully opened the door, but he needn’t have bothered. Aaron was dead to the world, on his side facing the wall. Robert lay next to him, facing him, and closed his eyes, ignoring the twinge in his back. He’d get over it.

Aaron woke slowly, feeling rested for the first time in ages. It took a while for him to become fully aware, and when he did, he frowned at seeing Robert laying next to him. “Er... what?” Aaron asked slowly. Robert smiled.

“You said you couldn’t sleep in a bed with me,” Robert said. “You never said I couldn’t sleep on the floor with you.” Aaron would have tried to argue that logic but the grin on Robert’s face stopped him. He looked happy.

“Thanks,” he said quietly. “You didn’t have to...”

“I wanted to wake up with you,” Robert said. “I don’t care where.” Aaron smiled into a kiss, soft and gentle.

“I know it’s a bit weird,” Aaron said. “Thanks for staying.” The cuddled up close, a mess of bed sheets and two duvets and tangled legs. It’s not about lust, but it’s very easy and comfortable, being this close to another person.

“My parents are dead,” Robert said quietly. That threw Aaron and his eyes popped open in surprise.

“Oh,” he said. “I er... wow, okay...”

“I’m telling you, because you’ve been opening up to me,” Robert said. “And I know it doesn’t come easily to you, I can tell so...”
“Right,” Aaron said, searching for words frantically. “I’m so sorry,” Aaron said gently.

“My mum, she died in a fire. I was there, I was fourteen.” Robert had made the conscious choice to bring this subject up, but now he had it was uncomfortable and he kept shifting on the floor.

“Oh, my God,” Aaron said. “I really don’t know what to say,” he said after a moment’s pause. He cradled Robert’s head with his hand, gently, and Robert shifted closer to him, enjoying the touch. He closed his eyes, but otherwise remained connected to Aaron, their touch, their bodies and Aaron stroked a thumb across his eyebrow lightly. Which was oddly soothing. “I’m sorry.”

“It was a long time ago.”

“That doesn’t make me less sorry,” Aaron whispered. Aaron shifted and kissed him softly. Robert deepened it, wanting more, so much more after confiding in him. Robert didn’t talk to just anyone.

“Wait,” Aaron said, twisting away. “You sure?”

“Mm,” Robert said nodding quickly. “Very sure.” They made love that had Robert whimpering and almost on the verge of begging by the end of it. Needy and desperate. He didn’t know, didn’t remember ever being this connected to another person during sex, because sex was just about lust and desire and scratching the itch. It didn’t have much to do with the person you were actually with. Right? Afterwards Robert couldn’t move, Aaron had collapsed on his chest, trying to recover.

“Shower, then breakfast,” Aaron murmured against Roberts sweat damp skin.

“Mm, yes,” he agreed. “Have you got anything in the fridge? You’ve only just got home.”

“Er… no,” Aaron said. “Milk for tea, didn’t buy anything else.”

“Right,” Robert said, shifting and deciding to start the day. “I’ll shower first, then I’ll go out and get some supplies for breakfast. What d’you fancy?”

“You,” Aaron said, biting his shoulder playfully. Then awkwardly, “You don’t have to go to a special effort for me.”

“I told you I’d cook,” Robert said. “I keep my word.”

“We could shower together,” Aaron suggested tentatively.

“Yeah, we could,” Robert said, stroking his hand through Aaron’s hair, enjoying the fluffiness now it’s not gelled down. “But I am really hungry and I think we both know that’s going to take up more time.”

“Spoil sport,” Aaron said. “Full English. If you’re serious. If you’re not toast’ll do for me.”

“Full English it is.” Robert kissed him deeply, the kind of kiss that seems to make time stop. It was broken by Aaron’s rumbling stomach and they both laughed. “That’s my cue,” Aaron watched as Robert left the small room, listening until the shower started running and he smiled. He couldn’t help it, this felt so good. To actually have someone who didn’t want him for his money, or his fame. This felt really right.

Aaron had had a very long shower, and then spent longer than he ever had in his life deciding what to wear. He was spending the weekend with Robert, he wanted to look good, at his best. The fact that Robert had quite possibly spent more time with him naked in bed than anywhere else seemed irrelevant. He decided on a white long sleeved T shirt and his usual jeans, leaving his hair free of gel,
as he’d noticed the way Robert’s long fingers had threaded through it this morning.

He went downstairs to the frying of bacon, making his stomach rumble. Robert looked so at home in his kitchen it was almost frightening. Bacon and sausages in the pan, toast in and a cup of coffee waiting for him on the kitchen table. God, he looked so good cooking for them both and it made Aaron’s breath catch.

“No, of course,” Robert said. Then Aaron realised he was on the phone, he’d been too busy staring at Robert’s rather nice arse to notice. “Yes. Sure. Love you too. Bye.” He hung up, and Aaron felt cold in just the space of a few seconds. Someone else Robert was seeing, then. He wasn’t single. Perfect.

“Oh, hi,” Robert said, turning and smiling easily at him. Not the look of someone hiding something. “Just on the phone to my sister.” Aaron sighed. Of course. Why did he have to think the worst of people?

“Is she all right?”

“Mm,” Robert said. “Wanted to come down to London to see me this weekend. I put her off.”

“You shouldn’t be doing that for me,” Aaron said, leaning against the kitchen table and grabbing his coffee.

“I’ve been looking forward to this weekend,” Robert said. “You don’t have unlimited time, she can see me next week.” Aaron couldn’t argue with that and smiled as Robert started plating up their breakfasts.
Chapter 12

Aaron wolfed down his breakfast. Robert was right, he could cook and it didn’t last long at all. “Wow, hungry much?”

“I have to keep in shape,” Aaron said. “Can’t have a fat singer, can you?” he said dully.

“Oh,” Robert said.

“This was a treat,” Aaron said. “And yeah, it was good,” he said with a smile. “I reserved you tickets by the way. For next week?”

“That’s great,” Robert said sincerely. “Which day?”

“Whichever one you want,” Aaron said. “I er… didn’t know what would be easier with your work, so…”

“So you reserved tickets for me for four dates?” Robert pushed, feeling flattered. “At the O2?”

“Yeah, I know it’s stupid.”

“It’s not stupid,” Robert said. “Must have had a job swinging that past management.”

“Not really,” Aaron said. “They reserve quite a few for PR, media…” he nodded at Robert. “And personal tickets.”

“Which one do I come under?”

“You already know that.” Robert smiled at the intense look in his eyes, leaning across the table and kissing him, just a brush of lips. “It’s two tickets each night. If you wanted to bring someone, or have some company I mean. It’s not like you’re going to get much from me, I’ll be on stage and busy and…”

“Aaron, you’re rambling,” Robert said and Aaron smiled as he was cut off. “I’ll be there to see you. I don’t need…”

“Oh,” Aaron said, amused as he stopped talking, Robert’s eyes looking into the distance. “Thought of someone you want to take?”

“Vic, my sister,” Robert said. “She’s couldn’t get tickets for Manchester, it was sold out. I know she tried.”

“That’s a plan then,” Aaron said. “You close with her?”

“Not really,” Robert said. “We should be, with no parents but…” he sighed. “I’m not great at keeping in contact with her. I should be, it’s my fault, but… yeah, this might make up for it.”

“Okay,” Aaron said with a smile. Aaron’s fingers were twitching and after two minutes of it, Robert noticed.

“What’s wrong?”
“Nothing.”

“Aaron…” Robert said, not buying that for a moment.

“I just… I need to write. When I feel… anything, I just… writing’s the way I cope.” Robert nodded and threw him a notepad. He’d discovered while cooking that Aaron had stashed notebooks and pens in almost every cupboard, some empty, some scribbled in. He had no doubt the rest of the house was like it too.

“I’m not stopping you.”

“I don’t deserve you,” Aaron said after a moment’s silence. How could Robert be so understanding so quickly? He knew he wasn’t an easy man to live with. He picked up the pen and started to write.

During the course of the day, they found themselves in the living room lying close together on the sofa. Robert had his thighs open, Aaron lying between them, his back against Robert’s chest, pressed so close together. It was easy and intimate and wonderful. Robert was flicking through Netflix, totally in control of the remote and what they were watching, and Aaron mentally wasn’t here with him. Every now and then he’d snuggle close into Robert’s chest, but otherwise his focus was completely on the notebook in front of him. When he did push into his body, Robert tightened his hand on Aaron’s waist, keeping him as close as possible.

“Okay, I’m done,” Aaron said, throwing the notebook on the floor.

“Come up with anything good?” Robert asked, no idea what makes lyrics good in the first place.

“I don’t know yet, Adam’ll tell me that when he tries to fit the music to it,” Aaron said.

“You don’t write music?”

“No,” Aaron said. “I’m not good at it, I have tried. Everything I come up with is just repeats of stuff we’ve already done.” Robert stroked his skin, hands now finding their way under fabric and getting much more intimate.

“What the hell are we watching?” Aaron asked, now finding the attention for the TV.

“Nothing,” Robert said. “It’s all crap.”

“Mm.” Aaron arched against him as Robert started to push a hand under the front of his jeans, teasing. “Let me pick something to watch.”

“Oh, you’d rather watch the TV than this?” Robert asked, skilled fingers making Aaron’s head roll back and Robert laugh wickedly in his ear.

“Just trying to save face and pretend I’m not completely at your mercy,” Aaron said, undulating at Robert’s touch. “I’m failing here,” he admitted.

Robert smiled into a kiss, trying to distract Aaron. Because the truth was, he was failing too. And he was falling hard.

They spent the rest of the weekend together, watching rubbish and Aaron apparently educating Robert in his terrible taste in music. It was fun and intimate and, quite honestly, the perfect way to spend the weekend. The only slight fly in the ointment for Robert was sleeping on the floor. He
wanted to wake up next to Aaron, to see his face incredibly carefree as he woke, but his back wasn’t thanking him for a couple of nights on the floor. Maybe if this turned into a regular thing he could buy a single mattress to sleep next to him. That might be a good compromise.

Sunday afternoon slipped into the evening and Robert told Aaron he had to go home. As much as he would like to, he couldn’t avoid work on Monday morning.

“Do you want to come over to mine?” Robert asked quietly. “Can’t avoid work.”

“Yeah,” Aaron said. “I do, but tomorrow eh? Just want a night on my own first.”

“Oh,” Robert said, feeling more let down that he probably should do.

“It’s not you,” Aaron said, reading him well. “I never spend a night on my own, not really. I’m always disturbed by someone, like Adam and Alex or PR, and… I like spending the odd night alone. It’s not about you, I really like you Robert. But my life can be hectic, please don’t take it personally.”

“I don’t,” Robert said after a moment, seeing where he was coming from. “I get it. But I do have to go, so…”

“A car’s a phone call away if you want to head back to London,” Aaron said with a sly smile.

“No, I can’t ask you to do that,” Robert said.

“Well, my car’s not here. And neither is yours, so good luck getting to work on time,” Aaron said with a grin, already fishing his phone out of his jeans pocket. Robert didn’t argue any more and let Aaron do it.

Robert slept poorly. Alone and in his own flat wasn’t the ideal place to be, and even though this relationship was relatively new, he missed Aaron by his side. His grumpy scowl, his eyes that looked at him with joy until the realities of life hit him. God, he had it bad. He knew that, but it was like he couldn’t stop. He needed Aaron around him. This was stupid, he wasn’t allowed to fall in love with a man like that, he’d be away and out of the country more often than he was here and… Robert stopped his thinking instantly, lying in bed. Because he’d thought the word “love” without even willing it. It had just swum to the forefront of his mind. No, he hadn’t known Aaron nearly long enough for that to even enter into it. Of course not, he thought as he punched the pillow. Aaron was unattainable, rich, famous, talented and he absolutely wouldn’t settle for Robert. So drop that line of thinking right now.
Chapter 13

The week rushed by. Robert was very busy at work, and he barely saw Aaron, except at night. Every night Robert would come home, knackered, to see Aaron looking surprisingly and annoyingly well rested compared to Robert’s testing days in the office. They’d order in usually, or Robert would cook, they would eat dinner and go to bed together. Aaron always ended up on the floor, but he did have the patience to always wait until Robert was sleeping, which he was grateful for. He liked falling asleep to Aaron’s face.

On Thursday, Robert had to work late. He was attempting to get the Friday issue of the paper sorted today, so he could get away quickly for Aaron’s concert tomorrow. One thing he didn’t want to do was run over and miss the start, especially as Vic was coming down for the weekend for the show, which apparently she couldn’t miss. Robert’s story was that he’d got the tickets through his job, but he had a feeling that would fall through when they got to the arena. Aaron had certainly implied they were good seats.

“Don’t worry about it,” Aaron said when Robert called, letting him know he’d be very late. “I’m not at yours anyway, I’m rehearsing for the weekend.”

“Ah, that’s the noise I can hear in the background,” Robert said, it suddenly clicking into place.

“What, you don’t just wing it?”

“That might work for hack journalists, but when we have twenty thousand fans in one room who could start booing us at any moment… well, I need a bit of preparation.”

“They’re not going to boo you,” Robert said easily. “They worship you.”

“Mm.” Aaron grumbled, but Robert laughed.

“How are the other two?”

“Alex is so keyed up, she won’t sleep tonight,” Aaron said. “Adam’s just… Adam.”

“Good,” Robert said. “Or, I don’t know, is that good?”

Aaron laughed easily. “Yeah, it’s good. Got a couple of the press hanging around, hoping for photos.”

“Well, it’s not one from me.”

“I did assume,” Aaron said warmly.

“Listen, Vic’s coming down tomorrow, so…”

“I’ll be staying with the band in the hotel from now on,” Aaron said, heading off the question. “I have to, it’s not that I don’t want to, but…”

“Yeah,” Robert said softly. “It’s okay. Just… remember that no matter how many fit men keep throwing themselves at you, that…”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m taken. I know,” Aaron said amused, unaware of the thrill of warmth that went through Robert at that. Aaron considered himself taken, that could only be a good thing. “Don’t worry, I won’t forget it. I expect a lot of phone sex though.”
Robert laughed loudly. “Oh, yeah?”

“I’m away for months,” Aaron said. “Need reminding of what’s waiting for me at home, don’t I?”

“I’m home am I?” Robert asked, the moment suddenly heavy with meaning.

“Well, something like that,” Aaron said, his voice warm, making Robert smile. “When you get here tomorrow night, just tell the box office your name and they’ll have you on the list.”

“Thank you,” Robert said sincerely. “Got to see what all the fuss is about myself.”

“Did you used to review live shows?” Aaron asked curiously.

“Well, at the beginning of my career,” Robert said. “Management tended to give away free tickets to interns, or… low level journalists to try and get a positive piece written.”

“And did you…”

“What, ever succumb to bribery?” Robert teased. “Surely not.” Aaron laughed, and Robert realised how much he had been laughing over the last few days. In public Aaron always seemed grumpy, though most agents would call it moody. But he seemed happy now and Robert loved that, whether he was involved in it or not.

“You reporting on our show?”

“Technically one of the junior writers is,” Robert said. “I have to include it, it’ll look odd if I don’t.”

“I know,” Aaron said. “Be kind though.”

“Come off it,” Robert said. “I could print you were committing ritual Satanism and it would still be a sell out.” Aaron laughed.

“Aaron!” Robert heard the shout even through the phone line.

“I have to go,” Aaron said.

“Guess I’m seeing you at the show then,” Robert said. “If you’re at the hotel tonight?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said. “I’m buzzing for it to be honest. This part I like. This is what I’m good at.”

“You sound happy,” Robert noticed.

“Yeah.” Another call of Aaron in the distance. “I’ll call you later.”

“Okay, bye,” Robert said. “Love you.” Robert froze, suddenly realising what he’d said, what had slipped out. He shouldn’t have said that, it was way too early, God, what had he been thinking?! The line was still connected, he could hear the distant sounds from the stadium, so he hadn’t even been lucky enough for Aaron to have hung up before hearing it. “Aaron? Just… forget that, please don’t…”

“I have to go,” Aaron said, his voice sounding cold. And then he hung up.

“Oh, Robert, what have you done?” he said to himself, feeling his heart sink. “Idiot.”

Aaron, come on, we can’t wait for you all day,” Adam said. “Lover boy can wait,” he added with a
grin. Aaron just nodded, getting back to rehearsals, all the while his mind running so quickly. Had Robert meant it? Or had it been something that just… said by accident, the kind of thing he wasn’t meant to take seriously. It was far too soon, obviously. Of course it was. But the thing is, the niggling thing in Aaron’s head was he felt it too. He felt that connection, he felt that deep indefinable thing he’d never felt with anyone else. If Robert hadn’t meant it, it wouldn’t be the end of the world, but for him… Aaron couldn’t remember ever feeling like this about anyone. He didn’t have the words to express it any other way than his lyrics. That was all he had. He was no good with saying what he felt, but writing it was far easier. None of that changed the fact it was too soon, much too soon.

“This okay for you?” Alex asked, giving him the set list to look over. Generally it was good, but one thing was wrong. Aaron decided to risk it, make a decision and go for it.

“Can I make a change?”
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

So this is tomorrow’s chapter, but I’m posting it now instead. Thank you all for your happy thoughts on tumblr after I passed out this afternoon (wth happened, idk) and I’m feeling better now. Again, please forgive me for the song lyrics, it really isn’t my strength. Enjoy!

Robert called Aaron three times on Friday, and he couldn’t talk any of the times he’d called. He really thought he’d blown it, though Aaron had sent a few texts to him. All along the lines of “sorry, its mayhem. Can’t talk right now and I’ll see you later?” Which while not exactly the kind of conversation he wanted, it was a little reassuring.

After work, he found Vic outside his flat, bright eyed and happy, giving him a hug. “Rob, it’s been so long since I’ve seen you!” she squealed into his shoulder. Even though he felt wary and unsure about the state of his relationship with Aaron right now, it felt unbelievably good to see her.

“How are you?” he asked happily, unlocking his door and letting them in. Vic started talking a mile a minute about her new job in the Woolpack, and being browbeaten by Marlon into cooking what he wanted instead of what she did. Robert tuned out, though it was good to see her so enthusiastic. Robert started cooking pasta, nothing complicated but he wanted food before they went out and Vic perched herself on the edge of the kitchen table.

“So, what seats have we got tonight?”

“I have no idea,” Robert said. “They’re reserved, just got to show up to the box office.”

“Well, I hope they’re good. I really want to be close enough to see them.”

“For free,” Robert reminded her.

“I love your job,” Vic said with a smile. “I really fancy one of the guys.” It was lucky Robert wasn’t holding anything because it would have smashed on the kitchen floor.

“What?!”

“That Adam,” she said, eyes bright. “I really like the look of him. Mm.”

“Vic, I don’t need to talk about my sisters list of crushes,” Robert said bluntly, focusing on the pasta, trying to pretend it was actually interesting.

“You’ve met Aaron Livesy though, haven’t you?” Vic pushed. Robert froze for a second. “You interviewed him, right?”

“Oh,” Robert said. “Yeah, I did.”

“What’s he like?” Vic asked.
“Gorgeous.” Robert spoke before he could stop himself and Vic looked at him slyly.

“Oh?”

“I mean… yeah,” Robert said, trying to backtrack a little. “Photos really don’t do him justice. Don’t think he liked me when I met him.”

“No?”

“Well, who would?” Robert said fairly. “Journalist nosing into his life. Anyone else did it, it’d be called harassment.”

“What’s wrong with you?” Vic said. “You seem all… I can’t put my finger on it.”

“I’m fine,” Robert said. “Want to eat?” Vic nodded, too hungry from a day of travelling on delayed trains to argue.

“I think there’s some tickets reserved for me,” Robert said to the woman in the Box Office, ignoring Vic who was almost buzzing with excitement.

“Name?”

“Robert Sugden.” The woman clicked on the computer, then brightened up.

“Yep, got you right here. ID?”

“Er… sure,” Robert said, finding his driving licence which was in his wallet. “Why?”

“You’re kidding, right,” she said, friendly enough as she passed his licence back. “You’re an exclusive guest, people would chew off their right arm for these tickets.”

“Exclusive guest?” Vic asked, eyes narrowing at her brother. “Why do I get the feeling there’s something you’re not telling me?” Robert looked at her, but said nothing, taking the VIP passes and tickets that the woman passed over with a smile.

“Fourth row?!” Vic said looking at the tickets. “Wow.” Robert moved away from the counter, and Vic grabbed him by his shirt.

“Right, there’s something you’re hiding,” Vic said. “Come on, out with it.”

“Okay,” Robert said, feeling caught. “Those tickets have been reserved for me… by Aaron.”


“Because… please God keep your voice down,” Robert warned. “I’m seeing him.”

“What?” Vic asked, not comprehending it.

“You’re not that stupid,” Robert said. Vic still didn’t seem to get it. “Okay, for the past week I’ve been sharing a bed with him, does that make it any clearer for you?”

“Rob!” she hissed. “No, you’re making this up.”

Robert sighed. “Fine,” he said. “I know I have a reputation as a liar, so believe what you want. Do you want your ticket or not?” Vic looked at him as if she was unsure what to believe but she let it
“Yeah, I want to see the show.”

“Right,” Robert said, forcing a smile. “Shall we?”

Robert had begun to think this was an incredibly bad idea. He shouldn’t be here, sitting in an arena, waiting for the man he was sleeping with to come on stage. He might have scared Aaron off completely anyway, so what would be the point? Plus Vic was looking at him alternatively with sympathy, and half the time like he was a pathological liar. He never should have mentioned it. But that was until the three of them took to the stage. Aaron looked incredible. He really did, and Robert barely had any attention for the other two thirds of the band. For him, they weren’t important at all.

Clearly his clothes had been picked out by someone in management because they fit him perfectly and Robert knew him well enough to know that Aaron rarely chose clothes that fit him this well. A black T shirt with the bands logo on it, showing off his muscular forearms, God those arms… and jeans (what a surprise) that Robert was definitely going to ask Aaron to wear again. He looked incredible fit in them and Robert’s palms were itching with the need to touch him.

They opened with No one, one of their biggest hits from last year and Robert finally felt glad he was here. It wasn’t like anyone was going to suddenly turn to Robert and go “oh, you’re the guy the lead singer's screwing, right?” No one would believe him anyway.

Adam had fun playing up to the crowd, as did Alex. Aaron was smiling, clearly enjoying himself, but he was quieter than the other two. Just his personality, Robert knew. Aaron caught his eye somewhere through the second song and smiled, more with his blue eyes than his mouth and Robert grinned back, pleased that he’d spotted him in the crowd. And he enjoyed watching him a lot more than he expected to. In his line of work, he had seen a lot of concerts and shows, but there was something almost hypnotising about watching Aaron on stage.

That was until about an hour into the show. “Now, we’re going to do something we don’t normally do,” Alex said into the microphone, staring at the crowd. “We’re going to perform a new song that no one here will have heard,” she continued.

“World exclusive, then,” Adam said easily, joining in the banter and playing up to the crowds screaming. Robert’s eyes swung back to Aaron who was fiddling with his guitar. If Robert didn’t know better, he’d say he looked nervous. But Aaron had done this a hundred times before, so… what? He wasn’t even taking the lead vocals on this, Alex was.

“This one’s called Daydreaming,” Alex said as Aaron started to play.

It’s in that moment before you wake up
It’s the smell of bacon in the air
Your sure hands won’t let me fall down
If you take one look and I’m laid bare.
I need to catch that smirk on your face
The one that will get me through the day
Who knows what tomorrow will bring?
But if it were up to me we’d stay.

Chorus:
My heart leaps when you call me
Can’t stop hoping for your smile.
One taste is not enough by half.
So stay right here for a while.
I know it’s too soon for this to be real
I know we’re no more than a fling.
Nothing can stop me hoping for you
So I still waste time…. Daydreaming.

My life was set with no room for two
You became the most important part.
I don’t share my heart with strangers
Please can’t you give me a head start?
I’m always alone on the floorboards
That’s the way it usually goes.
That second where I fall asleep
You watch me and it’s like time slows.

Chorus...

Robert had barely breathed throughout the song. As they go into the chorus for the second time, Aaron’s vocals backing up Alex’s, Robert knew he was either reading way too much into things that weren’t there, being self obsessed. Or Aaron had written that about him. Either way, he had to find out.

“I have to go,” Robert said desperately to Vic at the end of the song, not tearing his eyes away from Aaron.

“The shows not over yet!” she squealed.

Robert sighed heavily, reaching into his jacket pocket. “There. Key to the house, enjoy my flat, I don’t think I’m making it home tonight.”

“You’re going to have some explaining to do in the morning!” Vic called after him. He ignored this, getting out of the row of seats, also ignoring the groans from other audience members. It took a while for him to leave the room, but once he did, he suddenly had no idea how to get backstage. And even if he did magically know, they’re hardly likely to let some random and (apparently) raving man in, are they? The room was almost completely empty, the thrum as the band started their next song vibrating through the walls as Robert looked at a security guard approaching him.

“Robert Sugden?”

“Yeah?”

“You’re wanted backstage.”

“Am I indeed?” Robert questioned under his breath, but he said nothing and followed him.
Chapter 15

Robert had been searched before being allowed to go backstage, and people were rushing around, mostly ignoring him. He did get a couple of looks, but nothing he couldn’t cope with.

The song ended and Robert smiled as Aaron was the first one off the stage. His eyes landed on Robert and he smiled, then nodded, gripping his hand to pull him around a corner.

“Hi,” Robert said with a raised eyebrow.

“Just don’t,” Aaron said. “I know it was stupid.”

“I think that’s the most romantic thing anyone’s ever done for me,” Robert said. Aaron blushed flaming red even under his stubble. A colour Robert was unaware he could get.

“I don’t do romantic,” Aaron said gruffly.

“You’ve just outed yourself now,” Robert teased. “Because apparently you do.”

“Just… shut up and kiss me.” Robert was more than willing, and he didn’t hold back.

“You’ve got one minute before the encore,” Aaron breathed as Robert started to get carried away.

“Sixty seconds? Better not waste any time then.” Robert pushed him against the wall and kissed him for all he was worth. Aaron groaned into his mouth, almost whimpering when Robert started fondling him through his jeans.

“Really don’t have the time,” Aaron whispered as Robert kissed into his neck.

“Your body doesn’t think so,” Robert said, pleased at the reaction.

“Don’t look smug,” Aaron said, a hand on his chest, pushing him away. “And don’t go anywhere,” Aaron said firmly. Robert wasn’t about to move, not a chance in hell. Though he did watch from the side of the stage as Aaron and his band mates returned to the arena.

He stayed there, watching side on as the band performed, amazed at Aaron’s quick shift in focus. He wouldn’t be able to detach that quickly. Robert was hypnotised for the last two songs and in no time at all, they were coming back off stage to loud screams and applause.

“Did you like the show?” Aaron asked, looking like he was buzzing from the performance.

“Mm,” Robert whispered before kissing him gently. “Really like the fact I’m sleeping with the lead singer too.”

“Some would say you have a one track mind,” Aaron said, narrowing his eyes, but he laughed anyway. “Want to meet the others?”

“Sure,” Robert said. “You look too wired for sleep anyway.”

“Wasn’t planning on sleeping when we get to bed,” Aaron said lowly and Robert grinned, letting Aaron squeeze his hand before leading the way to what turned out to be Alex’s dressing room and he knocked.
“What?” she said bluntly, which Robert assumed was come in, because Aaron opened the door. Alex was sat in front of her mirror, taking off her makeup which was clearly for the stage, but she caught Aaron’s eye in the mirror, whipping around.

“God, if you’d told me you were introducing me to your boyfriend,” she snapped, trying to look put together and fiddling with her hair. “You must be Robert.”

“Yes,” Robert said. “And I know you’re Alex.”

“First name basis already,” she said. They fell into silence as Alex looked him over, and Robert had the distinct impression he was being judged, the way she was looking him up and down. “Not bad, I guess.”

“Is that a ringing endorsement?” Robert asked, because it didn’t seem like a compliment.

“Yes,” Aaron said firmly, sitting down and reaching for a beer from Alex’s fridge.

“Hey, you’ve got your own,” she said with absolutely no heat. “Are we going out tonight?”

“Er…” Aaron started.

“Oh, I get it,” she said. “You two’ve got plans.” She raised her eyebrows suggestively and Robert smiled. “Not that I blame you,” she said to Robert. “After being serenaded by him…”

“Oi!” Aaron said loudly as Robert smiled, he couldn’t help it. “I’ll just grab my phone, wallet and keys,” he said. “You won’t kill him in five minutes?”

“I don’t bite,” she said. Once they were alone, Robert suddenly felt a little nervous. He knew this was someone whose opinion mattered to Aaron, and Robert knew there weren't many of those people around. “He’s really falling for you,” Alex said bluntly when they were alone. “I’ve known him for a while and I have never seen him like this. Which basically means if you hurt him, I’m going to cut your balls off.”

“You don’t hold back do you?” Robert said.

“No,” Alex said. “You’re a journalist, you’re already in the position to seriously screw him over if you wanted to.”

“I’m not going to,” Robert said. “If nothing else it would ruin my career, a bitter a jealous lover publishing lies? Unethical, and no one wants that on their record.”

“And…” Alex said guessing Robert wasn’t finished.

“I’m… I really like him. And it’s not the fame or the money. I’d actually prefer it if he was in the country more often.” Alex rolled her eyes. “I’m not using him. I’m not trying to get an exclusive or anything like that.”

“Okay,” Alex said, with a shrug of her shoulders. But he could tell she was reserving her judgement. Which was fine, he could cope with that. Anything but outright dislike and hatred he could deal with.

“Ready to go?” Aaron asked, coming back in and Robert nodded.
After the inevitable but thrilling sex, they lay in bed together in Aaron’s hotel room, skin and bodies touching almost everywhere. Robert checked in with work on his phone, having been out of communication for most of the evening. It took about two minutes, but then he saw the pictures. Shit. Someone backstage had taken pictures of them all over each other. It wasn’t subtle, it was quite obvious what they were doing, and the images were popping up all over twitter. No hiding it now, there was no putting a lid on this. It was out.

“What’s wrong?” Aaron asked tiredly, feeling Robert stiffen.

“Nothing,” Robert said with as much conviction as he could manage. Aaron was actually near sleep, in Robert’s arms, on a mattress. Robert wasn’t about to ruin that if he could help it. “Just Vic being her usual self. Doesn’t matter,” he lied.

“Mm…”
Robert slept poorly, which meant he was aware when Aaron shifted onto the floor at around three in the morning, taking the blanket and pillow with him. All Robert could do was worry and wonder about tomorrow, when the news would properly break, and everyone would be awake to see it and read it. He didn’t know why exactly he was worried, they’d never planned on keeping their relationship secret forever. But forever was very different to right now.

When he did wake up properly in the morning, he found Aaron opening the door to room service, breakfast being delivered to the room. Robert tried to wake himself up quickly, he didn’t want Aaron finding out from anyone else, it should come from him that their relationship was now available to speculation by every media outlet in the country. World even.

“Morning,” Aaron said, perching on the edge of the bed as he buttered his toast.

“Aaron, you need to check your twitter,” Robert said quickly.

“I’ve seen it,” he said briefly. “Coffee?”

“What?” Robert asked, shuffling up the bed. “You’re… okay with it?”

“Rob, I didn’t come out to the entire world so I could hide my relationships. Yeah, I don’t advertise who I see, but it’s not going to change my life dramatically if they know.”

Robert got his phone out and started tapping away. Several articles had popped up overnight on the gossip websites, mostly reading “Who’s Aaron Livesy’s new beau?” They didn’t have his name yet then, though it would only be a matter of time. “The pictures though,” Aaron said. “You couldn’t keep your hands off me.” It’s clear he’s pleased and Roberts lips twitch into a small smile.

“You’re… remarkably okay with the fact that…”

“Everyone knows we’re sleeping together?” Aaron said, a soft smile on his face. “I don’t care. I was never hiding it because I was ashamed of you, or us. I kept it quiet because it’s none of their business.” Aaron took a large bite of toast and saw Robert still looked worried.

“Robert, this was always going to effect your life more than mine when it came out. I’m not worried, but I am concerned by you… You seem…”

“Just… I wasn’t ready for everyone else to find out yet,” Robert said. “Didn’t want to deal with the press, I know how bad it could get.”

“Limited sympathy considering you’ve made your career on invading everyone else’s privacy,”
Aaron said, but his voice was light and Robert knew he wasn’t serious.

“Get back in bed with me,” Robert said, and Aaron couldn’t disagree. They cuddled together in bed, alternately grabbing something off the breakfast tray in the quiet for about half an hour. Then Robert’s phone buzzed.

“Oh, it’s my boss,” Robert said, not answering the call.

“Oh,” Aaron echoed heavily. “What does he want?”

“No idea, but I’m willing to bet my life that the words “conflict of interest” will come up,” Robert said. “I have to go to the office.”

“Okay,” Aaron said as Robert got up and started to get dressed. “Well, call me if you need anything, even if its just to rant.”

“Yeah,” Robert agreed.

“And I’m sorry if I’ve got you in trouble.” His cheeky, almost schoolboy grin made it clear he didn’t mean that in the slightest.

“You’re not sorry.”

“No,” Aaron said. “And neither are you.” Robert leaned over the bed and kissed him goodbye, soft and sweet, Aaron with the biggest smile on his face as Robert left.

When he got to reception he could see a crowd of photographers outside the building and he sighed, asking the woman behind the desk if she could call him a taxi. He didn’t exactly want to be waiting outside in that mess. It took about five minutes, but when he had a car waiting, he fought his way through the photographers and journalists, actively trying not to engage with them. But it was a hell of a lot harder from this side of it, when the questions were being shouted at him rather than some nameless celebrity who he didn’t care about. The thing was, Robert knew these journalist didn’t care about him or who he was sleeping with either. Not personally. They were doing it for public demand, probably to put food on the table for their own families. It wasn’t about him at all, and that’s what he held onto as he went to the office.

It was quiet, Richard, the editor of the paper being the only one there, and it being a Saturday and technically off duty, he already had a glass of whisky in front of him as Robert knocked on the door and opened it.

“Robert,” he said, tiredly.

“Bit early for a Saturday call,” Robert said with false bravado.

“You know why you’re here.”

“Yeah, I’ve got an inkling,” Robert said. “And who I see, who I sleep with is my business.”

“Robert…”

“Before you criticise me, Remember Katrina? She was sleeping with that premier league footballer for a couple of months, and her job was never at risk.”
“She didn’t work on sports,” Richard said. “She was a low level intern, you have the entire music and arts section under your control.”

“And I’ve been completely impartial,” Robert said. Richard rubbed a hand over his face in agitation.

“You must see how this looks,” he said. “It’s a conflict of interest.”

“What?” Robert countered, even though he’d been right in how he’d expected this conversation to go.

“Are you ending it with him?” Richard asked. “Is this just a fling?”

“No,” Robert said, needing to be honest. “No, it’s not a fling. We’re together, and it’s going to stay that way.”

“Optimistic.”

“Look, everything about the band I agree to print can be put past you first if you want,” Robert said. “You can’t sack me for who I’m sleeping with.”

“Robert…”

“And if you do, I’ll sue the paper. And win.”

“Are you threatening me?”

“I love my job. Aaron is a part of my life and I’m not sacrificing either. And anyway, Aaron might let something slip to me that we could publish. Or sell on.” Robert didn’t believe this, but he needed a sweetener. Even the things Aaron had told him, private things, they’d stay private, no matter what happened between them.

“Okay,” Richard said eventually. “But you’ve got to be impartial when it comes to Messenger and Aaron Livesy.”

“I will be,” Robert said. “Positive pieces go with the public mood right now. I can’t write anything overly negative about them, people don’t want to read it.”

“The British public are fickle,” Richard said. “One of them will mess up, then the tide will turn and…”

“I know,” Robert said. “I’ve been here long enough. I will be completely professional. Unlike the cow over at The Express, continuing to run pieces on Alex’s weight whenever she eats a cheeseburger.”

“Yeah, that’s lazy journalism,” Richard agreed. “Okay, but I’ll keep an eye on you.” Robert sighed. “I have to, you know I do. And it isn’t about you being two men, if a woman was in your position it’d be exactly the same.”

“I know,” Robert said. He genuinely didn’t think this was a homophobic thing, it just happened to fall in that grey area. “Thanks for ruining my Saturday.”

“Sorry, did you have plans?” Richard said. “Be careful. You know what we’re like, the press will eat you alive if they can.”

“I know.” Robert left, though while he was walking back to his flat, Vic called him.
“Yeah?”

“Your face is all over the internet,” Vic said. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I did,” Robert said. “And it’s not like I planned for it to come out like this.”

“What had you planned?” Vic asked.

“Oh, I thought I’d do an editorial piece about exactly how Aaron makes me moan in bed,” Robert snapped, well and truly annoyed now.

“No need to be like that with me,” Vic replied.

“I’ve had a bad morning,” Robert said in his defence. “ Been told that I’m going to be being watched by my boss, my face is on every gossip website, and…”

“And name,” Vic supplied.

“What?”

“Your name was released about half an hour ago.”

“Perfect.”

“Rob, you’re bringing a hell of a lot down on your own head with this. Are you sure Aaron’s worth it?”

“Yes,” Robert said. He didn’t even have to think about it. “He is, I… I’ve never felt like this before. And it’s not because he’s a famous singer, it’s because of him.” Vic sighed deeply. “Look, I’m nearly home. We can have a long in depth conversation if you’d like.”

“Perfect, I’ve got the red wine.” It stopped Robert for a moment, because he hasn’t been around Victoria drinking very much. Kept forgetting she’s old enough.

Instead Robert tried “it’s not even midday.”

“It’s a weekend, I’m on holiday and my brother has just been outed as sleeping with one of the richest men in the country.

“Exaggerate why don’t you,” Robert muttered. “And he’s not a multi millionaire, he’s rich but not that rich.”

“He’s not just a cover band,” Vic pointed out. “They write their own stuff, that’s where the money is.”

“I’m not asking how much he earns, Vic. And that’s besides the point.”

“You’re right, the point is now that you’re seeing Aaron, you’re going to introduce me to Adam, right?” Robert smiled.
ChapterNotes

I know this is short, but I wanted to get something up. Thank you for being patient with me.

After placating his sister, Robert called Aaron. He needed to hear his voice after being discussed on every gossip website in the country. They hadn’t found out where he lived yet, which he supposed was a good thing.

“How are you?” Aaron asked.

“Fine,” Robert said. “I want to see you.”

“I know, but I’m already backstage,” Aaron said. “Gotta put the work in, and…” Robert sighed. He had guessed this would be the answer but it didn’t stop the need he felt to see Aaron, to kiss him and be reassured that everything would be okay. He was more rattled than he’d liked to admit, having his identity released as Aaron Livesy’s boyfriend. “Look, if you want, you can come here to the stage door. I’ve added your name to the list and they’ll let you in. But I can’t leave here, I’m sorry.”

“Would you mind?” Robert asked. “If I turned up unannounced?”

“No,” Aaron said warmly. “I wouldn’t mind. I’ll call down to the doorman, let him know you’re coming?”

“Thanks,” Robert said. “How do you live with it like this?”

“You’ve had barely twelve hours of it,” Aaron reminded him. “Look, Rob, I really want this but if you can’t cope with the press attention…”

“I never said that,” Robert said. “To be honest, I think the most difficult thing is going to be when you’re on tour, and I can’t see you every day. I’m going to miss you.”

“Rubbed off on you then?” Aaron teased.

“Something like that. I’m on my way, okay?”

“Good,” Aaron said. “And er… you know that song last night? I meant it.”

“That’s handy, because I may have rewatched in on youtube this morning.”

“Oh?”

“My ego could do with some attention.”

“You’re ego’s just fine, thanks,” Aaron said with a laugh. “Come over. I miss you.”

“I’ll be there.” And Robert hung up, feeling a little more secure of himself now he’d spoken to
As expected, outside the stadium there were a lot more than the normal amount of photographers and Robert kept his head down, ignoring the flashes. Security had obviously been told he was coming because he was waved through the stage door without much of a second glance and Robert sighed, the noise level dying down once he was inside. Robert looked around, as if expecting a sign post to how to get to Aaron.

“Corridor to your left, dressing room B,” the security guard said helpfully.

“Thanks,” Robert said, adjusting his collar though it didn’t need it as he went in search of Aaron. It felt like a lot longer, his heart hammering, but it only took him a couple of minutes, the door ajar and Aaron fiddling with a guitar.

“Aaron…” His eyes lit up when he saw Robert and within moments he had his arms around him. And Robert relaxed. He wanted to be with Aaron, but he wasn’t ready for the press attention, no matter how much he lied to himself and said he was.

“This bothers you, doesn’t it?” Aaron said into his neck, pulling back though their arms stayed on each others hips, waists, stroking bodies comfortingly through fabric.

“I don’t know how you do it,” Robert said. “I just…”

“It will die down,” Aaron said. “But if you can’t cope with it, we can end it.”

“Is that what you want?” Robert asked, trying to hide his desperation.

“No,” Aaron said softly. “Of course not. But I’m not easy to be with. Before you even get to the famous thing, and the out of the country thing.” Robert kissed him deeply, enjoying the taste of him and the distraction. Because when he was kissing Aaron not much else seemed to matter.

“We can make this work, right?” Robert said.

“Yeah,” Aaron said. Why was it that neither of them seemed convinced?

Much to Robert’s immense relief, an England footballer was caught with three prostitutes in a cocaine den, the story breaking that evening which meant the heat was off of him. Robert couldn’t help but thank the timing, he needed a breather. And he also greatly appreciated Timothy who ran the sports section for doing a major feature piece on it for Monday’s paper. It was good to know someone had his back.

That night after the show, Robert was waiting for Aaron in his dressing room. Aaron looked so good, buzzing again from the energy off the stage. Robert couldn’t help himself, he unzipped Aaron’s hoodie and kissed into his neck. He could taste sweat and salt and something that was undeniably all Aaron and intoxicating. Once they started there was no stopping them, thy ended up having sex on the floor of Aaron’s dressing room, finally feeling reconnected after a hectic day. You know what, Robert thought, his mind drifting lazily in the satisfied loose way he usually felt after sex. It was worth it.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Again, this was a chapter that took forever to write, so I hope it reads okay! Thank you so much for the comments and encouragement on this so far...

Time seemed to run away from both men. Before they knew it, Aaron’s last night in London approached. Robert had been busy with work, and Aaron with his shows, only having one day off before he moved onto Portsmouth. That’s what Robert was dreading, the gap, the distance between them. He hoped it wouldn’t break them, he really had fallen incredibly hard for Aaron. He also hoped Aaron had a longer attention span than most celebrities seemed to.

“Are you okay?” Aaron asked the morning he was leaving, dressing slowly in Robert's flat. “You’ve been quiet.”

“Is quiet bad?” Robert questioned from the bed, watching Aaron move around his bedroom as if it were his, searching for his phone.

“I’m used to your smart mouth,” Aaron said with a smile. “I’m not looking for anyone else, Robert,” he added correctly reading the silence.

“It’s just hard. Knowing that hundreds, maybe even thousands of men will be throwing themselves at you,” Robert admitted, hating himself for feeling insecure.

“To be fair, so will women,” Aaron said, sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Yeah, but…”

“But I’m gay?” Aaron asked, and Robert nodded. “I have as much interest in women as other men,” Aaron said quietly. “I only want you. No matter how much attention I get from whichever fit man’s decided he wants me for the night, I only want you.”

It was good to hear, and Robert smiled, leaning forward to kiss him, gentle and sweet. “I’ll miss you,” Robert said.

“I’ll miss you too. I do enjoy touring though.”

“I know you do,” Robert said. “Just… don’t forget me waiting at home for you, right?”

“Right,” Aaron said. His phone rang and Aaron answered it. “Don’t say anything, I’m on my way,” Aaron said quickly before the person on the other end could even speak and hung up. “Alex. I’m going to be late if I stay here for much longer.”

“Go,” Robert said.

“Send me some filthy photos while I’m away,” Aaron teased, eyes light and Robert laughed. Though he probably would if Aaron asked. “And hey, just in case that song the other day didn’t make it clear? I love you too.” Robert felt like he was melting and pulled Aaron into his arms, kissing him deeply as they sank into the bed sheets, Aaron’s clothed body against Robert’s naked one thrilling
them both. They stayed that way, lips stealing breath until Aaron’s phone buzzed again. He groaned against Robert’s mouth.

“Go,” Robert repeated. “Sing some songs, delight some fans and write a few more hits. I’ll be fine here on my own.” Aaron got up and left in short order and when he was alone, Robert sighed heavily. He really hoped that wouldn’t be the end. He loved Aaron, and it felt so good to know he felt the same.

“Right, I’m here,” Aaron grumbled, getting onto the tour bus.

“How was Robert?” Alex asked.

“Pissed off that I’m leaving him,” Aaron said shortly.

“Well, he shouldn’t be, this is your job!” she said indignantly.

“No, I mean…” Aaron sighed. “He didn’t say that, I’m saying that. You don’t like him do you?”

“It’s not that I don’t like him,” Alex said, plaiting her hair into a braid. “I’m worried about him.”

“Why? Because he’s a journalist?” Aaron said.

“No,” Alex replied. “It’s not that at all. But I know you, Aaron I know you don’t fall for just anyone. I know this is different, and…”

“I don’t get this shit from Adam,” Aaron countered and Alex playfully slapped his arm.

“You’re writing more than I’ve ever seen you,” she said.

“I’ve always written lyrics,” Aaron said.

“Fine,” Alex snapped. “This guy’s no different, he’s exactly the same as all the others. Ignore me.”

“Alex, he is different, but going on and on about it won’t help,” Aaron said.

“Management’s saying “Daydreaming” should be our next single,” Alex said, swiftly changing the subject.

“What?” Aaron said with a frown. “No, it can’t. I wrote it on a whim, I wanted Robert to hear it. I’m terrible actually saying how I feel, I need to scribble it out and cross through the stuff that sounds absolutely dreadful. I don’t want…”

“The video that one of the crowd took and uploaded? Trending number one on youtube. We can’t argue with that. You got any more hits up your sleeve?”

“Shut up,” Aaron said, smiling. He did take the notebook she offered him though.

Aaron did check youtube on his phone, wanting to see the video, and see if Alex was right. She was, and there were a hell of a lot of comments too. A few had put the connection together, considering the press attention Robert had received lately, but not many. Probably because Alex had taken the lead vocals on it, which had been a conscious choice. He wanted Robert to know how he felt, he didn’t want the rest of the world weighing in before they were public. Or that had been how he felt a
few days ago anyway. Now, maybe he could take the lead in a song. Maybe.

Over the next week or so, Robert lost some of the tension he’d been carrying. The press weren’t interested in him once they’d got a few pictures. They’d realised that he was boring, because all he did was go to and from the office, and Aaron wasn’t currently with him. Robert was sure the attention would start back up as and when Aaron and him were back together, but for now he was content to work. And stalk Messenger on social media of course.

About four days after Aaron had left, Robert got a call and he didn’t recognise the number. This didn’t bother him, Aaron occasionally called on whatever phone was in easy reach, saying that organisation was sometimes a mess. “I had a highly coloured dream about you last night, want me to fill you in or are you busy?” Robert said as he answered the phone. A woman’s stuttering voice came on the line.

“Oh, I er… I might have the wrong number.”

“What’re you after?” Robert asked, trying to ignore the slightly embarrassing way he’d answered the phone.

“Robert Sugden?” the woman said. “I thought…”

“No, this is him,” Robert said. “Who’s this?”

“My name’s Chas. I’m Aaron’s mother, and…”

“Why are you calling me?” Robert asked, cutting her off.

“I saw all over the internet that you’re with my son and…”

“What, warning me off?” Robert said thinking she had a fat chance of doing that.

“No, no,” she said. “Look, things between me and Aaron aren’t great and I wanted to know if it was true and…”

“It is true,” Robert said shortly. ”I’m seeing him.” Could hardly deny it after all, his picture was everywhere.

“Oh. Right. Okay, well could you maybe pass me Aaron’s number?”

“If you’re his mother why haven’t you got it?” Robert asked coldly.

“I just need to talk to him,” Chas said. “Please…”

“I’ll tell him you called me,” Robert said shortly. “But if Aaron wanted you to have his number, you’d have it.” He could hear Chas gearing up for another try. “I have to go.” Robert disconnected the call and sighed. He didn’t know precisely what had happened in Aaron’s childhood, but he knew it was both bad, and something he didn’t want to rake up again. But he wouldn’t lie to Aaron. Next time they spoke, he’d bring it up.
“I need you to shag your boyfriend.” Robert looked into mid air in complete surprise for a few seconds, phone clutched to his ear.

“And who the hell is this?” Robert asked, not recognising the voice, half afraid it would be some crackpot caller from the press.

“Alex,” she said dismissively. “And I need you to do something to bring Aaron out of this mood or I’m going to kill him.”

“You do know I’m in London, right?” Robert asked. Aaron had only left about two weeks ago and he felt his absence every single day.

“I know, but talk to him or something. Honestly, I don’t know how much more of this I can take.”

“Put him on,” Robert said.

“Aaron!” He snapped himself out of his trance and looked to see Alex holding her phone out for him. Aaron had been distracted by writing and he was in a bad mood anyway, but he smiled a little, knowing it was Robert purely from the look on her face.

“Hi,” Aaron said warmly, smiling for the first time in days.

“Aaron is warning me she’s on the verge of killing you,” Robert said lightly. “Want to tell me why?”

“Oh, she’s annoyed with me,” Aaron said, shaking his head. “She’ll get over it.”

“Where are you right now?” Robert asked.


“It’s a weekend,” Robert said. “I could…”

“Yeah?” Aaron said hopefully. “I mean, don’t do it because Alex is saying I’m a miserable git.”

“Aaron, I miss you,” Robert said simply. “Tomorrow Saturday, I could take the train and see you?”

“I’d like that,” Aaron said, almost shyly.

“There is something I’ve got to tell you though,” Robert said, and Aaron didn’t like his tone.

“Oh?”

“Your mother called me,” Robert said. “Or she said she was your mother anyway, I suppose it could
have been anyone. She wanted your phone number.”

“Rob, please tell me that…”

“I didn’t give it to her,” Robert replied quickly and Aaron felt himself relax a little. “I said I would pass the message on. Which I’m doing. What’s your problem with her?”

“I can’t,” Aaron said. “And I sure as hell can’t do it over the phone, plus it’s none of your business.”

“Right,” Robert said, detached, cold. “Okay then.”

“Look, I didn’t mean that,” Aaron said, rubbing his face in agitation. “My mum… it’s a sensitive subject and I’d rather not talk about it. Thanks, for being on my side though.”

“Always,” Robert said. “Want me to come up? To see you?”

“Yes,” Aaron said firmly. “Right hand’s just not cutting it any more.” Robert laughed, a joyous sound and Aaron smiled tiredly. “I’ll add you to the list, if you want to see another show?”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “Sounds good.”

“See you tomorrow?”

“See you tomorrow,” Robert confirmed. “And hey, don’t wind Alex up any more, she already doesn’t like me.”

“It’s not that she doesn’t like you,” Aaron said. “She’s protective of me. And you know something, that’s nice to have.”

“I wasn’t criticising,” Robert said gently. “See you soon.”

“Bye.” Aaron hung up and passed Alex her phone back. “That do you?”

“Are you cheating on Robert?” Alex asked.

“What? No!” Aaron snapped. Where would she even get that idea from? He was with the band constantly when he wasn’t asleep, when would he have the time?

“This.” Alex has picked up his notebook and had read his latest project, most likely the reason that Aaron was in a bad mood right now.

*Hide It Away.*

*Verse 1.*

Words choking me up
Will be forever there.
Poison trapped inside
None of this is fair.
Why did you make it hard
To lie to you like this?
Something not put right
With your perfect kiss.

*Chorus:*

Once you hear the truth
I don’t think you’d stay
Better to be quiet
Won’t run the risk that way
So I stick to the script
And lie that I’m okay.
Because I know that I’ve…
Gotta hide it away

Verse 2
Every day it’s tough now
To keep my story straight
You’re seeing through me
And I need you to wait
In time I’ll be ready
I promise that you’ll know
So in your turn please
Promise me you won’t go.

Verse 3.
I was able to talk.
The words, far too black
Now you know how it is
I wouldn’t take it back
There’s no place to go
I thought that I’d be free
How is it this secret
Is still torturing me?

“That’s private,” Aaron snapped, pulling his scraps of paper back.

“Aaron, I was only looking!” Alex said, a bit surprised at his reaction. Generally he was free with his lyrics, let them be tweaked and altered.

“I’m not cheating on him,” Aaron said, calmer. “I’m trying to tell him something but I can’t find the words to.”

“You write lyrics,” Alex said simply.

“Yeah, and I can spend an hour staring at a single line to change one word,” Aaron said. “In conversation… it’s harder for me. And I have no idea how he’s going to react either which doesn’t make it any easier.”

“What is it?” Alex asked softly, seeing that Aaron was genuinely upset.

“I can’t,” Aaron said. “I’ve never been in a relationship. Not like this, not where it matters and… I don’t want to ruin it.”

“Is this because of his job?” Alex asked.

“No,” Aaron said. “I trust him. None of this is going to get back to his paper or any of the gossip mags. He’s already had the chance to screw me over if that’s what he wanted.”

“Okay,” Alex said. “Then you’ve got two choices really, whatever it is.”

“I’m listening.”
“Tell him and let the chips fall where they may,” she said, Aaron screwing his nose up at the description. “Or keep silent and learn to live with Robert not knowing. Without knowing what this secret is, I can’t really help you any more and…”

“My dad raped me.” The words had come out without Aaron making the conscious choice to say them, and Alex looked appalled, her face falling. Genuine shock and horror, making Aaron feel even worse if that were possible.

“And that right there? That look on your face is what’s stopping me from telling Robert.”

“Aaron…”

“Because I’m not going to be able to cope if he looks at me like that,” Aaron said, voice breaking. “I can’t. I need him to look at me like he wants me. Not like I’m some kind of pathetic victim or damaged goods.”

“Aaron!” she shouted. “Don’t blame me for how I’m reacting! Out of all the things I thought you were going to say, that didn’t make the list!”

Aaron breathed in and out very heavily, trying to calm down. “Okay,” Aaron said. “I can accept that, but… I shouldn’t have said anything. Forget it.”

“Oh, that simple, forget it?” Alex said. Both of them looked at each other, a mix of anger and hurt on both of their faces. “You should tell Robert,” Alex said. “If I were him I’d want to know. And you love him.”

“I do love him,” Aaron said, nodding.

“And if he loves you, he’ll be there. But don’t scream at him for how he reacts.”

“I didn’t scream at you,” Aaron said indignantly, Alex’s mouth tilting into a small smile.

“Does Adam…?”

“He knows it was bad,” Aaron said. They’d run away together as teenagers after all. “He doesn’t know how bad. I need him to be my mate, I don’t need him to know the gritty details of my past.”

“Then why did you tell me?” Alex asked.

“Practise run?” Aaron said sarcastically, though that wasn’t true. He’d already been thinking about how to tell Robert the truth and the words had kind of… slipped out.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Alex asked.

“No,” Aaron said firmly. There’s no doubt about it, Alex looked relieved and Aaron frowned at her in question.

“I just… don’t know what to say here,” Alex admitted.

“You don’t have to say anything,” Aaron said. “I’m the same man I was ten minutes ago.” Alex looked like she might cry for him, and Aaron pulled her in for a hug, resting his head against the top of hers, she was so short. She obviously didn’t have her heels on right now.

“You’re amazing,” Alex said into his chest.

“You’ll make me blush,” Aaron deadpanned, though he could feel the knot of emotion tight in his
chest. He couldn’t let go of it though. Because when he did, he needed Robert to be around, to be the one to pick up the pieces.
So this is the in between ish chapter, trying to set up for the reveal. Hope it still works!

Robert was wound up. The train was delayed and at this rate he was going to be lucky to see Aaron at all before he went on stage. Okay, that might be a slight exaggeration, but the miles were slowly ticking down and Robert was impatient. He wanted to see his boyfriend again. And if he found it hot, the thought of Aaron performing on stage while he watched, that was no one else’s business.

“Unfortunately due to a technical failure, this train will be removed from service at the next station,” a voice came over the tannoy. And Robert sighed, rolling his head back against the seat. He was never going to get there.

“Robert here yet?” Alex asked, popping her head around the door of Aaron’s dressing room.

“No,” Aaron said with a sigh. “Train’s delayed. And keep your mouth shut when he gets here, I’ll tell him in my own time and I didn’t tell you so you could blurt it out. If I wanted you to throw your weight around…”

“Calm down!” Alex said, holding her hands up. “I just wanted to see if you were all right. Don’t shout at me for caring!”

“You mean you wanted to see if I was going to fall apart on stage in a few hours time,” Aaron said. “Don’t worry. I’ve had years of practise burying this. I’ll be fine.”

“I’m not worried with how the show goes tonight,” Alex said. “Believe it or not, I’m worried about you! You stubborn arse.”

“Alex, it’s not new. I’ll cope with it, I always do.”

“Cope with what?” Both of them spun around to see Robert there and Aaron smiled. He looked good, tired, but so good and Aaron breathed out almost in relief at his presence. Alex took a step back and only then did Aaron realise how close they’d been to each other. “Am I interrupting?” Robert asked seriously, able to sense the tension between them.

“Yes, thank you,” Aaron said, Alex sighing and walking out.

“I don’t want her to hate me,” Robert said, nodding at her.

“Her opinion of you matters, doesn’t it?” Aaron asked. He’d sensed this theme when he spoke to Robert over the last few days.

“Yes,” Robert said surely. “Because I know you don’t let many people in. And if your best friends hate me? I’m pretty much screwed no matter what I do. What they think matters to you.” Aaron smiled at him and pulled him in for a kiss, soft and sweet. Or the first one was anyway. Aaron
groaned as the kisses went on and on, needing Robert’s touch, being perfectly happy to be pressed up against the wall, Robert’s thigh pressing up against him. Aaron rolled his hips and groaned.

“Not that I came here for this,” Robert breathed into his neck, Aaron laughing. “But have you got the time?”

“No,” Aaron said regretfully. “I really haven’t.”

“Quickie?” Robert suggested, eyes bright and teasing and Aaron was tempted, kissing into Robert’s neck when Adam came in.

“Hey, mate, I hate to do this but…” Aaron pulled off of Robert with regret. “Those competition winners? Promise of a meeting and a backstage tour…”

“Shit, I’d forgotten about that,” Aaron said with a sigh, looking at Robert. “Wait here?”

“Yeah,” Robert said, then seeing a couple of packets of crisps on the table and realising that he was starving. He'd not eaten all day. “Do you mind…?”

“Knock yourself out,” Aaron said. “I will be as quick as I possibly can.”

“Don’t worry,” Robert said. “Need to relax after the train journey from hell.” Aaron kissed him briefly once more before leaving and Robert sighed.

“Aaron can’t get away,” Alex said, apology threaded through her voice. “Sorry, they all want a little more of him. Can’t blame them.” She came into the dressing room and sat down opposite Robert, where he had been scrolling through his phone, wasting time.

“No, I know he’s working,” Robert said, though he was disappointed. Having more than five minutes with Aaron would be good. “How come you’re here then?”

“I put up with two men trying to feel me up before leaving,” Alex said with a fake smile.

“What?” Robert asked in surprise.

“You kind of… get used to it,” she said, rolling her eyes. “And Aaron and Adam stick up for me, so…”

“What do you want to talk to me about?” Robert asked. “You’re not sat here for my sparkling company.”

“Aaron, I, um…”

“Aaron? What don’t I know?” Robert asked quietly. He could feel the disconnection, even in those few minutes he had actually spent with Aaron. Like things weren’t quite right. “I know something’s going on, Aaron’s been… odd on phone calls. More distant that usual. I’m right aren’t I?”

“He’s struggling a bit,” Alex said. “But I’m not going to tell you. Just… take care of him, Aaron deserves that.” Robert frowned as she left, because that was a… odd thing to say to him. Whatever it was, whatever was bothering him, Robert needed to know.

“I’m sorry,” Aaron said, coming back about twenty minutes later. “This wasn’t the plan and now
I’ve got to be on stage and…”

“Aaron, it’s fine,” Robert said, cutting him off. “I know you’re working, I know this isn’t all fun for you.” Aaron’s eyes softened.

“Tell you what, why don’t you just go to the hotel and wait for me there,” Aaron said, shaking his head. “Order whatever you want from room service, the minibar. I’m sorry, it’s just been one of those days.”

“You look stressed,” Robert said, stroking his arms, choosing not to mention the promised ticket that Aaron had reserved for him for the show tonight. Aaron clearly wasn’t in the mood for it. “Just take a minute and calm down, okay?” Aaron breathed in deeply and nodded. He knew Robert was right, but he’d had a bad couple of days. Actually verbalising it to Alex had taken a lot more out of him than he expected it would. Saying the words out loud. He kissed Robert before pressing his head to Robert’s shoulder, simply standing with each other, Aaron taking comfort from him for as long as he could. And Robert being Robert, he was more than content to let him.

At the hotel, Robert started winding himself up. Something had changed. Aaron seemed more distant, more detached than usual, and it was worrying him. He didn’t like it when Aaron was upset, and he definitely didn’t like it when he didn’t know what was wrong. Or the nagging suspicion that it had something to do with him. Which meant by the time Aaron turned up after the show, Robert was well and truly ready for an argument, to fight to keep Aaron in his life. Maybe this wasn’t going to work, maybe it was too hard with the distance and the celebrity and…

“Hi,” Aaron said, coming into the room, out of breath, clearly rushing to get here.

“Aaron, what’s going on?” Robert said, sitting on the edge of the bed. “You’ve been… slightly strange on the phone, and now I’m here you don’t seem all that happy to see me.”

“It’s not that I’m not happy,” Aaron said, interrupting.

“Are you leaving me?” Robert asked. “Is this your way of trying to end it?”

“If I wanted to end it with you, I’d have no problem doing it to your face, I’m not that sensitive, Robert.” Robert smiled a little at that. He did know Aaron well, well enough to know that being blunt and harsh wasn’t a problem of his in ending a relationship.

“Then what is it?” Robert asked. “I know it’s something. I can see it all over your face.”

“I need to talk to you,” Aaron said heavily. “And I’m in a mood because I’ve been dreading it, but I have to. But first, I need a whisky. Want one?”
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Here we go, the one we've all been waiting for! Obvious warning for mentions of Aaron's abuse from Gordon here. Enjoy (if that's the right word)!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I thought you were a beer kind of guy,” Robert said, watching as Aaron poured himself a measure, a large one.

“Yeah, that’s not going to cut it tonight,” Aaron said, sitting in the chair.

“You’re worrying me now,” Robert said, looking at him steadily. “Are you going to talk?”

“Okay,” Aaron said, taking in a few deep breaths and hunching over himself. "I had a bad childhood,” he said, that feeling like a safe enough place to start.

“I know,” Robert said, his voice carrying an understanding Aaron didn’t like.

“How do you know?”

“Aaron, you don’t run away from home as a teenager, trying to escape as you said, if you’ve had a happy childhood,” Robert said bluntly. “You told me that you didn’t want to be famous the first time you met me, that all you wanted was an escape route. It’s not that much of a stretch to make.”

“Okay,” Aaron said, nodding. “Well, it’s worse than you’re probably thinking. My mum left me when I was eight, she left me with my dad. And after that, I barely saw her. It was easier for her to forget I existed.”

“I’m sure…”

“Don’t,” Aaron interrupted. “I get it, she was so young when she had me, but… she wanted to get away from my dad because he wasn’t a nice man. She just never wanted to take me with her.”

“Aaron,” Robert said softly.

“No, this isn’t me trying to make you feel sorry for me,” Aaron said, shaking his head. “He blamed me for her leaving. I couldn’t see that at the time, I was a kid. But now? Yeah, I think he blamed me.” Aaron took a sip of his whisky before setting the glass down. He wasn’t looking at Robert, instead looking at his hands. He didn’t want to try and work out how to say this. Maybe blurting it out the way he had with Alex was easier.

“Things were okay for a while. Then I started playing up in school, and… there’s no excuse, there’s no easy way of saying this. I tried to say in bluntly and it doesn’t help.” Aaron took in several deep breaths. This was much harder than he’d thought. Why was he even doing this? Because you don’t want to lie to him, Aaron thought. Because this is the first relationship that you can fully trust. It’s not just sex, it’s not clumsy experimenting, it’s a real relationship. And you don’t want to lie to him.
“Hey.” Robert’s crouched in front of him, holding his hands lightly in his. Aaron has no choice but to look at him. Robert’s eyes are warm, understanding and Aaron draws so much comfort from him, just that look and his gentle touch. “You don’t have to tell me,” Robert said. “Clearly this is difficult for you, and it’s fine. You don’t have to…”

“He raped me.” Robert gripped Aaron’s hands tighter instantly, the only sign that he’d actually heard. “My dad… raped me.” Aaron looked at him, saw the flicker of fear, then horror, then Aaron turned away. He didn’t want to look at Robert right now.

“You… er… God, right okay,” he spluttered. “Sorry,” Robert said dropping his hands. “You probably don’t want me to be touching you right now.” In fact, Robert touching him was very welcome at this moment, but he was too vulnerable to come right out and say it. Ask for it.

“W… when?” Robert said. “I mean… was it more than once?

“Wait. You don’t think I’m lying?” Aaron asked. He had to. Because why would he wait until he was an adult before speaking out?

“No, Aaron,” Robert said softly. “Of course I don’t. Never think that.”

“Good,” Aaron said, relieved. He wouldn’t have been able to cope with that.

“Why are you telling me?” Robert asked quietly. Then something seemed to occur to him. “Is this because… Oh, my God, I’ve done something that you thought you couldn’t say no to? Something you don’t like?”

“No,” Aaron said, cutting him off. He got up to stop Robert from pacing, putting his hands on Robert’s forearms. “No, you know you haven’t.” Robert nodded, though his face was pale and Aaron could tell he was taking this badly. Was there a way to take this well?

“How old were you?”

“It wasn’t long after mum left,” Aaron said, still touching him.

“But that was… God, you were so young.”

“Is there a right age for this?” Aaron asked. Robert half sat, half collapsed onto the bottom of the bed, Aaron still close to him because he thought he might faint. You should have kept your mouth shut. Why, there was no need to tell him. He’ll never want you now.

“Did it… did he hurt you more than once?” Robert asked, the question not having been answered earlier. Aaron nodded briefly and Robert closed his eyes on a sigh.

“What happened?” Robert asked. “I mean, not the graphic details, but… well, unless you need to tell me, I…” Aaron put both hands on Robert’s face and kissed him, a simple brush of lips to stop him talking.

“I have no need to go through every disgusting detail,” Aaron said, and he could see the relief in Robert’s shoulders. “But thank you. If that was what I needed.”

“So…?” Robert asked, and Aaron knew the question.

“It wasn’t often,” Aaron said. “Maybe every year or two.” Robert scoffed. “I was sixteen and he was coming for me again. And I was so angry, Robert. I punched him. I just wanted it to stop, and I hit him.”
“Aaron, that’s understandable,” Robert said, but Aaron shook his head.

“I hit him more than once.” Aaron sighed. “I can’t even remember how often I hit him. He was out cold, and I went upstairs to pack a bag and get my guitar. I wasn’t leaving home without it, but I wasn’t staying there either.” Aaron’s lost in memory, Robert could see it on his face. “I checked, before I left the house. I didn’t want to have killed him, so I checked his pulse. He was alive and I didn’t hang around for any longer to find out more. Adam’s a bit older than me. He was 17, he was driving and he had an old banger. I broke into it and slept in the back seat. Then you pretty much know the rest. My dad never came to look for me, and I never spoke to him again. If I hadn’t checked, he could be dead for all I’d know. And my mum… I don’t speak to my mum now, or rarely, because I can’t forgive her for something that was never her fault in the first place. I can’t help thinking if she’d never left me with him, this wouldn't have happened.”

“Aaron, I don’t know what to say,” Robert said. “I… never expected…”

“I hide it,” Aaron said. “I don’t want people to look at me with sympathy or regret or disgust. It’s not worth it, so I don’t tell anyone.”

“But you are telling me.”

“I am telling you,” Aaron agreed.

“Why?”

“Maybe it’s been a while, long enough that I can actually speak about it,” Aaron said. “I’m sorry if it’s too much. I know this wasn’t what you signed up for and…”

“Hey,” Robert said. “It’s okay.” Robert could see actually speaking had drained Aaron and he pulled him into his arms, both of them shifting on the bed until they were comfortable. His hands were treating Aaron like he was fragile, breakable, oh so careful about where he touched. “Is this…?”

“S good.” Aaron confirmed. The snuggled together and it was comforting for Aaron without being demanding or about desire. Aaron closed his eyes for a moment, the weight on his shoulders feeling like it had gone.

“Does anyone else know?” Robert asked.

“Alex,” Aaron said.

“You told her?”

“The words came out.” Aaron shook his head. “It wasn’t intentional.”

“She told me to take care of you,” Robert said, remembering. “It didn’t make sense to me at the time.”

“She’s a good friend.”

“Does Adam know?”

“No,” Aaron said. “I was a teenager, I didn’t want my best mate to look at me like I was disgusting.”

“He wouldn’t.”

“I know that now,” Aaron said. “I was already seriously struggling with the fact I was gay and I so badly didn’t want to be. Because I thought… he’d made me like it. It was another thing I couldn’t
cope with. Being forced into that, then wanting it anyway?"

“That’s not how it works.”

“No,” Aaron agreed. “If I still had any doubts on that score do you think I’d have flown to London just to have sex with you?” Robert smiled at the memory a little. It was a good one. “Could you still want me?” Aaron asked, voice shaking now he’d voiced what he feared the most. “Knowing what you know. Would you be able to see me like that again?”

“Not right now,” Robert said, the idea ludicrous. “But… it’s something that happened to you and it’s not your fault, Aaron.”

“I know,” Aaron said. “I like sex, I really like sex with you.” Robert’s lips gave a valiant twitch upwards into a smile. “I don’t want to lose that.”

“Thank you,” Robert said quietly.

“For what?”

“Trusting me with the truth,” Robert said. “It means an awful lot to me that you did.”

“You staying?”

“I’m staying.” Aaron felt exhausted and weary and it was only too easy to close his eyes, safe in Robert’s arms. However Robert felt like he might never sleep again, his mind running with a thousand images now that Aaron had told him the most horrific thing imaginable.

Chapter End Notes

So this turned into more from Aaron’s pov, Robert’s thoughts and reactions will be in the next chapter while Aaron’s sleeping I expect. Thank you so much for reading and commenting on this, I hope you like the chapter!
Aaron fell asleep almost instantly, curled into Robert’s shoulder. It seemed to be like the weight he carried had fallen off him, and with confiding in Robert, telling him the truth, it had exhausted him. Robert stroked his hair gently, a small part of him delighting in the fact that Aaron had trusted him. Both to tell, and to be vulnerable with. Trusting him to fall asleep with (on a mattress but who’s keeping score?). That’s what Robert thought about, because if he thought about what Aaron had actually told him… He had been raped. The man he loved had had the worst thing possible happen to him. And not by a stranger, but by someone who was supposed to take care of him, someone who was supposed to look after him. When he wasn’t even old enough to really understand what was even happening to him. Right now, at this moment, Robert couldn’t think of anything more abhorrent.

How did he cope with sex? There had never been any indication that Aaron wasn’t enjoying himself, Robert could read him well. How did he lock it away, not think of it? Aaron shifted in his sleep and Robert soothed him. “Sh, you’re okay.” His face relaxed again, this time on the pillows, leaving Robert free. Aaron was still fully dressed and Robert was halfway to his belt, intending on removing his jeans so he could sleep easier, more comfortably before he thought better of it. He covered Aaron with a bed sheet instead.

Robert had no idea what to do here. He had no experience dealing with this, he never thought he’d be dealing with this with Aaron. How anyone could do this to him, Robert didn’t understand. He spent most of the night awake, thinking about it. When Aaron awoke, Robert could hear the rubbish truck on the street, the first light of the day creeping under the curtains. Aaron’s eyes flickered around the room before seeing Robert and he calmed a bit.

“You look terrible,” Aaron said, seeing the dark smudges under his eyes. “Have you not slept?”

“No,” Robert said. “But you did.”

“Yeah,” Aaron said, blinking while trying to wake himself up properly. “I didn’t realise how much… I’d been carrying it I guess. I slept.”

“That’s what matters.”

“Is this…” Aaron looked hesitant again. “Is this going to change things between us?”

“I don’t see how it can’t,” Robert said and he could almost physically see Aaron’s walls going up again. “I don’t mean that in a bad way, Aaron. I mean… I can understand you better. Your past better, and that does change the way I see you.”

“Right…”

“I love you,” Robert said.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Robert confirmed. “You’ve dealt with more than anyone should have to.” Aaron kissed him gently.

“I need you to want me, still,” Aaron said. “I can’t have you staying with me for pity.”

“You know me better than that,” Robert said. “I can’t say I was expecting to hear it, but… does your
mum know?”

“No,” Aaron said.

“So she has no idea why you don’t talk to her?”

“She thinks it was because she left me when I was younger,” Aaron said. “Which it is.”

“Aaron…”

“Don’t pressure me to tell her,” Aaron said, a warning in his voice. “I don’t want her knowing, it’s fine as it is.”

“Have you ever had counselling for this?” Robert asked. “Trying to cope with it, I mean.”

“No,” Aaron said. “I’m fine, I deal with it. I always do.”

“Aaron, you might need to talk to someone.”

“I’m talking to you,” Aaron said. “Now, do you want breakfast?”

“What?”

“Room service here’s good,” Aaron said. “And I’m hungry. So…”

“I could eat,” Robert said, letting the subject drop. For now.

Aaron wasn’t wrong, the room service was excellent. Breakfast for two could have fed about six people with no trouble, and once Robert caught a whiff of the bacon, he realised he hadn’t had a proper meal in ages. Between the two of them, they demolished the table in quick time.

“I feel better after that,” Robert admitted.

“Good.”

“So… what now?”

“We get on with our lives,” Aaron said.

“You don’t want to report him to the police?” Aaron looked shocked at the mere suggestion.

“No.”

“You could…”

“I am not reporting it,” Aaron said. “No way in hell. Even if I wasn’t me with all the press attention, I wouldn’t want everyone to know what he’d done to me. Let alone the fact that there isn’t any actual evidence, it’s been so long.”

“Aaron, just think about it. He’d go to prison.”

“You don’t know that,” Aaron said. “All I want is to not see him. I’m fine with that. I erm… keep an eye on him though.”
“Oh?”

“I pay someone to check he’s… well, far away from me's the only requirement actually.” Aaron shrugged. “That’s all I need to know.”

“Then why did you even tell me?” Robert asked. “If you wanted to forget it?”

“Because you needed to know,” Aaron said. “And clearly, judging from how well I slept, I needed to tell you.” He smiled slightly. “I thought I’d wake up to you gone. Wondered if you’d call in a report to that paper of yours.”

Robert suddenly felt afraid. “Aaron, you know I would never breathe a word if you didn’t want me to. Even if you dumped me or chucked me, I’d never say…”

“I know,” Aaron said, smiling. “I was trying to be funny.”

“You’re historically unfunny,” Robert said, though both men were smiling a little, the serious atmosphere broken. Robert kissed him over the remnants of their breakfast and Aaron smiled into it.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

This was not intended to be, but I feel it could be the last chapter because of on screen hell. So, if I feel the need to write more for this, I will. But for now I’m going to try and step back. This is (hopefully, my God, I hope) not a permanent thing, and when the boys are back together, I will most likely be back. But I think I’ve reached my limit right about now.

The scene of the two of them in bed in this chapter I’ve had in my head since the beginning, and I wanted to include it. Enjoy.

Robert dozed for a bit. He’d not got much rest the night before, but now that he saw Aaron was okay (relatively speaking) he felt the weight of tiredness catch up to him.

When he woke up, Aaron had gone. There was a note on the pillow in his untidy scrawl which Robert snatched at.

You’ve been asleep ages and I had to leave. Got a sound check and rehearsal with the band before tonight. Come to the arena when you’re conscious. Your names on the list so you should get past security with no problems. I love you. Aaron. Robert smiled, then decided to have a shower to wake himself up properly. Brush his teeth, maybe before getting a taxi to the arena and tracking Aaron down.

When he did, Aaron and the band were on stage, running through the set list with someone who was clearly organising them. Robert watched from the side, just watching Aaron fiddling with his guitar, clearly in his element discussing the music. Aaron’s eyes flicked to the right, almost as if sensing Robert there and he smiled. It took another ten minutes for Aaron to excuse himself and he pulled Robert to his dressing room by his hand.

“Hi,” Aaron said, kissing him gently. “Sleep well?” he asked amused.

“Sorry about that,” Robert said, though he wasn’t sorry it had made Aaron smile. “How are you?”

“Good,” Aaron said. “It’s not new, I cope,” he added, answering the real question.

“Okay,” Robert said. “Sorry, not quite sure how to deal with this.” Aaron shrugged.

“I’m me,” Aaron said. “I’m still me and if you can’t…”

“I’ll be here,” Robert said. “But I never said it was easy.” Aaron nodded, conceding the point. Aaron moved into Robert’s personal space and Robert’s hands rested on Aaron’s hips by instinct.

“I still want to be touched,” Aaron said. “I didn’t tell you so you’d keep your space. I told you because I didn’t want to lie to you. Okay?”

“Okay,” Robert said, nodding. He kissed Aaron, which turned a bit deeper than he’d intended. “Listen, I have to get back to London.” Aaron sighed. “I have a job, I can be late on Monday
morning so I’ll leave it until tomorrow, catch an early train, but otherwise…”

“I know,” Aaron said. “I don’t like it, but I know. And this isn’t you…”

“No, you really have to loudly dump me if you don’t want me texting and calling you all the time,” Robert said with confidence, and he could see the relaxation in Aaron’s face. “Knock em dead tonight.”

“That’s a really cheesy line,” Aaron said with a raised eyebrow and Robert smiled.

Robert watched the entire show from backstage. Watching Aaron perform was incredibly hot, and briefly Robert wondered if that was okay. To want him so desperately after the things Aaron had told him. But he did, God help him. He could appreciate the way Aaron filled out his clothes, how talented his hands were on his guitar. Just because a past horror had happened, that didn’t change that, did it? Rape was about power, not desire. Robert held onto that, because the way Aaron looked tonight? He lusted after him, there really was no other way to put it.

Back at the hotel, Aaron was buzzing, on a high after the show, his body almost vibrating with it. It was good to remember that this version of Aaron was still here, even with the recent revelations. He went into the bathroom, and nodded to Robert to come with him as he started to strip. Robert stayed perfectly still, not quite knowing what to do as Aaron turned the shower on to heat up.

“I want…” Aaron started shyly, though the way his eyes grazed up and down Robert’s body was anything but shy. “I’m allowed to want, Robert.” Robert took his shirt off and Aaron’s hands were on him in seconds. A little nervous but determined and Robert pulled him in for a kiss.

They ended up in bed, completely naked and tangled in the bed clothes, skin damp from the shower. It was close, intimate and there was absolutely no expectation of sex, that wasn’t the point of this. Aaron’s kisses were intense, perfect and Robert didn’t think he’d had such a satisfying make out session since… well, ever? When he was a teenager he always wanted to get this part over with and move on to sex.

“You hair’s getting long,” Aaron said, sliding his fingers through it and tugging gently.

“Yeah, I know,” Robert replied. “Really needs a cut, but I can’t find the time.” Aaron smiled into a kiss, his hands tracing down Robert’s neck, then shoulders. This was so good, this was wonderful.

Aaron rolled his hips and Robert moaned. Aaron was in complete control of this, laying on top of him and Aaron would be the one who could stop at any moment if he wanted to. Robert knew that was important, but that didn’t stop him enjoying it when Aaron smirked into another heated kiss.

“Are you…” Robert asked.

“S good,” Aaron breathed against his lips. Robert nodded, smiled and tilted his head up. Their bodies were sparking together everywhere, the bed sheets gathered around their hips.

There was a knock on the door and both men groaned, Robert’s fingers gripping Aaron’s hips hard. Aaron breathed heavily before pulling the bed sheets up to his shoulders, covering them both before shouting, “What?!” The door opened; they hadn’t even realised it was unlocked, and Alex stood there, suddenly blushing at what she’d walked in on.

“Oh!”
“Can I help you?” Aaron asked, at the same time a hand sneaking down Roberts body, making Robert hold in a whimper.

“Chloe.” Aaron groaned, dropping his head. “It’s her last night and you said…”

“Drinks, yeah, I know,” Aaron said.

“Er, Chloe?”

“She’s worked on our tour set for years,” Aaron said. “She’s on maternity leave, tonight’s her last show and… I have to go.”

“Okay,” Robert said, leaning up for a kiss. Aaron indulged before grabbing a blanket and moving to the bathroom where his clothes had been abandoned.

“You’re already late!” Alex shouted after him. Alex glared at Robert while waiting for Aaron.

“What?” Robert asked, almost daring her. “He likes to look at me. Can’t say I blame him,” he added smugly. Alex rolled her eyes.

“You’re not all that,” she said. “How is he?”

“Okay,” Robert said, relenting. “He’s okay. I am taking care of him.”

“Taking care of yourself more like,” she said, unflatteringly looking at him, obviously naked and wrapped in the bed sheets.

“We weren’t having sex,” Robert said lowly. “Think we’d have left the door unlocked if we were?”

“I just worry about him.”

“You don’t have to,” Robert said. “He’s stronger than you would ever believe.” Alex nodded shortly once, and Aaron came out of the bathroom fully dressed, leaning over Robert in bed.

“I’ll be back as soon as I possibly can,” he promised, kissing him sweetly.

“Wake me when you get back,” Robert said. “I’m not finished with you yet.” Aaron grinned, kissing him again.

“Right, lets get this over with,” he said to Alex, leaving the hotel room. Alex paused, looking at Robert.

“You’re good for him,” she said eventually. And Robert recognised that as a very important nod of approval.

“Thank you.”

“Alex, I’m holding the lift here!” She smiled, nodded and left and Robert sighed. He felt like he’d passed some kind of test, and that could only be a good thing, for the person who Aaron trusted the most. Robert turned over and closed his eyes, knowing that Aaron would wake him up when he came back.
PART TWO

Chapter Notes

I asked on my tumblr if people wanted to see more of this, and got such an overwhelmingly positive response, I decided to write more. Hope you enjoy, and thanks for sticking with this!

(Fifth attempt at uploading, lets see if this works....)

Messenger ended their sell out European tour in Paris last night. Though while the music is as good as ever, speculation is turning to the groups personal lives. Alex Tisdale missed two of the bands meet and greet experiences in the last week alone, citing “personal reasons.” The vocalist broke up with her long term boyfriend (see pic) four months ago and people are speculating that she’s begun seeing him again. That is nothing compared to Aaron Livesy. Rumours are flying everywhere about him and his new beau, Robert Sugden, who has not been seen with Livesy since going public. Rumours are that they may have had a private break up in the face of their public relationship and the...

Robert stopped reading, closing the magazine. Total trash. He had to read them, both professionally and since getting involved with Aaron, personally but that didn’t make them any more accurate. He and Aaron were certainly together, but it was difficult, because Robert had to work and he couldn’t drop everything to follow Aaron around Europe, no matter how tempting that might sound at times. It hadn’t really hit him yet. The kind of press coverage that would inevitably follow him around as long as he was seeing Aaron. Because so soon after they went public, Aaron left for his tour and his work commitments. Photographers didn’t seem to have much interest in Robert on his own, so they got bored. He knew it would though, he knew the period of grace was coming to an end, because Aaron was coming home today.

He’d even decided to take the entire weekend off work to celebrate, meaning he’d left Lucy in charge. God knows how that was going to work out, but he didn’t care right now. He’d only seen Aaron in person twice since this tour started. Once when Robert flew out to Dublin for what could only be called a dirty weekend away, and secondly when Aaron had a day off, and had flown to London for a precious twelve hours.

And this wasn’t the first time he’d seen speculation on Alex’s private life either. In a friend of a friend kind of way, he was a little concerned for her, though whenever she’d come up in conversation Aaron just brushed over it. Right now, he didn’t care. He was sat in a coffee shop, reading through the weeks magazines while waiting for Aaron to call him, which he was going to do when he landed. Which meant he was way too eager when his phone rang, until he saw the caller. “Boss.”

“No, don’t you dare,” Robert said before answering the phone. He knew this was for being called back into work. “Lucy can handle it,” Robert said, answering the phone in lieu of hello.
“You’re taking the day off for personal reasons,” Richard said. “And she’s very inexperienced to be in charge of…”

“If you always say that, she’ll never get the experience,” Robert said, trying to stay calm. “It’s a slow day.” This was by design, Robert had published all the good stuff earlier in the week. “Come on, you could say that I’m…” he thought about the phrasing for a moment. “Meeting a source.” Richard snorted down the phone line, though it was clear he was amused. “It’s one day, and Lucy will call if she needs help.”

“Fine,” Richard said. “But you used to be reliable, Robert, I don’t want that to…”

“I know my job, and you know I’m good at it. I’ve not seen him in weeks now. Cut me some slack. When’s the last time I so much as called in sick?”

“Fine. See you Monday. If she needs help…”

“Yep, of course,” Robert said, ending the call very quickly. He looked at his home screen on his phone, smiling. It was a photo Aaron had sent him while on tour, happy and laughing. Alex was in it too, but most of her face was cut off, and it was just a picture of Aaron happy and Robert almost melted at that. He rarely saw him so relaxed. A small part of him hurt that it wasn’t when they were together, but only a tiny part. He remembered them laughing in bed together, it being so easy between them both. While he was reminiscing, his phone rang and this time Robert answered it with more enthusiasm.

“Hey, you landed?”

“Er, yeah,” Aaron said, not sounding very pleased. “There’s been a security scare at Heathrow so the plane was diverted.”

“Okay,” Robert said. “Diverted where?”

“Southampton.”

“Oh, God,” Robert said under his breath. That meant another couple of hours wait until he’d see Aaron.

“I’ve got a driver taking me to my place,” Aaron said. “If you make your way there and let yourself in, I’ll be about… forty five minutes behind you.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said. Robert did have a key, Aaron had given him one just in case there was a problem with the house while Aaron was out of the country.

“Aaron, I need the code.”

“Yeah, it’s 119328,” Aaron said. “I’ll text it to you,” he added as Robert repeated the numbers under his breath, trying to remember them.

“Thanks,” Robert said warmly. “And for trusting me.”

“I can’t wait to see you,” Aaron said. “I’ve missed you so much.”

“Me too. Now I’m going to hang up because I need to get out of London.”

“I know we had plans,” Aaron said. They did, they were going to do some of the touristy things
in the city while Aaron took advantage of his security.

“We’ll do it another time.”

“Good,” Aaron said. “See you soon.”

“Bye.” Robert finished his coffee and left. He needed to get to Aaron’s house.

Robert had rented a car, grabbed a bag of his things and headed out of the city. One of the things that really bothered him about living in London was the fact he didn’t own a car. It was so impractical in the city, but he did miss it, so he enjoyed the drive out of London more than he probably should have done.

He remembered the way to Aaron’s place relatively well and it didn’t take long before he parked outside. It felt a little odd to be here without Aaron, but hopefully it wouldn’t be for long. Robert had also stopped to buy supplies, food, bread, milk, champagne (in case they felt like celebrating the end of Aaron’s tour) and once he’d put that away, a car was coming up the drive. Robert watched out the kitchen window and saw someone who screamed “security” handling Aaron’s bags as he came up to the house.

Robert’s heart was thumping unusually hard as Aaron came in, blue eyes glowing. It was only for a moment, then Aaron was kissing him, pushing him up against the wall, beautiful gorgeous lips on his. Lips he’d missed enormously.

“Where do you want your bags sir?”

“I don’t care,” Aaron breathed against Robert’s smiling mouth before sinking into another kiss. Robert laced a hand into Aaron’s curls, pulling him as close as he could get. The door closed and finally, blissfully, they were alone.

“Good flight?” Robert breathed. Aaron looked at him like he was mad for even mentioning that and instead took his shirt off, letting Robert’s eyes feast on his skin. He was fitter than before, his muscles more well defined.

“God, you look amazing,” Robert breathed, and before Aaron could say anything else, Robert got on his knees.

They had sex twice, the first time desperate and needy, the second time more tender, rediscovering each others bodies now Aaron was home. Robert’s body felt sated, deliciously so, but the only thing stopping him from drifting off was Aaron still wide awake. He usually became at least a little bit dozy and lethargic after sex, but not this time.

“Was that…” Robert started, hating how needy he was going to sound. “Okay?”

“Was what?” Aaron asked distractedly, before looking at him. “The sex? I’m not about to stroke your ego, Robert.” But it was accompanied by a big smile and Robert relaxed. He thought they still fit together well, but nothing wrong with checking, was there?

“Then what’s wrong?”

“I can’t tell you,” Aaron said, sounding sad.
“You can tell me anything,” Robert said, a little hurt that Aaron didn’t trust him. The last few months of separation had been extremely hard on him, on them both, and now Aaron was home, he didn’t trust him?

“If I tell you, I’m telling you,” Aaron said seriously. “I’m not confiding in the sub editor.”

Robert understood. “I wouldn’t break your confidence, not for anything. Now are you going to tell me what’s wrong?”

Aaron took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I’ve been offered a contract,” he said. “It’s so much money, Robert.”

“You’re not hard up,” Robert pointed out. “And I know you, it’s not about the money with you. So keep going, get to the point.” He stroked his hand through Aaron’s hair, and he relaxed a little bit, keeping his eyes on Robert.

“I’ve been offered a solo contract,” Aaron said, biting down on his lip hard. “Break the band up, and I don’t know what to do.”

Robert paused. “Well, you must be thinking about it,” he said. “You’d have just turned them down otherwise. Is it a lot more money?” Aaron looked at him. “Out of professional curiosity from someone on thirty grand a year.”

“Ha ha,” Aaron said, unamused. “Yeah, it is. And I’d keep the writing royalties on my songs.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“I can’t do it to Adam,” Aaron said, shaking his head. “If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t be here. He got me out of that house, how do I tell him now that “no, I’ve had a better offer, thanks.” I can’t do it, Rob.”

“But you want to,” Robert pushed. “Don’t you?”

“I don’t even know if I’d be any good on my own without a band,” Aaron said. “I don’t want to be one of those wash ups who ruined a really good thing because he got selfish.” Aaron bit his bottom lip and Robert pulled it free with his thumb gently. “I don’t know what to do.”

“What about Alex?” Robert asked.

“She’d be fine,” Aaron said. “I know that, either way, but I’m stuck, Robert. Tell me what to do.”

“I can’t tell you what to do,” Robert said. “You know that.”

“Yeah, but I don’t want to make the decision,” Aaron said. “I’d quite like you to take the blame when it all goes wrong.”

“Oh, I see how this goes,” Robert teased. “You can’t make a wrong decision, Aaron. Too many people want you? It’s not a problem.”

“Maybe,” Aaron agreed and he let himself be spooned up against Robert's chest, closing his eyes.
Chapter Notes

I am amazed and overwhelmed about how many of you wonderful people in this fandom wanted to see more of this AU. Thank you so much for your patience and encouragement, and I hope I don't let any of you down. Enjoy!

Robert woke up to an empty bed and, rolling over, a cold one. Aaron had been up a while then. He quickly dressed and went downstairs, hovering in the doorway of the kitchen. Aaron was singing. Robert had heard him sing dozens of times now, but it was always for his job. Right now, he was making coffee, putting bread in the toaster and singing for enjoyment. It made Robert sigh with pure contentment. He watched him for about six seconds before coming up behind him and wrapping his arms around his waist. Aaron grinned happily, pushing back against Robert’s body.

“Morning,” Robert whispered lowly, kissing his neck. “You sleep next to me?” Either answer was fine, Aaron could tell.

“Er… till about six. Then I dozed on the floor for a bit. Sorry.”

“No, don’t worry,” Robert said. “I like to know how you sleep.”

“Better than I used to,” Aaron said. “That’s enough.” Robert kissed him again before reaching around for his coffee, still pressed to Aaron’s back.

“So, what have we got planned for this weekend?” Robert asked, parting from him.

“Sex?” Aaron suggested, making Robert laugh into his ear, a low sound making Aaron just want.

“Seriously, I don’t know. What do you want to do?”

“Sorry?”

“Well, money’s no object. And I think most places I’ll be able to persuade them for entry, so think of something ridiculously extravagant you’d like to do and I’ll treat you. Us.”

“Er… God, I don’t know,” Robert said, suddenly a world of possibilities open to him. If Aaron was serious about treating him, doing something he’d want to do... And then he knew what he wanted.

“The Bodleian library.”

“What?” Aaron asked with a scowl.

“If you’re serious,” Robert said. “Somewhere I’ve always wanted to go. I’ve always been a reader, and those books there are phenomenal. Some you’re not even allowed to touch. I don’t want the tour joe public gets, I want exclusive access to some of their works. They don’t let just anyone touch those books. It’s not going to be interesting for you at all, but... Yeah. That’s where I’d like to go if money or influence were no problem.”

“Where even is that?” Aaron asked.

“Oxford. I know it’s stupid, it was just an idea.” He now felt ridiculously vulnerable for admitting
that, like he'd showed too much of himself.

“We can do that,” Aaron said, getting his phone out. “I might abandon you to your books and find a pub somewhere, but…” Robert smiled at the mental image.

“That won’t be too boring for you?” he asked softly.

“No,” Aaron said, kissing him tenderly. “Or yes, but if I can do something for you? I will.”

“What do I do for you?” Robert wondered aloud, not really expecting an answer.

“You listen and you stayed,” Aaron said. “That’s more than anyone else ever has. You want a boring trip to a library…”

“It’s not just a library, Aaron…” Robert said. He rolled his eyes, calling someone to arrange it, and if it was possible, Robert fell in love with him even more in that moment.

Aaron had no idea what made essentially a big hall jam packed with books so interesting, but by the end of the day, Robert was glowing and buzzing with it. His enthusiasm was infectious and on the drive back to the house (Aaron driving) he couldn’t help but smile at Robert. It was so good and rare to see him like this.

“I can’t believe we’ve made a day trip to a library,” Aaron said. “So much for rock and roll.”

“You said you didn’t mind.”

“I don’t,” Aaron said. “I can’t… I can’t put into words what you’ve given me, though I do my best when I write lyrics to try.”

“I’ve not done anything,” Robert said, feeling he was getting unfair credit. “Not really. Just loved you.”

“That’s enough. And to hell you haven’t done anything, you know being with me could make your career suffer…”

“I don’t care about that,” Robert interrupted. Aaron ignored him and carried on.

“You know that I’m out of the country more than I’m in it, you know my job is insane and you stay anyway. You’ve not looked elsewhere, you trust me to be faithful even when I know with the press coverage that’s difficult. And you let me talk, when I needed to about my dad.”

“Aaron…” Robert said softly, wondering if driving a car probably wasn’t the wisest decision right now.

“You never once called me a liar, you never once looked at me like I was filthy and you still wanted me after all that.” Aaron’s voice was shaking.

“Pull over, I don’t think you should be driving.”

“We’re nearly home,” Aaron said. “I’m okay. But you help make me okay. Don’t you dare say you do nothing for me.”

“Okay,” Robert said. Though he couldn’t imagine anyone turning away from Aaron, whatever the
circumstances. “How do you know I’ve been faithful?” he asked out of curiosity.

Aaron shot him a patronising look. “Barring the fact it would be over every gossip magazine in Europe?” Aaron asked. “You were skyping me most nights, even after a gig. I’m not an idiot.”

“Could have gone back to Yorkshire,” Robert said fairly. “Copped off with an old flame there.” What the hell was he doing, Robert asked himself. Why was he attempting to plant seeds of doubt there when Aaron wasn’t feeling them?

“Yeah, but you didn’t. I know you and I trust you.” Aaron turned left and cleared his throat. “I er… don’t find that easy. Trust.”

“I know you don’t,” Robert said. “And not many people trust me either. Thank you for today, it was perfect.”

“Geek,” Aaron said warmly. “I love you.” It’s rare for Aaron to say that, particularly unprompted.

“I love you too. Are you all right?” Robert asked quietly.

“Yeah, I am,” Aaron said. “I’m happy with you. And…” Whatever he’d been going to say faded on a sigh. “Hold onto that thought.”

“Why?”

“My mothers paid a visit. I knew giving her my address was a mistake.” Aaron pulled the car to a stop, seeing the huddled woman sitting on his doorstep. “Can you be on my side, whatever she says?”

“Always,” Robert said. They got out of the car and the woman on the doorstep stood, brushing herself down.

“What’re you doing here?” Aaron asked heavily unlocking the door.

“I want to talk to my son,” she said, eyes sad. Robert frowned at her, trying to place that face, because he was sure he’d seen her somewhere else. But out of context he couldn’t quite remember it.

“About what?” Aaron asked, disabling the alarm and the three of them went through to the kitchen.

“Love, I want to get past this, I want…” Robert tuned out her words, because he suddenly knew. *Chas. Emmerdale.* She was from home. She was Aaron’s mother? Images from the village, his childhood, his teenage years were warring with the image in front of him. He’d been so focused on Aaron telling him about his dad, and the horrors he’d endured that he didn’t think he’d ever got Aaron’s mums name. He just said “my mum” usually. If he had mentioned her name, it hadn’t stuck in Robert’s brain. It was a little bit of a shock to see her.

“And you can shut your gob an’ all,” Chas said to him unkindly.

“Excuse me?” Robert asked, still trying to put the pieces of his life into focus.

“I know you, Robert Sugden. Always such a smarmy arrogant git who…”

“You two know each other?” Aaron asked, looking at Robert like he’d been thoroughly betrayed.

“I didn’t realise until about sixty seconds ago,” Robert said truthfully, still looking at Chas. “I grew up in Emmerdale, I know I’ve told you about that,” he said, turning back to Aaron.
“You said Yorkshire,” Aaron said quietly. “You never said where.”

“It didn’t matter,” Robert said. Then saw the hard look on Aaron’s face. “I have not been lying to you, Aaron.”

“You knew who I was,” Chas said unhelpfully. “I called you asking for Aaron’s phone number.” Tha’s right, she had. Robert just hadn’t paid much attention to it. At the time their relationship had just been blown wide open to the press, and quite honestly, Robert had had other things on his mind at the time. Why would he join Aaron’s mother up with someone from his home town he hadn’t seen in ten years? He wouldn’t. Of course not, that wasn’t human nature. He just hoped Aaron believed him, he knew his mother was a quite understandably tetchy subject.

“Yeah, and if you were any kind of mother you wouldn’t have to resort to talking to Aaron’s new boyfriend for his number,” Robert snapped, hating the look on Aaron’s face. Betrayal. “I had other things on my mind at the time,” he said to Aaron. “I’ve not been home in ten years, forgive me if I didn’t put a face to the name.” Aaron nodded once before turning back to his mother.

“What do you want?”

“I want to make things right,” Chas said. “I want you to be my boy again.” Those words got Aaron’s back up immediately, Robert could see it and knew the reason why. Chas seemed to be oblivious.

“Rob, I can’t,” Aaron said. “Can you get rid of her please?” Aaron turned away going up the stairs and Chas turned on Robert with a fire.

“What’ve you been saying to him?!” she snapped. “What’ve you filled his mind with? Your lies?”

“Because your relationship with your son was going so well before I showed up,” Robert said sarcastically. “He wants you gone, so please leave.” Chas looked immovable. “Try again tomorrow when he’s calmer. You know how stubborn he is, you’re not going to get anything out of him tonight.”

“I don’t understand,” Chas said, her anger turning into desperation. “Why he hates me so much. Why he left for years without so much as calling me.

“Ask yourself why,” Robert said. "Why it happened in the first place."

“All kids run away at some point,” Chas said with a shrug.

“Teenagers run away for a night or two at most,” Robert said. “They run away because they’ve had an argument and need to cool down, or there’s a party they want to go to. Teenagers don’t run away from home for years unless there’s a serious problem.” He wouldn’t go any nearer the truth without Aaron’s permission, but she needed to see this wasn’t a silly teenage grudge gone on for too long. Chas shook her head, but she did turn and leave, Robert locking the door behind her.
Chapter 26

Robert went upstairs and found Aaron so on edge. He sat on the bed, hunched over himself and his entire body language was screaming “don’t touch me.”

“Aaron?”

“I hate seeing her,” he said quietly, looking at his knees. “She reminds me of the past I so desperately want to forget.”

“You never forget it.”

“Thanks,” Aaron said lowly.

“I just meant…” Robert sat down next to him, making the mattress dip but carefully not touching him. “Your mother is always going to be in your life. If you told her, if you got it all out in the open, you might be able to move on. It might be better for you.”

“No,” Aaron said firmly. “I can’t tell her, it’s been too long, she’d think I’m lying or…”

“Well, you wouldn’t have to go into specifics,” Robert said. “But Aaron, she has no idea why you even ran away from home. I don’t think giving her a reason would be…”

“Are you deaf? I said no!” Aaron said bluntly. Robert shut his mouth immediately and dropped the subject. “This happened to me! I get the say on who knows what! And I say no!”

“I’m going to have a shower,” Robert said lowly. “Thank you for today, I loved it.” Robert left the bedroom and Aaron groaned. He had one person who was able to make him feel better whenever the subject of his childhood or that man came up, and he’d just bitten his head off. He didn’t like being told what to do in this. And seeing his mother always put him on the very edge of losing his temper. Robert was right about one thing, it wasn’t Chas’s fault she didn’t know the truth. But telling her… it wasn’t an option. Not one he liked anyway, but he did feel bad for shouting at Robert.

He got up and went into the bathroom, opening the shower door and ignoring both the water spilling onto his bathroom floor and the shock on Robert’s face.

“Hey, if you want to kick me out you could at least wait until I’m dry,” Robert said. Aaron stripped his hoodie and shirt off before stepping under the water with his jeans still on, Robert’s face softening.

“I shouldn’t have shouted,” Aaron said. “It’s just such a sensitive subject for me. I don’t like people knowing, and I don’t trust my mum. She’s a gossip Rob, and one word to the wrong person and it’ll be all over the papers. It’ll be the first fact everyone ever remembers about me. I thought you got it.”

“I do,” Robert said over the running water. “But she’s your mum. Without shouting, you could tell her that your dad was… violent. You could tell her a reason you left. Not the reason.”

“I feel… I blame her,” Aaron said. “I know that’s not rational, I know it’s not her fault. I know it’s not my fault what happened, but I still blame her. And then I feel guilty for blaming her, because what kind of person does that?”

“Give her something,” Robert advised. “Then you could move on. Talk about other things. Wouldn’t you like to share your success with your mum?”
“Maybe,” Aaron admitted. “I want to forget, I’m sorry for shouting.” Robert kissed him, all wet warm skin, soft and comforting. “Now, about you knowing my mother…”

“She was one of the faces in the village I grew up in,” Robert said dismissively. “It wasn’t something I was hiding.”

“Just… tell me that you haven’t slept with her.”


“You said you knew her when you were a teenager,” Aaron said. “She’s not that much older than you, so I just…”

“No,” Robert said instantly. “No, God no. I just didn’t put the names together, your last name is…”

“Good,” Aaron said, kissing him again. “Take me to bed.” Robert couldn’t deny him that.

On Sunday Chas and Aaron called a truce. Robert wasn’t there for the conversation, but Aaron told him he’d mentioned some half truths, violence, manipulation. Fear. Just not the big one. Robert wouldn’t push, but he was again reminded of how much Aaron had trusted him in the first place. The three of them went out for lunch, and it was awkward and stilted, but there was conversation. It was also perfectly clear that she didn’t think Robert was good enough for her son. But she wasn’t coming right out and saying it, knowing that damaging their already fragile mother son relationship wasn’t worth it. But the glares across the table told their own story.

After dessert Aaron went to the loo, leaving Chas alone as Robert paid the bill. “Oh, that’s novel,” Chas said, looking at his wallet. “Trying to impress the mother-in-law?”

“No,” Robert said levelly. “If you were Alex or Adam I’d be trying to impress you, but you? No.”

“Wow, you’re just as charming as Katie says.”

“I might have grown up a bit since eighteen,” Robert said.

“You’re a bad idea for him,” Chas said. “You know that. What’re you after, free loading? A good story? What?”

“Is it that hard to believe I love your son? He’s incredible, and it’s not what it’s in his bank account, it’s not the fame, it’s him.”

Chas raised her eyebrows but had no time to say anything else before Aaron returned. “Okay?”

“Yeah, I got this,” Robert said.

“No.”

“Hey, you took me to the Bodleian,” Robert said. “Least I could do is buy lunch.” Aaron smiled at him, before it dimmed when he looked at Chas. “Look, we kind of had weekend plans,” Aaron said. “I’m not… we’re okay, but…”

“I can take a hint,” she said. She gave Aaron a hug, a hesitant one, but one all the same, leaving them to it.
Both men headed home, in a little bit of a more contented silence than before. At least a ceasefire had been called between Aaron and his mother. They spent a wonderful afternoon at home, watching rubbish and enjoying each others company. Robert had to be back in London for work on Monday morning but they’d agreed to spend the night together anyway. Robert would just get up early.

Or that was the plan. Robert woke to a hammering on the door, his head on Aaron’s chest. “Wha…” Robert spluttered.

“God it’s stupidly early,” Aaron moaned, looking at the clock.

“Think someone wants you,” Robert said, getting out of bed and slowly putting clothes on.

“Yeah.” Aaron went downstairs, Robert following quickly.

Aaron opened the door. “How could you??”

“Good morning Alex,” he said neutrally.

“I hate you right now!” Alex snapped, curling up her fist and hitting Aaron’s chest.

“What the hell have I done?” Aaron asked.

“You trusted him!” she hissed as Robert came down the stairs. For a small woman, she could move really quickly and started hitting Robert instead. “I knew you were bad news! I should have told Aaron to dump you, to leave you, but no! I encouraged him because I wanted him happy!”

“What have I done?” Robert asked, restraining Alex from hitting him and looking at Aaron in complete bewilderment.

“You’ve not done anything,” Aaron said heavily. “Alex, it wasn’t him, he doesn’t know.”

“What don’t I know?” Robert asked.

“It’s in his bloody paper!” Alex shrieked.

“Robert, put the kettle on,” Aaron said calmly, pulling Alex into his arms and guiding her to the sofa. She was angry, Robert could see that, and upset. But God knows why.

When Robert came into the living room with a mug of tea, he found Alex on the sofa, hair askew and Aaron crouching in front of her holding her hands. Oh. Robert saw exactly what the problem was. Alex had a small but noticeable bump, which explained a lot. Robert started typing on his phone, checking what “his” paper had published overnight.

“Right, now you need to calm down,” Aaron said. “It was never going to stay secret forever.”

“No, I know, but… forever’s different than now,” she said, sniffing into her hand. “You don’t know what it’s like.”

“Alec…”

“No, you don’t, it’s different for men,” she said. “No magazine debates whether you should be eating a steak or how it’s going to effect your figure. You don’t get criticised whenever you leave the house without make up on because you don’t care about yourself or have low self esteem. I wanted… just for a little bit to keep this to myself. To not be judged as to whether what I’m wearing is maternity appropriate. Or how I shouldn’t be going out because I’m pregnant. I just…”
“It’s out,” Aaron said. “You can’t take it back. So you have a good cry, have a sleep, then concentrate on growing my nephew, okay?” Alex smiled weakly.

“You don’t know it’s a boy.”

“And you don’t know it isn’t,” Aaron said.

“I want a little girl,” Alex said, calming down now. “I’m surrounded by you and Adam all day, he looks like he’s going to be a regular fixture around here,” she added, nodding at Robert. “I need a girl. Keep the numbers up.”

“Okay then,” Aaron said with a soft smile. “Me and Adam can teach her how to kick a football around. You’re terrible at that, she’ll need her uncles to give her some lessons.” Alex smiled.

“You make things better,” she said. Aaron wiped her eyes, smiled, and then straightened up to look at Robert.

“Aaron, this has nothing to do with me…” Robert said, even though he was looking at the articles on his phone. Ones that Lucy had approved.

“No, I know,” Aaron said. “You didn’t even know. And you’ve been with me all weekend. Just go. My friend needs me and you need to get to work.”

“I need to give Lucy a piece of my mind,” Robert said darkly. “I’ll grab my stuff and go.” It only took Robert ten minutes to pack his things, and when he came back downstairs Alex and Aaron were cuddling on the sofa. “I’ll call you later,” Robert said. Aaron nodded, and Robert leaned over him and kissed him gently.

“Hey,” Alex said. “Sorry for hitting you.”

“It’s okay,” Robert said. “I’m about to give that woman hell for giving it the go ahead.”

“Go,” Aaron said. Robert kissed him once more before leaving.
“Hey Rob. Good weekend?”

“What the hell is your problem?” Robert asked Lucy. “I leave you in charge and you print that gossip about Alex?”

“First of all, I didn’t print it, I handed it over to the showbiz section and they were very eager to get the pictures of Alex with a noticeable bump,” Lucy said calmly.

“You shouldn’t have…”

“The pictures fell into my lap, Robert,” she said. “I couldn’t ignore it. I held it over the weekend.”

“You should have…”

“What, called you?” Lucy asked. “Because it effected your friend?”

“Yes!”

“I ran it past Richard,” Lucy said and Robert’s heart sank. The editor. “I didn’t know if I should call you, he told me not to. And told me to pass them over.”

“But…”

“Robert, this is personal for you,” Lucy said. “Do not take it any further. We published that a woman’s probably pregnant, though you’re pretty much confirming it with your reaction. You’re too close to be objective.”

“I’m not…”

“You are,” she said. “It’s our most popular article on the website today. Like it or not it’s in the public interest.”

“That says more about them than the fact we’re turning into a gossip column,” Robert said. “Listen, you work for me. You don’t publish anything about Aaron, Alex, Adam or Messenger without my say so.”

“And that’s the problem.” They both turned to see the editor. “Robert, a word.”

They shut themselves in Robert’s office and Robert sighed, sitting behind his desk. “This isn’t going to go well is it?”

“Robert, what are you doing?” Richard asked, exasperated.

“Forgive me, but I thought I was in charge of music and arts,” Robert said. “Announcing a woman’s pregnancy wasn’t what I signed up for.”

“It didn’t come from your section,” Richard said. “All Lucy did was hand it over, I’m sorry if that screws with your personal life.” Robert bit his lip and shook his head. “Robert, be careful,” Richard said. “You’re good. You could be running this place in a few years. Don’t throw that away for a bit of good sex with someone famous.” Richard left his office and Robert sighed, hitting his fist against
Robert knew Aaron was at his flat before he even made it up the stairs. He could hear his guitar before he got there, and after one of the longest days of his career, that was very welcome. He’d given Aaron a key when Aaron had trusted him with one to his own place. He unlocked the door and smiled, seeing Aaron on the sofa, playing his guitar. He smiled at Robert, a beautiful smile and the music stopped.

“No, keep playing,” Robert said, going to the fridge and grabbing a beer. He liked listening to it.

“Don’t think your neighbours would be best pleased,” Aaron said, putting the guitar down and walking over to Robert. “How was work?”

“I’m probably going to lose my job,” Robert said, admitting the possibility.

“What? Over this?” Aaron asked, scowling.

“No,” Robert said. “Over the fact that things like this will keep coming up for as long as I keep seeing you.” He kissed him briefly. “And I don’t want to stop seeing you.”

“Robert…”

“How was your day?” Robert asked instead. They stood very close together and Robert placed a hand on Aaron’s back, pulling him in for a kiss. Aaron smiled into it before answering the question.

“Fine. Good,” Aaron said, his hands on Roberts waist, thumbs rubbing gently. “I spent the morning with Alex, calmed her down a bit.”

“How is she?” Robert interrupted.

“She’s okay,” Aaron said. “She doesn’t normally get that emotional and upset… hormones.”

“Did you tell her that?”

“Are you kidding?” Aaron said. “I value my head on my shoulders.” Robert laughed lightly, pulling Aaron in for a gentle soft kiss.

“You were great with her this morning,” Robert said, their chests touching, looking into his eyes. “You want kids?”

“Wow, that took a turn,” Aaron said. “No.”


“Why would I?” Aaron said. “Give someone else a screwed up childhood? No thanks.”

“But…” Aaron looked at Robert as if seeing him in a whole new light.

“You want kids?”

“One day,” Robert said, wondering if he was scaring him off. Doesn’t everyone? That at least he kept to himself. “Is that…”

“I just…” Aaron shook his head. “Why would you want a kid?”
“Because… one day, I’d want a family who wasn’t such a complete mess like mine.” Robert cleared his throat. “I’d like to have a kid who didn’t hate his parents the way I did.”

“All kids do,” Aaron said lowly.

“Yeah,” Robert said. “My father… he was a good man, relatively speaking but he didn’t like me. He didn’t want me, he wanted… my adoptive brother. I was never good enough, Aaron. And I’d love to make sure a kid never felt like that.”

“Rob…” Aaron said, his entire demeanour changing.

“My dad found me,” Robert continued. “Kissing a guy when I was fifteen. It didn’t go over well. He was a farmer, a mans man. And his son did not act like that, a fact I was reminded of with his fists.” His voice wavered and he hated himself for not even being able to be strong enough to say it.

“Robert, why’ve you never said anything?” Aaron asked quietly.

“Because it took me a long time to come to terms with being bisexual, Aaron. It took a lot of years, a lot of screwing around with people I shouldn’t, far away from home to be okay with being this way.”

“Robert, there’s nothing wrong with being bi,” Aaron said.

“I know,” Robert said. “But when I was fifteen and I didn’t know how to even name what I was feeling, it wasn’t okay.” Aaron moved close and wrapped himself around Robert, tucking his head against Robert’s neck.

“I love you,” Aaron said. “You because you’re you. And I’m sorry for what your dad did.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Robert said, taking comfort from Aaron anyway. “It’s not a patch on your dad. So it doesn’t matter.”

“It does,” Aaron said quietly. He kissed Robert gently. “Do you want food?”

“Yes,” Robert said decisively. “Food would be good.”

“You pick where,” Aaron said. “My treat.”

They went out for Thai food, which Robert discovered Aaron hated. “You could have said,” Robert pointed out, clearing both his own and Aaron’s too. Couldn’t go to waste, could it?

“I said you could pick,” Aaron reminded. “Plus dessert can’t be too bad, right?” Both of them were distantly aware of other customers taking pictures on their phones of the pair of them. Aaron was too used to it to give it much consideration, Robert didn’t want to think of what the press would make of them having dinner together. Just take one night off from the circus, let them print whatever the hell they wanted.

“I love you,” Robert said. “Thanks. I needed this after the day I’ve had.”

“How bad is it really going to get for you at work?” Aaron asked seriously.

“How about we don’t think about that and head back home for dessert instead?”

Aaron smiled at him. “I like the sound of that.”
Three weeks later.

“Right, you better have a bloody good reason for making a pregnant woman climb four flights of stairs.” Alex sighed exaggeratedly.

“Not my fault the lift’s broken,” Aaron said. “And anyway, I wanted your opinion.”

“On what?” Alex said, looking around the empty room.

“I’ve just bought this,” Aaron said, motioning the flat. “I could probably still get out of it, but I wanted you to see it.”

“I thought you didn’t do the centre of London,” Alex said, looking over the quite impressive view of the city. “You said it’s too busy, too claustrophobic, too…”

“But Robert works here,” Aaron said, cutting her off.

“Oh,” Alex said with a smile. “I see where this is going.”

“I hate being without him,” Aaron said. “I wondered if maybe he’d want to move in with me here. Do you think that’s crazy?”

“No, I don’t think that’s crazy,” Alex said with a small smile. “It’s a commitment though, he might not say yes.”

“Why?” Aaron asked, suddenly feeling fear.

“Because… don’t get mad,” Alex said. “But if your relationship goes wrong, you can just cut your losses, buy a new place and move on. You’ve got the money to do it. What will Robert be left with if it all goes wrong and he’s lost his home on top of everything else?”

“You sound like you’ve given it a lot of thought,” Aaron said.

“It came up with Freddie,” she said. “He didn’t like the thought of being a “kept man” and… a lot more unpleasant things I’m not going to repeat.”

“Oh Alex…”

“It’s fine,” she said, though it wasn’t. “Just… if he says no, it’s probably not because he doesn’t love you.”

“Great,” Aaron said sarcastically. “I needed you to give my confidence a boost.”

“So, what’re you going to do?” Alex asked, perching on the edge of an upturned box.

“I’ll ask him anyway,” Aaron said, looking out of the window.

“I meant about your solo offer,” Alex said. Aaron’s gaze snapped to her in surprise. “What, you think I didn’t know that?”

“Yes,” Aaron said honestly. “Yes, I did.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”
“Because I haven’t decided what I’m going to do,” Aaron said. “No need worrying you two if there’s nothing to worry about. And I’d hate to lose my friends over this.”

“You’re not going to lose us,” Alex said, then she patted her stomach. “Needs his uncle Aaron doesn’t he?”

“His?”

“His,” Alex confirmed with a smile. “Ask Rob. See what he says. Just don’t fly off the handle, okay?”

“Thanks,” Aaron said sincerely. "And I'm thinking about it, nothing’s been decided."

"How long've you been keeping them waiting?"

"A while," Aaron said with a slight smile.
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

This took a lot longer to write than I anticipated and I'm not that happy with how it turned out. But anyway, here it is. Enjoy!

Robert looked over the city in the hollow flat, their voices echoing slightly. “Why’ve you brought me here?” Robert asked curiously.

“What do you think?” Aaron asked, ignoring that.

“It’s a flat,” Robert said blankly. “You renting it?”

“Not exactly,” Aaron said, biting his bottom lip. “Look, I’m no good at doing stuff like this. I bought this place for us.” Robert looked at him, eyes going fractionally wider but otherwise having no visible reaction. “I wondered if you wanted to move in with me. Live here together and... just say something.”

“Aaron, I can’t afford this,” Robert said. “It’s a penthouse.”

“I liked the view,” Aaron quipped. “Don’t worry about the money.” Robert sighed. “I want us to live together, the money’s irrelevant.”

“I know that it is for you,” Robert said honestly. “But...” he looked around the flat. “It’s serious, this.”

“I know,” Aaron said, smiling slowly. “I’m serious about you. I don’t like skipping between my place and yours, I want somewhere that’s ours. And you can furnish the place if you want, make it more yours if that would make you feel better.”

“Can I think about it?” Aaron was disappointed, Robert could tell. But this wasn’t a decision to make lightly, if he did he’d end up regretting it.

In the end, all it took was a call from Aaron’s management. They wanted some of his lyrics, and they were at his house, an hour outside the city. So it took Aaron half a day to go there, get the sheets of paper and return to Robert’s flat in London. A whole lot of wasted time that Robert would really have liked to spend with his boyfriend.

So that night in bed, Robert moved on top of Aaron, pressing their bodies so close. “Yes,” Robert said firmly.

“Yes what?” Aaron asked with a raised eyebrow. “More of...” he rolled his hips and Robert whined in his throat at the sensation. “That?”
“Yeah, I’m not one to complain, but that wasn’t what I meant,” Robert said breathlessly. Aaron grinned at him, doing it again and Robert’s head dropped, forehead resting on Aaron’s collarbone, breath coming in damp gasps against Aaron’s skin.

“I don’t want you to say yes because the sex is so good,” Aaron said, his hand wandering southwards, making Robert moan again. “Even though it is really good.”

“If we’re having a serious conversation,” Robert said, the rest cut off in a moan. Aaron chuckled, then pushed Robert off him.

“I’ll be good, I’ll keep my hands to myself,” Aaron said with a grin that took years off him. Robert took in two deep steadying breaths, calming his body down.

“I’m saying yes because I mean it,” Robert said, looking at him. “Because us going to and from each others places is a waste of time. Because I’m not stupid, I know you’re writing the next album and I know your… time off won’t last forever. I don’t want to waste the time, Aaron.”

“Good,” Aaron said softly, gently, eyes warm. “I don’t either. But, if the money’s going to be an issue…”

“I can’t promise I’m always going to be charming about it,” Robert said. “But it's stupid to have it sat in a bank account when it could solve our immediate problem. Of course, this is me rambling about how you should spend your own money and…” Aaron shut him up, his palm going over his lips.

“I want to live with you,” Aaron said. “And I’ve never ever wanted to do that before with anyone. So this means a lot to me, yeah not from the financial point of view, but… it means a lot.”

“And I want to live with you,” Robert said, smiling at him. “Come here.” They wrapped themselves in each others arms gently.

Aaron felt something nagging at the back of his mind and decided to come clean. “I made a call the other day.”

“I know,” Robert said.

“How?”

“You relaxed more,” Robert settled on. “For what it’s worth, I think it’s the right choice.”

“I haven’t even told you what decision I made,” Aaron said, looking at him.

“No, but Alex called me in tears, saying she isn’t worth you hanging around for, just because her stomach’s getting bigger by the day and… yeah, I got the picture. Why didn’t you take it?”

“I could do the solo stuff,” Aaron said. “And a part of me really wanted to take it. Especially with the fifty million pay day.”

“I’m sorry, fifty million?” Robert asked faintly. “As in 5-0 million?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said.

“I’ve changed my mind, you absolutely take it,” Robert said which made both of them laugh easily.

“It wasn’t dependent on success either,” Aaron said. “It was two years, but I started thinking… it wouldn’t be as much fun without the other two. And I need them for the press and the publicity and the media circus that goes along with being who I am. I love to sing, I love to write. But I don’t have
that part down. The part that I need to show my best side off to everyone else who scrutinise every move I make. I don’t have that in me.”

“I know the media attention makes you uncomfortable,” Robert said. “Which is why I think it’s the right decision. Or I did, before you added the number behind that choice.” Aaron rolled his eyes.

“I’ll make you forget that amount of money,” Aaron said, smiling as he pulled Robert close again.

“You think a lot of yourself,” Robert teased.

”Yeah, I do.”

Robert woke slightly later than usual, his body sore and tender in the most wonderful way. He and Aaron had certainly celebrated about their decision to move in together until the early hours, still making Robert smile. Until the hammering on his front door. Robert grabbed his phone, because if it was a photographer, he was going to call the police. They’d only tried once, when Aaron was away, and Robert (and more particularly the newspapers) lawyers made it perfectly clear his flat was off limits. They hadn’t tried again, but now that Aaron was obviously home, maybe they thought they could.

As it turned out, it was an annoyance, but one in the form of his sister, not the press. He didn’t know which option was better, Vic smiling as she came in.

“You’re not dressed?” she asked, looking at him shirtless.

“Wasn’t expecting company,” Robert said, his eyes slipping to the bedroom door. “I actually…”

“Oh, is he here?” Vic asked enthusiastically.

“Tell me, would you be this interested in him if he were anyone else? Or is it because he’s Aaron Livesy?”

“It’s because I’ve not seen my brother happy in my entire life,” Vic said. “And… yeah, the fact he could introduce me to Adam Barton might be a factor.” Robert rolled his eyes. “I do want to see you happy,” she added.

“Hey, where’s the coffee?” Aaron said, coming into the kitchen. “Shit!”

“Ah!” Vic squeaked, turning to face the wall. Aaron unfortunately hadn’t bothered to put any clothes on and Vic was now blushing profusely as Aaron dashed back into the bedroom. “Okay, not the visual I wanted.”

“Hey, other people would kill for that visual,” Robert teased.

“Look, can we… reconvene when everyone’s dressed?” Vic asked, still deep read. “There’s a café across the street, I’ll be… having breakfast…” she left, slamming the door and Robert bit his bottom lip to stop from laughing.
Chapter 29

Keeping track of events / how much time has passed within a story isn't my strong suit, so just go with that one when it comes up! Anyway, enjoy this chapter, it's quite a long one for me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I am so embarrassed,” Aaron hissed, zipping up his jeans quickly.

“Don’t be.”

“Robert!” Aaron shouted. “She saw everything!”

“Hey, hey,” Robert said, his arms around Aaron’s waist. “Calm down. It doesn’t matter.”

Aaron snorted. “Maybe not to you.”

“Maybe she shouldn’t drop in unannounced,” Robert said. “She won’t do it again, that’s for sure.” Aaron sighed again, closing his eyes as Robert passed him his T shirt. “Come on.”

“I can’t have breakfast with her!!” Aaron said, eyes wide.

“What, so you’re never going to talk to my sister again?”

“That doesn’t seem like it’s feasible,” Aaron said, like he was considering the possibility.

“We’re all adults, she’ll get over the shock,” Robert added sarcastically. Aaron nodded, grabbing his wallet and phone before they went downstairs.

They found Vic on a corner table, a coffee on the table and a croissant being torn to pieces. She smiled at Robert, then her eyes slid to Aaron, who was so uncomfortable every pore was screaming it.

“Hi,” Vic said, smiling brightly at him. “I’ll be sure to call ahead next time,” she added with a raised eyebrow.

“That’d be great,” Robert said fervently as Aaron laughed under his breath nervously.

“That’s not normally how I make a good impression,” Aaron said. Vic shrugged, but it was good natured.

“What can I get you?” the waitress asked coming over. They quickly ordered and some of the tension eased around the table, though Vic’s eyes kept flicking back to Aaron more often than they would had Aaron not been famous. If Aaron was aware of it, he wasn’t saying anything. They were attracting a fair bit of attention and Aaron stopped the conversation to call his security guard. Just in case a fan got overly friendly, it was good to have him nearby. That seemed to stop Vic mid flow,
and she was looking at least a little bit star struck.

“She’s not normally this lost for words,” Robert said.

“Not everyone’s like you when they meet me for the first time,” Aaron said, and there’s no mistaking the warmth in his voice. Robert’s eyes glowed.

“So, are you ever going to introduce me to Adam?” Vic asked Aaron.

“You’re not going to vaguely threaten me to make sure I look after your brother?” Aaron asked.

“No,” she said. “He’s happy, that’s all I need to know.” Aaron and Robert caught each other’s eyes for a moment before Aaron turned to Vic.

“Adam?” she suggested eagerly.

“Depends,” Aaron said. “You’re not going to go all crazy on him are you?”

“No, of course not,” she said, wide eyed. Aaron questioned the wisdom of introducing them, but he also knew that Vic was all the family Robert really had, and annoying her wasn’t really a good long term plan. Especially as he’d already made a fantastic start by wandering into Robert’s kitchen naked.

“I’ll call him,” Aaron said. “You going to be in London tonight?” Vic nodded as Aaron dialled.

“Do you know what time it is?” Adam groaned as he answered the phone.

“Yeah, I know,” Aaron said quickly. “Sorry. Listen, want to do me a favour?”

“What?”

“I’m going to set you up with someone?” Aaron suggested, well aware Robert and Vic were listening intently.

“Aaron…” Adam moaned. “Do you have to? I mean… what’s she look like?”

“I, er…” Aaron said, aware people were listening in. “It’s Rob’s sister.”

“Oh, Aaron…”

“Come on mate, please. I need brownie points.”

“You do?” Adam asked. “If a multi millionaire rock star isn’t good enough for her brother, who is?”

“Adam,” Aaron said under his breath.

“She’s not crazy, right?”

“No, course not.”

“That didn’t sound that convincing.”

“Adam…”

“I’m going out to Jays tonight,” Adam said, a club they went to occasionally. “Couldn’t be too mad if she was there at the same time.”
“Thanks,” Aaron said.

“Don’t say I never do anything for you,” Adam said. “Now can I sleep?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh, I emailed you the new music,” Adam added. “Tell me if you like it. At a reasonable hour.” The line went dead and Aaron smiled at Vic.

“Job done.”

She squealed, drawing if possible, even more attention to their table. “Thanks. Tell me when I have to buy a dress for your wedding!” There was a massively awkward silence between the three of them and Vic looked embarrassed. “Er… put my foot in it?” she said.

“Kind of,” Robert said. “So go, and leave me and Aaron in peace.”

“Your sisters in town and you’re kicking me out to spend time with him?” Vic asked.

“I’ve had you for twenty years,” Robert said. “Yeah.” Vic rolled her eyes dramatically but she took her cue and left. “Please ignore my overly enthusiastic, doesn’t know when to shut her mouth sister,” Robert begged.

“It’s nice to know you have someone who cares,” Aaron said. “Even if she’s overly interested in my friend.”

“Aaron…” Robert started.

“Look,” Aaron started. “You don’t have any parents, she matters to you. Though one thing I would ask is she doesn’t walk in on me naked again.”

“Yeah?” Robert asked amused.

“Only one Sugden gets that.”

“Good job too,” Robert said. Aaron closed the gap and kissed him across the table, both of them smiling.

Of course, photos of that kiss ended up over most of social media and the press the next day. Seeing Aaron Livesy being affectionate in public hadn’t become the norm. Yet, anyway. It surprised Robert how little it actually bothered him.

“Robert, a word?” Richard said, coming into his office.

“Yes,” Robert said, closing his emails and looking at his boss who’d closed the door. “What’s the problem?”

“Every other newspaper is speculating on Messenger having a split and Aaron Livesy going solo.”

“Yeah, I know they are,” Robert said. “Keep going…”

“Why haven’t you?” Richard asked.
“I thought editorial decisions were down to me,” Robert said lightly.

“They are, but… everyone’s talking about it, Robert. It would be remiss of me not to ask you why you’re holding back. If it’s because of your personal relationship, I hear you’re moving in with him.”

“Yes I am,” Robert said. “But no, that’s not the reason I’m not reporting on it. I’m not reporting on it because it isn’t true.”

“And you know that?”

“Yes, Richard. I know that. I know Aaron was offered it and he turned it down, and I know why. So I’m not printing speculation that will lead to lawsuits like the one the Star is currently fighting.

“They’re suing?”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “Though I think that’s more to do with the fact they called Alex a slag because she doesn’t know who the father of her baby is, rather than Aaron’s non existent solo career. I’m not printing things I know are lies. Aaron and Adam are working on their next album. They’ve been off for a few months, and probably will be for a few more. Their management isn’t pushing them on the time frame, they know they’re lucky to still have Aaron there. That is what’s going on.”

“Do you know who the father of Alex’s baby is?”

“I do,” Robert said. “But my focus is on reviewing albums and critiquing tours, not on publishing gossip in the “showbiz” section.” Richard sighed. “Come on, when Messenger are ready to release an exclusive interview for their forth album, who do you think they’re going to pick? Or when Alex sells baby pictures. If she wants to,” he added fairly. “Everyone else is gossiping about them, don’t make me add to it.”

“Okay,” Richard said. “If you’re wrong…”

“I’m not wrong,” Robert said surely. “I’m good at my job, let me do it.” Richard nodded and left him alone.

Robert did something rather embarrassing. He left his office, went home and realised that his home was completely empty. Because today was the day he’d given back the keys and he no longer lived there. Aaron had been putting the finishing touches to their new place. So he turned around and got on the tube, feeling like only a minor idiot as no one was there to see the fact he’d forgotten where he lived.

On the journey he thought about living with Aaron. It rubbed him up the wrong way that Aaron was paying for everything. He understood why, he knew Aaron had more money from his career than he could ever spend, and buying a pent house suite for them both barely made a dent in his savings. But still he hoped it wouldn’t be thrown back in arguments. He wasn’t sure his pride could take that, Aaron paying for everything and then throwing it at him when things get tough. Robert didn’t think Aaron would. For a millionaire he was one of the most un-materialistic people he’d ever met. And if Robert seriously thought it would become an issue, he’d never have agreed to it in the first place.

Aaron didn’t argue over a fiver here or there. He didn’t even consider money the way Robert would, making sure everything was exactly in place before investing, or for Robert, more likely paying off his student loans. Robert wasn’t sure if he could do what Aaron was, paying for their life together so easily, so selflessly.

His thoughts were still running away from him when he got off the tube and headed up to his new
house. He could hear Aaron before he went through the door, playing the guitar and this time singing as well. Robert didn’t open the door, just stayed outside it, listening for a minute or two. Aaron’s voice was beautiful. Robert could tell it was a new song, because Aaron stopped the guitar, cursed, and tried again from the beginning.

“Hey,” Robert said, coming into the flat. Everything perfect, shiny and new and theirs. Aaron was sat on the sofa, adjusting the guitar. “Okay?”

“No,” Aaron said with a sigh, putting it down. “It needs restringing.” Aaron grabbed his guitar case and started to remove the strings.

“You do that yourself?” Robert asked in surprise.

“Yeah. Why wouldn’t I?”

“I assumed you’d… I don’t know, send it to a specialist. You’re in one of the most sought after bands in Europe. If not the world. I thought you’d treat your guitar like gold dust.” Aaron smiled at him.

“Look over there.” Robert did, following where Aaron pointed. An old battered guitar was hanging on the wall, in pride of place. “That’s my first guitar. Does it look like a specialist kept making sure it was working properly?”

“No,” Robert said. It didn’t. It was scratched to high heaven, had gouges in the wood. It looked completely battered and well loved.

“Plus, I wouldn’t trust anyone to look after my baby,” Aaron said. “I don’t care how reverently they’d treat it. How was work?” Robert kissed him gently.

“It was fine,” Robert said. “Missed you.” Aaron put the guitar down.

“I’ve actually got a surprise for you.” Aaron looked nervous, and it was that rather than anything else that piqued his interest.

“Oh?”

“Tell me if you hate it.” Aaron said, walking through to a room at the back of the flat. They had been using it for storage, gathering things from Robert’s flat and Aaron’s house. Aaron wasn’t going to sell his place, nice to have somewhere outside the city for them both to get away, but most of his things were here. This morning the room had been filled with boxes. Now it was filled with bookshelves, the shelves filled with books that had been in his flat. There was a desk with his laptop and printer on it, and it was a small hidey hole from the world.

“This is amazing,” Robert said. His books were out of order, but Aaron wouldn’t know how he organised them. But just the thought was incredible. So sweet of Aaron to do this for him. “Thank you.”

“I know you’re worried about this being my place rather than ours, and I want… I wanted to do something for you to know it’s ours. Most of your books were in boxes, your flat was so small, I thought…”

“It’s perfect,” Robert said, putting his hands on Aaron’s hips to stop him rambling. “Seriously, it’s perfect.”

“Yeah?” Aaron asked nervously. How could Aaron’s self esteem sometimes still waver? He was a
rock star, and Robert had never given Aaron a reason to doubt himself. Maybe it was just how he naturally was.

“It’s wonderful,” Robert said. “I do have a gift for you actually.”

“Robert, no,” Aaron said. “This was for you, you don’t have to reciprocate.”

“It was an anniversary gift, but once I got it, I knew I was never going to be able to wait that long,” Robert said.

“It’s not our anniversary for ages yet.”

“Three months,” Robert said. “And that’s not long when you’re buying for the man who has everything. We met, we had about a month, six weeks before you went off on a four month tour early in the year.”

“Work,” Aaron reminded him.

“For work,” Robert agreed. “You’ve been home for three months and two weeks…”

“You’ve been keeping count?” Aaron asked softly.

“Of course I have,” Robert said, keeping his hands on Aaron’s waist. “Good job one of us is, because you clearly have a shit memory.” Aaron laughed. “Plus Alex’s growing belly is a huge sign that times passing.”

“Keep it for our anniversary,” Aaron said surely. “Whatever it is.”

“I can’t,” Robert said. “You’re so hard to buy for, and Alex said it was right. I don’t know what makes it right and…”

“You’re nervous,” Aaron realised.

“Yeah,” Robert said. “But you’ve done this for me. So I want to give you something.”

“Go on then,” Aaron said, kissing him very softly. “Show me what you’ve got.”

“It’s in the bedroom,” Robert said. “And get your mind out of the gutter,” he added to the silence.

“I said nothing!” Aaron quipped, laughing quietly as they went through to the bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

That will be it until Monday. I have a very busy weekend. Thank you for reading so far!
Chapter Notes

I have not forgotten Robert's gift to Aaron, but couldn't make it work within this chapter. It will come up, don't worry! I wanted to get something written for you, probably no more until Tuesday at the earliest now. Very busy weekend. Thank you and enjoy!!

Robert was working from home when it happened. It wasn’t that late, about nine in the evening, but he had a deadline he wanted to make and Aaron was out for the night so he was making the most of his free time, getting as many articles locked for the paper as possible. That was until he started getting news alerts on his phone and emails appearing in his inbox.

“Breaking news, Aaron Livesy, lead singer of Messenger has been arrested on suspicion of GBH.”

“What the…” Robert said, looking at the words in complete disbelief. He would have completely dismissed it, except for the fact he kept getting similar stories from different sources, plus from his work. Shaking himself out of his stupor, he called Aaron. It went straight through to answer phone three times. Then he couldn’t ignore it any longer, because pictures on twitter were slowly coming through. Aaron with police. Aaron in handcuffs. Aaron being led to a police car from the club he’d been in with Adam. “Jesus.” His phone rang and Robert answered it distractedly.

“Rob?”

“Yeah,” he said heavily, hearing Lucy’s voice.

“You’ve seen it then, you know?” she asked.

“Yes,” Robert said. “What the hell was he thinking?”

“This is front page news, Rob, we can’t ignore it, so…”

“You do the write up,” Robert said, making a decision. “Let me read the article before it goes to press.”

“Robert…”

“Please,” he said. “This is a favour. I’d write it, but I’m too close to be objective, I know that.”

“Fine, but we have to publish…”

“I know,” Robert said, disconnecting the call to keep his phone free. If Aaron were able to call him, he didn’t want the line to be engaged. Meanwhile, Robert was panicking. What had the stupid man done that for? He must have been provoked. Of course he was, there was no way Aaron would lash out like that if no one had provoked him. He had too much to lose, his reputation, his career, everything. Parents weren’t going to let their kids buy his albums if he’d been convicted of a violent offence were they? Reputation meant everything in the music business, Robert knew that. There were a few people who could get away with it, but… This could affect the rest of Aaron’s career. If he got let off with a caution, he might get away with it. Professionally anyway.
Robert’s phone rang, but he was disappointed in the caller. Chas. He answered it. “I’m working on it.”

“Is it true?” Chas asked and she sounded like she’d been crying.

“Aaron’s not answering his phone and I’m getting reports from various sources, so yes, I’d guess it’s true.”

“God, what…”

“I’m getting to the bottom of it,” Robert said. “Don’t call again.”

“Robert!”

“I want to keep the phone free in case Aaron calls,” Robert explained. “I’ll let you know when I know anything.”

“Thanks,” she said with a sniff, hanging up. Robert tried to keep calm. He located the area Aaron had been arrested in and called the local station there. As soon as he said the words “Aaron Livesy” they clammed up. Wouldn’t share any more information, assuming he was a nosey reporter. Which he was, but this capacity was entirely personal. But they had confirmed he was there, so Robert knew he had to give the green light for the cover piece Lucy was currently writing. Unfortunately, because she was right. If they could get the new layout changed by 10:30, or 11 at the latest, it would be front page news. And Robert wasn’t naïve, Richard would be pushing for the copy, hard, as would every other newspaper in the country.

Robert got the email through and he scanned it quickly. It wasn’t out rightly offensive, and was just at the level he could live with, so he sent Lucy a confirmation with heartfelt thanks. He did appreciate the measured tone of it, and he nodded to himself. Then waited.

Alex arrived just before midnight, crying in anger. She hadn’t been with them, resting because of the baby who she kept moaning was pushing on her ribs. Alex cried about how this was unfair and Aaron wasn’t a thug and how could he be treated like this? Robert managed to get out of her that the band kept a lawyer on retainer for things like this, so Aaron would be well taken care of, but not much else of use. That was good, he’d be able to afford a top rate lawyer, solicitor, whatever he needed. That didn’t stop Robert from wanting to know what had happened, as Alex decided to kip on the sofa, bump and all.

At two in the morning, Robert realised they were probably keeping him overnight. And that no one had heard from Adam either. According to ever reliable twitter, he’d been brought in for questioning over the “incident.” Robert gave up, and went to have some sleep. If he could get it.

He couldn’t, and by six in the morning he gave up, had a look at the first print run of The Standard and sighed when compared to all the others, going for the more “sensational” story. Thug. Bully. Role model letting down his fans. It was all in there. And that didn’t even touch the melt down that social media had turned into. Still Robert couldn’t get through to the police station. He was trying not
to slip into a full scale panic and looking at the clock, he decided to go down there. Maybe his presence in person would wield more results. He left Alex a note and a spare set of keys, knowing she’d understand. It took Robert a moment to consider where this trust came from, but it was most definitely there.

A partial video was released while sitting in the waiting room of the police station. It was wobbly, obviously taken on a phone and was just a blurred visual of Aaron punching a guy who was already laid out on the floor of a club. It made Aaron’s position look even worse if possible. Robert’s heart sank even lower.

It was eleven in the morning when Aaron came out, looking shaken and like a man on edge. He was almost bristling with nervous energy, and for the first time in his life it occurred to Robert that maybe he should be afraid of him. Only for half a second but the thought was there. Aaron’s eyes, dancing around the room settled on Robert and he stilled, body relaxing towards him. Robert could see the loosening of the tension, he knew Aaron so well.

“What happened?”

“Caution,” Aaron said. His eyes flicked to the door and Robert got the silent unspoken message. They’d talk about this, but at home, away from prying eyes. And for the first time in twelve hours or more, Robert could breathe deeply once again.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

I’m losing inspiration again (thank you ED) and unless we get something compelling updates might be a little slower from this point on. That said, thanks for sticking with this and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When they got home, having battled through the photographers downstairs, they found Alex had left, probably finding out online that Aaron had got away with only a caution. Robert threw his keys on the kitchen table and looked at Aaron, waiting for an explanation.

“I need a shower.”

“Excuse me?” Robert asked.

“I don’t like sleeping in prison cells,” Aaron said. “Just need to feel clean.”

“I’m seriously not going to get an explanation for this?” Robert asked in disbelief.

“It’s my life,” Aaron said heavily. “It’s my career to jeopardise, which I’m sure is where you were going next. It doesn’t effect you.”

“It doesn’t effect me?” Robert echoed in complete shock. “Are you crazy?” Aaron looked at the floor. “Of course it does. I live with you, I’m in love with you. I’m the guy waiting at home, calling the police station and updating twitter every two minutes for information! You stubborn idiot.”

Aaron’s lips twitched slightly as he looked up into Robert’s eyes for a second.

“Fine,” Aaron agreed. “I’ll talk but let me get clean first, okay?” Robert nodded, watching Aaron go and feeling the bone deep tiredness start to set in. It had been a long twenty four hours and technically he was supposed to be at work. He looked at his phone, deleted the missed calls and then checked his answer phone. There were three messages from Chas, who he called very briefly to tell her that Aaron was home and he wouldn’t be charged. Two from Richard, being weirdly understanding that he’d need the time for “personal reasons” and one from Alex letting him know he’d seen Aaron was home on the news. Otherwise, nothing and Robert switched his phone off.

By the time he’d done all that, Aaron emerged from the bathroom, dressed in a loose T shirt and jogging bottoms, looking very comfortable and much more himself. Plus he was damp from the shower which Robert shouldn’t be finding attractive right about now.

“How are you ready to talk?” Robert asked.

“I lost my temper,” Aaron said. “I shouldn’t have.”

“I guessed that much,” Robert said as they both sat down either side of the kitchen table. “You want to elaborate? You’re not needlessly violent, Aaron.”

“All right,” Aaron said. “This guy kissed me. I didn’t want it and I backed off. He ignored that and tried again. I shouted at him “are you deaf?” And when he tried to go in for the third time I lost it. I
shouldn’t have, I know that, but… God, it got to me so much and someone touching me I don’t want…” Aaron took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I know I shouldn’t have got as aggressive as I did.”

“I’ve seen the footage,” Robert said. “It really doesn’t look good.”

“I know.” Aaron shook his head. “I guess… there’s a little bit more to it. I was already on edge because… the guy I pay to keep an eye on Gordon… he gave me information that he’s in London.”

“He’s here?!” Robert asked in shock. “When did you find that out?”

"A few days ago," Aaron admitted.

“But… why didn’t you tell me?!”

“Because London’s a city of twelve million people, what will one in that mess matter?” Aaron cleared his throat uncomfortably. “And I thought I could handle it, I thought I was coping with it, and… clearly I wasn’t.”

“No,” Robert said, speaking gently though.

“It was just… someone touching me when I didn’t want it… I was already feeling strained and I snapped.”

“Is that why you got off with a caution?”

“Sort of,” Aaron said. “The guy knew he’d gone too far and he wanted to squirm out of it as soon as possible. And Adam was backing me up all the way, even when my lawyer said to keep my mouth shut. I was lucky the guy didn’t want to press charges.”

Robert sighed heavily. “How do you feel?”

“I shouldn’t have hit him,” Aaron said.

“Sod that,” Robert said. “How do you feel about your dad being here?”

“Don’t call him that,” Aaron said. “Call him Gordon, he’s not my… he lost that right.”

“Okay,” Robert said quietly. “Maybe you could…”

“I’m not reporting him,” Aaron said. “Stop suggesting it.” His voice didn’t carry any heat, and Robert let it drop.

“You can’t live with him in the same city,” Robert said, realising the truth of the words as he said them.

“I’ll be fine.” Robert reached across the table and squeezed his hand gently.

“No, you won’t,” Robert said calmly. “I don’t know how you cope with it.” Aaron sighed heavily.

“Just… I want to forget.”

“Get in bed,” Robert said. Aaron looked at him incredulously. “Get undressed, get in bed and trust me. Can you do that?”

“I’m not in the mood for sex, Robert.”
“I said nothing about sex,” Robert said. “Come on, let me help you.” Aaron nodded once, going into the bedroom.

Robert took his time, straddling Aaron’s thighs and leaning over Aaron’s beautiful back and slowly massaging him, hands slick with the oil he liked to use. He made sure to stroke every part of his body and Aaron felt like he was melting under Robert’s sure touch.

“This is a hidden talent of yours,” Aaron moaned.

“I’ve massaged you before,” Robert said fairly.

“Not like this,” Aaron said. “Not like you’re… taking your time over every inch of me.”

“Well, usually I’m in a rush to get to the sex,” Robert murmured, making Aaron chuckle, sounding lighter than he had in ages. Robert kissed Aaron’s cheek lightly before pushing his palms against the meat of his arse and Aaron let out a quiet whine.

“Okay?”

“Good. So good…” Aaron turned his head to the left, enjoying it as his eyes settled on the guitar by the door. He looked at it for far longer than he should do, Robert’s moving in gift to him. Robert had had no idea what made it the most wanted guitar on Aaron’s mental wish list, but he’d spoken to Alex who’d given him a nudge in the right direction. A nudge meaning a hell of a push. Aaron knew how expensive it was, and even though he could afford it, spending money on something he didn’t actually need after having just bought a rather expensive flat felt a little over indulgent. But he was pleased and happy Robert had thought of him enough to do that for him. Aaron hadn’t been able to wait and he’d played it for at least an hour when he’d been given it as Robert had been resorting his library.

“Ah!” Aaron gasped.

“Sorry, painful?” Robert asked, gentling his touch just above Aaron’s left hip.

“Yeah, a little,” Aaron said. Robert lightened his touch and Aaron sank into it beautifully. This man cared so much about him, everything he did just radiated it. He could have lost his job, he could lose everything and he was still here, still caring for him despite it all. Aaron rolled over, with a little bit of difficulty because Robert was straddling his legs still. Though with a bit of shifting, he managed it.

“Want me to do your chest next?” Robert asked quietly. “You look relaxed,” he added, seeing Aaron’s eyes soft, his face young and trouble free for once.

“I am,” Aaron said. “I love you.” Robert smiled sweetly and kissed him, lightly on the jaw.

“I can,” Robert said reaching for the oil he liked to use on Aaron. “I like feeling you up,” he added cheekily. Aaron grabbed his wrists to stop him, overwhelmed with how much he was feeling, like he couldn’t hold it in, like it just had to come out. Aaron spoke without even remembering the words coming to his lips.

“Marry me.”
Chapter End Notes

How did that happen? Wasn't planned...
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

I am seriously struggling at the moment and tonights episode just made it even worse, so I'm calling it a day.

But I had worked on most of this chapter before tonights episode aired and had me in floods of tears for two straight hours, so I felt it fair to my lovely readers to continue and post this. Hope you enjoy. Don't know when or even if there will be more, but I didn't want to leave you on such a nasty cliff hanger.

The pause between them seemed like the world had stopped breathing. Robert’s eyes had gone wide in shock and Aaron was suddenly starting to realise the implications of what he’d said. Implications he most definitely hadn’t thought all the way through, caught in the moment.

“I er…” Aaron said, suddenly feeling incredibly vulnerable, pushing Robert off him. “Look, could you do me a huge favour and just…”

“What, forget it?” Robert asked faintly.

“Would you?” Aaron said.

“That’s… kind of a big thing to forget,” Robert said, sitting on the edge of the bed while Aaron started fidgeting uncomfortably, throwing on whatever clothes he could reach. “Aaron. Please God, don’t walk away from me!” Robert snapped. Aaron turned and looked at him.

“I didn’t plan to say that,” Aaron said. “It slipped out, it was just… how I felt at the time.”

“All of five minutes ago?” Robert asked. He felt a little shell shocked, couldn’t quite believe what was happening here. He ran a hand through his hair in agitation. “Were you serious?”

“Kind of,” Aaron said, looking anywhere but at him. The floor, the bed. Robert closed the gap between them and put both his palms on Aaron’s face, making him look at him directly in the eyes. Robert saw the moment that Aaron stopped slipping into an absolute free fall panic, and Robert dropped his hands, both men still looking at each other. Aaron cleared his throat. “Am I serious that I’ve never felt this way about anyone?” Aaron said. “Yes. Do I… am I able to picture my future with anyone else? No. For a long time I wasn’t able to picture any kind of future at all. So maybe in that way I meant it. But it was a spur of the moment thing and I don’t want you to say anything else.” Aaron shrugged.

“Aaron, you can’t just drop those words and…”

“Yes, I can,” Aaron said, grabbing his phone. “Shall I call out for takeaway? What do you fancy? Oh, no, damn. There’s still some photographers outside. Well maybe a delivery guy would be able to push through if we pay extra, you think?”

“Aaron, I love you,” Robert said surely. “So can you for five seconds please stop looking for an
emergency exit?” Aaron breathed in deeply and nodded once. “There is nothing you could say except the fact that you no longer love me and you’re leaving me, that would drive me away. You didn’t let me answer you.”

“I don’t want to hear it,” Aaron said. “I jumped the gun. I seriously jumped the gun, just... do you want dinner?”

“Yeah,” Robert said lightly, deciding to let it drop. “That’d be good.”

“I er...” Aaron was about to call for some food when he shook his head. “Oh God. Alex needs me.”

“Is she all right?”

“She’s had her baby,” Aaron said already grabbing his shoes.

“But... no,” Robert said simply. “What is she, seven months gone? No.”

“Which is why we need to get to the hospital,” Aaron said. “Or I do, I suppose you don’t have to come but...”

“Hey. I’m coming,” Robert said surely. “We’re together right?”

Aaron nodded, grateful that that was Robert’s answer. “She’ll be alright.”

“Alex is one of the toughest people I’ve ever met,” Aaron said, calling a taxi. “I know damn well she’ll be fine, she’s not the one I’m worried about.” Robert pulled Aaron in for a soft reassuring kiss, knowing it was the baby he was concerned about.

“Lets go,” Robert said.

It was a very exclusive hospital, the entrance looked more like a five star hotel than anywhere that held doctors and tiny premature babies. Once they’d got through reception, it did start to look a little bit more like a hospital, even though they had someone leading them to Alex’s room. They both looked through the window to the room, seeing Alex staring at an incubator with single minded determination. There was a doctor or nurse or medical someone keeping an eye on the baby all the time, probably part of the service you pay for in a place like this.

“I’ll um... stay outside,” Robert said uncomfortably, looking at the scene in front of them. “She’s your family, she’s not mine.” Not yet, the little nagging voice at the back of Roberts head said. Aaron nodded once and went in. Robert watched from the window, Alex’s whole face lighting up, as she went and hugged her friend. Just for a few moments before the tears started coming, wiping her face tiredly. She didn’t look good, more worried and exhausted than anything physical, Robert was guessing. He sat down on a waiting chair and sighed. Alex had seemed fine yesterday. He’d even felt the baby kick when she’d hugged him, over Aaron being arrested. Surely there couldn’t be too much wrong if he’d felt the baby kick? Based on zero experience of pregnancy and no medical knowledge, Robert thought bitterly.

“Hey,” Aaron said, smiling slightly. Alex got up and hugged him tightly. “How are you?”

“I’m the least of my concerns right now,” she said, shaking her head.
“How’s your boy?” Aaron asked, nodding at the incubator and the silent nurse checking on him.

“I don’t have a boy,” Alex said, Aaron looked at her in fear. “They misread the ultrasound,” she said. “She’s a girl.”

“Oh,” Aaron said. “Damn, I was looking forward to all the boys outnumbering you.” Alex smiled weakly. They both looked over to the incubator. “How is she?”

“Too early.”

“Alex…”

“She came far too early,” she said, shaking her head. “She…I was worried about you yesterday. I thought, I was having just a bit of pain and I… thought I was worried. I didn’t think I was in labour until much later. I ignored it, I thought it was fine. So if she’s damaged, if she suffers for the rest of her life…”

“She doesn’t look too bad,” Aaron said fairly. “To my incredibly untrained eyes, obviously.”

“But it would be my fault,” Alex pushed.

“I’m not sure how it’s your fault you went into early labour,” Aaron said.

“God, I haven’t even asked how you are since being arrested,” Alex said, changing the subject to one that wouldn't make her tear up.

“Me spending a night in the cells isn’t important,” Aaron said. “I’ll live. Now, how is she?”

“They want to keep her in the isolate until she reaches five pounds,” Alex said with a sniff. “She’s small, tiny. And gorgeous and perfect,” she said warmly.

“Does she…”

“What, have anything seriously wrong with her?” Alex asked. “They think she’s all right. Just impatient to be here.”

“The name Joe’s out then?” Aaron guessed, knowing that was the favourite for her son.

“I don’t know,” Alex said fairly. “I kind of like Josephine for a girl.”

“Does everyone like to name girls in your family after boys names?” Aaron teased lightly. Alex smiled, a genuine smile and Aaron put an arm around her shoulders as they sat on the edge of her bed.

“How’s Rob?”

“Outside, actually,” Aaron said. “Came with me, but he didn’t want to get in the way.”

“He can come in,” Alex said. “She’s not quite at deaths door.”

“I may have done something stupid,” Aaron said, looking at the baby. “I might have accidentally proposed.”

“What!” Alex shrieked. “Wh… how? Just…”

“I didn’t mean to, it slipped out,” Aaron said, shaking his head.
“Were you in the middle of sex?”

“No!”

“Then there’s no excuse, is there?” she said. Aaron looked at her in disbelief before laughing slightly.

“I just thought… I can’t really imagine my life without him in it and it… came out.” Aaron sighed. “I didn’t mean to say it.”

“What did he say?” Alex asked.

“Nothing, I took it back as soon as I could,” Aaron said. “I’m not that crazy, we’ve only just moved in together. It’s way too soon and…”

“Aaron, you’re an idiot sometimes, you know that?” Aaron just looked at her in confusion.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

It wasn't the plan to update or even write more of this this soon, but I've been in bed all afternoon feeling rottenly ill with just a laptop for company, so this happened. And it's also taken a little bit of a turn. Thank you all for the encouragement. (Canon's shit, lets live in AU fanfics.)

Alex sighed, flicking through her phone for baby name suggestions. Adam had made a joke about Josephine being shortened to Joey and Alex hated that, so she was still looking.

“I guess tomorrow’s recording sessions off?” she said quietly to Aaron.

“Don’t worry about that,” Aaron said dismissively.

“You could replace me,” Alex said levelly.

“Shut up.”

“You could,” Alex repeated. “I don’t have the talent, not really. I’ve got… a good voice and a pretty face, which is what your management needed when they were trying to get the band to hit the big time. There are a thousand girls out there who can sing.”

“Yeah, and none are you,” Aaron said.

“I’m going to be chained to this hospital for at least a month,” Alex said. “Until she gains enough weight to be discharged. We’d planned to be well into recording the next album by the time she got here.”

“I know,” Aaron said. “Management will push it back, it’s fine.”

“But you could replace me,” Alex said, looking at the incubator. “I thought I could do it all. Have her on my own, work the way I used to work, be a single mother. I knew I was having a baby, I’m not thick, but I didn’t realise how much I’d love her when she got here, how much my mind would wrap around her.” She looked at her daughter quietly.

“Call Freddie,” Aaron said.

“No.”

“Look, I know I’m gay so I really have no frame of reference,” Aaron said. “But if some woman somewhere was having my child, I would really need to know that.”

“He’s a bastard.”

“I know,” Aaron said. “Call him anyway. Then at least you could tell her you tried when she asks where her dad is. Which she will.”

“Can you stop being logical?” Alex asked. “Can I…?” she asked the nurse who was steadily
monitoring the baby. The nurse nodded and took the small bundle out of the incubator, handing her to Alex.

“Tell me, what’s this hospital stay setting you back anyway?” Aaron asked, looking at the nurse they always had on hand.

“Don’t go there,” Alex said darkly. “Probably the same amount of money that I used to pay off my parents mortgage. But I’d rather than photographers down every hallway and doctors trying to snap shots of her on their phones.”

“Good point,” Aaron said as Alex started beaming at the baby. She was limited how long she could hold her, because the baby couldn’t regulate her own temperature yet, so Alex put all of her attention on her child.

“Replace me Aaron,” Alex said. “It makes sense.”

“I don’t care if it makes sense,” Aaron said. “I didn’t turn down a solo career for you to wander off because you’re hormonal over your daughter.”

“I’m going to delay everything,” she said. “Management were pissed when I got pregnant anyway, especially before marriage, as “single motherhood is not the image we want to portray on our label.””

“They told you that?” Aaron interrupted.

“Yeah,” Alex said. “And they’d just about worked out the timing with her and the band and… she comes two months early. It’s easier this way.”

“Alex, it’s not up for discussion,” Aaron said bluntly. “Besides, I’ve got plans of her being five years old, running rings around everyone backstage at a show. Being all proud of her mother, you know, until it gets seriously uncool.” Alex smiled at him for a moment.

“You are amazing,” Alex said. “Want to hold her?”

“Can I?” Aaron said in surprise.

“Have a quick hold,” she said happily. Aaron took the baby.

“She is so tiny,” Aaron said. The knowledge that she was early and too small didn't prepare him for holding her.

“I like Matilda,” Alex said quietly. “For her name.”

“That’s good,” Aaron said. “She’s gorgeous.”

“You and Rob think about having kids?” Aaron’s face paled completely. “Don’t drop her!”

“I don’t want kids,” Aaron said. “I’d be useless with them. But it has come up before and I know Robert wants kids.”

“How can you not want kids,” Alex mused, taking the bundle back, smiling at her daughter. “You asked him to marry you, you must be thinking about your future.”

“She’s got to go back into the isolate now,” the nurse said. Alex sighed, but didn’t argue.

“By the way, talking about replacing you? You haven’t even gone into changing next years tour dates to match up with the new delayed album release.” Alex groaned, head in hands, knowing that
even though it hadn’t been released as public knowledge, most of the venues had been booked.

“How much money am I costing us?” Alex said.

“Pin it on her when she’s a whiny moody fifteen year old,” Aaron advised. Alex smiled, then they both looked when there was a knock on the window, Robert there clearly having just finished work. “I’ve got to go.”

“Are you happy?” she asked. “With him?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said. “I wouldn’t be with him if I wasn’t.”

“How do you do it?” Alex asked. “How do you make it work? I’ve not found anyone who’ll put up with me.”

“Yeah, you have,” Aaron said. “Just because you’re not in a relationship with me or Adam doesn’t make us obligated to put up with your crap. We do it because we love you.” Aaron kissed the top of her hair before grabbing his hoodie and heading out the door.

“How are they both?” Robert asked.

“Good,” Aaron said. But he could tell something was wrong with Robert just from the way he stood. All twitchy and uncomfortable.

“Listen, I’ve got to go home,” Robert said quickly.

“What?” Aaron asked, knowing from his tone that he didn’t mean their flat.

“My step mother and my sister got in a car accident,” Robert said. “Vic’s fine, she’s got a fractured right arm, but she’ll be fine. But Diane… she’s… it’s touch and go, so I have to go. I’ve got compassionate release from work, and some built up holiday so I can take my time but… I have to go to Yorkshire.”

“I get it,” Aaron said. “Of course you have to go.”

“I wanted to see you, rather than call you and tell you I’m vanishing for the north and…”

“I’m coming,” Aaron said.

“What? No, you’re busy, you’ve got Alex and your career and…”

“I’m coming,” Aaron repeated seriously.

“Aaron, you don’t have to…” Robert shook his head. "I know you have commitments you can’t just walk out of and..."

“Oh, come on,” Aaron said. “You’ve supported me through absolutely everything, the least I can do is pack a bag and drive you up north.”

“I was going to drive.”

“Yeah, that’s not happening,” Aaron said dismissively. “Give me thirty seconds to say goodbye to Alex, okay? Don’t go anywhere, you can give me that?” Robert nodded briefly and Aaron went back into Alex’s room for only about a minute before he turned back. “What do you need?” Aaron asked.
“You,” Robert said, voice wobbling very slightly. ”I’m not close with Diane, I never was and she always preferred my brother but… I didn’t like getting a call like that.”

“Have you packed anything or…?”

“No,” Robert said. “I arranged with work then I came here to talk to you. I’ve not done anything, I don’t even have my phone charger and my phones dying and…”

“Right, I’m going to make a call and get a car here,” Aaron said levelly. “Do you want to go home and pack, or shall I get someone else to do it?”

“You have people who do that?” Robert asked faintly.

“I don’t usually use them, but this is an emergency,” Aaron said. “So yes. But only if you want.”

“Yes. No,” Robert said, shaking his head. “It’s better if I go through my own stuff, no one would pack the way I would and… yeah.”

“So we’ll do that,” Aaron said. “Okay. Your step mum will be fine.”

“You don’t know that,” Robert said.

“No, I don’t. But it’s what you say isn’t it?” Aaron said. “Sorry. I’m shit at the comforting thing.”

“Thanks,” Robert said. “Even if it’s just what you say.”

They were quiet until they were well outside London. Aaron was driving, neither of them trusting Robert to be in charge of the car. “My brother doesn’t like me. I don’t like him. It’s more like a… mutual hatred. I’m just warning you because… Andy’s tough.”

“Do I want to know all the screwed up history?” Aaron asked.

“He killed my mother,” Robert said. “I slept with his wife. So he tried to shoot me. Except when the door opened and he pulled the trigger, it was at our father. Andy’s now with his first wife, Katie, the one I had an affair with, and she’s pregnant. A pregnancy no one, not even my sister bothered to inform me of.”

“Right, yeah, that’s twisted.”

“I’m just warning you that I’m probably not going to get a warm reception.”

“Okay,” Aaron said slowly. “Why did you sleep with his wife?”

“That’s the question you’re asking?” Robert said.

“Well, I can hardly ask why Andy tried to kill you or… did kill your mother as he isn’t here.” Aaron said. “So yeah, that’s the one I’m going with.”

“Andy killed our mother in a fire,” Robert said. “It was an accident, but I was a teenager and I didn’t care about that. All I could see was that Andy was the reason for me being motherless, left with a father who… well, preferred Andy.

“Rob…”
“No, don’t comfort me,” Robert said. “That’s how it was. My dad wanted a farmer, wanted someone to work the land and that’s not me, Aaron. It was never me even at fourteen. And then I kissed that boy, and pretty much cemented my place as the second best son.” Robert took in a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“Maybe I went for Katie at first because I had something to prove. I don’t know, I don’t care to go into my teenage psyche. But… it did change into more than that. I fell for her and then I got so jealous that she was marrying my brother. We were kids, we were far too young to be doing stuff like that, but it was happening, and I was jealous as hell. I continued the affair because I loved her. Maybe not at first, but I did, I need you to believe that.”

“Why?” Aaron asked.

“Because I’m not someone who could continue an affair for six months if I didn’t feel anything at all,” Robert said.

“Okay,” Aaron said.

“Anyway, Andy found out about the affair, because affairs always come out in the end. And he’s got a bit of a temper on him. He got a shotgun and he thought it was me coming through the door. He pulled the trigger before looking and it was our dad. He shot our dad in the chest, because he was aiming for me.”

“Is that…” Aaron cleared his throat. “You’ve told me your dad’s dead.”


“Why’ve you never told me any of this?” Aaron asked.

“Sleeping with my brothers wife hardly paints me in a good light,” Robert said. “And when I met you I was trying to make a good impression on you if you remember.” Aaron smiled at him. “The mistakes I made ten years ago… well, I didn’t want to bring them up.”

“You loved her?” Aaron asked. “Not just because she was your brothers wife and you were trying to win the battle, but you… had feelings for her?”

“Yeah,” Robert said honestly. “I think she was… my first real love.” Aaron looked at him for probably a few seconds longer than he should while driving, and wondered if he should be worried. Trying to compete with someone Robert freely admitted he loved once, a woman who Robert had used to try and get one over on the brother he hated. Who was still (again?) married to Andy and pregnant, and who clearly held a place in Robert’s heart. Someone boring and normal and uncomplicated, the kind of person Robert would have expected to be with before Aaron came along… yeah, Aaron thought. Maybe he did have a reason to be worried.
“Hey.”

“Mm?” Robert blinked himself awake, the car having pulled to a stop outside the Woolpack, completely dark and seemingly no other person alive in the world. “Sorry, didn’t mean to fall asleep.”

“It’s fine, you needed it,” Aaron said softly. “I text my mum. There’s a spare room in the pub if you want to sleep here. I didn’t know…”

“No, here’s good,” Robert said. “Thanks.” Aaron had never been her before, once running away from home he’d felt no need to see his mother or where she lived, so this was odd.

Chas had left the door unlocked, and they crept into the pub, both feeling like errant teenagers once again. The thought clearly passed Robert’s mind because he pushed Aaron up against the wall and kissed him.

“We shouldn’t…” Aaron breathed as Robert’s thigh pushed between his legs, pressing up against him. “It’s been a long day.”

“Mm,” Robert agreed, kissing his neck. “No, we shouldn’t. Do you want to stop?”

“No,” Aaron breathed, feeling the desire pulse through him. “I don’t want to do this where my mum can walk in, though.”

“Good point.” Robert kissed him deeply before they went up the stairs.

Aaron didn’t sleep. Most nights he didn’t sleep all the way through next to Robert in their bed at home. It was getting better, but he rarely managed to sleep through the whole night on a mattress, wrapped up with Robert. And that was when he was in his own bed, so now, in a strange house he could hear settling in unfamiliar ways, he didn’t even try to sleep. He did let Robert’s hand splay on his stomach though, pulling him close for comfort.

Aaron did something he hadn’t done in a while, got out his notepad in the middle of the night and started to write. He was still writing songs and lyrics, but usually he did it when Robert was at work and the flat was quiet so he had the time to think, because his sleeping had got a lot better when Robert was with him. Now he wrote, thinking of Robert and their future together, distantly thinking this album might be a bit happier than their last one. Oh well. He was happy.

“Oh, my boy!” Aaron put up with Chas hugging him in the kitchen and smiled at her tiredly. “I didn’t hear you come in!” Aaron was privately pleased to hear that, because him giggling into Robert’s neck as Robert shushed him last night like two teenage virgins was something he didn’t want his mother overhearing.

“It was late. Or early, I guess.” Aaron yawned and rubbed his eyes. “Was going to take Robert up some breakfast. Do you mind making us some bacon sandwiches?”
“Course,” Chas said, though she forced the smile.

“If you’re about to have a go at Robert, we’ll find a hotel,” Aaron said bluntly. “Robert needs to be near his family, but we can do it elsewhere.”

“No!” Chas said. “I like having you here, I’m just not sure if he’s… the right person for you?” she started tentatively.

“And you’d know that how?” Aaron said, but without any anger as Chas was already putting the bacon in a frying pan. “You don’t know me, not really mum.”

“I want to change that,” Chas said lightly.

“Then you need to accept Robert,” Aaron said. “Trust me, he isn’t going anywhere and I need him in my life.”

“Okay,” Chas said. “Two bacon sarnies coming up. How is he?” she asked seriously.

“Slept all through the night,” Aaron said. “Hasn’t woken once.” Chas frowned at him and Aaron realised what he’d said. “I er… don’t sleep well in beds that aren’t mine.”

“How do you manage when you’re jetting all over the world?” Chas asked with a frown.

“Most places have floorboards,” Aaron said quickly, putting the kettle on. “Just don’t, mum.”

“Fine,” she said. “You love him?”

“Mum…”

“I’m seriously asking,” Chas said, flipping over the bacon.

“I er…” Aaron swallowed. “You can keep your mouth shut?”

“Yeah,” she said easily. Aaron looked at her and decided to trust her, simply because their relationship was too fragile that Chas wouldn’t risk talking to anyone else.

“I need him more than I need anything else in my life. More than the band, more than the money, more than every good thing that money can give me, more than the music. I could get rid of all that, and I’d be okay, because I’ve got him. I love performing, I love singing and the thrill I get from the crowd when we’re on tour, but I don’t need it, mum. I do need him.”

“He’s not asking you to…?”

“No,” Aaron said, making the tea. “Of course not. I love him mum, and he is going to be a permanent feature of my life.”

“That’s awfully confident,” Chas said, though she was smiling. “I must tell you, he is not going to get a warm reception here.”

“I know,” Aaron said. “I’m sure I didn’t get all the juicy details, but I got a vague outline.”

“Robert wouldn’t tell you everything.”

“I’m sure,” Aaron said. “Did tell me a little of his history with Andy and Katie.” Chas snorted, though she was plating up their sandwiches and putting them on a tray with two mugs of tea. “Thanks for letting us crash here.”
“Any time,” Chas said with a smile. Aaron nodded and went upstairs, giving Robert a nudge.

“Huh?” Robert started sleepily. “Wh... time is it?”

“Just before eight,” Aaron said. “Eat.”

“Smells good,” Robert said, sitting up in bed. He looked at Aaron and then sighed. “You didn’t sleep did you?”

“No,” Aaron said. “I’m fine.”

“You shouldn’t be here, you should be at home in your own bed,” Robert said, shaking his head.

“Hey, stop,” Aaron said. “I’ve faced worse in my life than missing a few hours sleep. You need to be here for your family, and I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.” Robert kissed him briefly before falling on his bacon sandwich. He was too hungry not to.

“Got a message from Vic, she wants me to take her to the hospital this morning,” Robert said between sips of his tea. “Seeing as she can’t drive.”

“Are you okay to?”

“Mm,” Robert said. “I slept, you didn’t.”

“Do you er… want me to come to the hospital? I’m not sure… how this works.”

“I’d love you to be there,” Robert said. “Especially as I’m not that sure what I’m going to find, so…”

“Okay,” Aaron said. “We’ll get dressed and go.”

“Rob!” Both men made it down the stairs to see Vic looking agitated, a cast on her arm. She hugged her brother quickly and forced a smile at Aaron. “Thanks for coming,” she said. Aaron nodded before they were all being herded into Aaron’s rental car and heading to the hospital.

“It’s bad Robert,” Vic said. “Diane hit her head on the windscreen. She’s in a coma, and they er… they’re not sure what state she’s going to be in… if she wakes up.”

“Okay,” Robert said, turning left. How could the journey to Hotten general still be like a muscle memory for him? “Will er… Andy be there?”

“Andy knows you’re coming,” Vic said with a sniff. “He said it was fine.”

“Oh, I’m so glad you got his permission first,” Robert snapped.
“Robert!” Vic wailed. “It’s not like that, it’s… please.”

“If you’re not going to support your family…” Aaron started.

“I warned you it was tense,” Robert said. “I’ll be good,” he said to Vic, looking at her in the rear view mirror. “Promise.” That was said to Aaron.

“Where’s Katie?”

“Meeting us at the hospital.”

“Great,” Robert said unenthusiastically. “Was anyone going to bother telling me she’s pregnant?”

“Yes,” Vic said. “It’s just gone past three months, she wanted it kept quiet. Just in case.” Robert nodded, he could see the logic in that. “What about you? Were you two going to tell me about your engagement?”

“What?” Aaron snapped as Robert focused hard on not slamming his foot down on the accelerator. Aaron whipped around and looked at her in shock. “W… where are you getting that?”

“Twitter,” Vic said, shrugging a little. “It’s all rumours, no ones taking it seriously, but as we’re in the same car I thought I’d ask.”

“No,” Robert said firmly.

“Aaron,” Aaron said.

“She won’t have said anything,” Robert said.

“No, she won’t have,” Aaron agreed. “But there’s a nurse monitoring the baby constantly. I talked about it with Alex. In hospital.”

“So you twos are engaged?”

“No,” Aaron said firmly. “But Alex needs to know if her doctors and nurses are gossiping. They could sell the pictures of Matilda and…”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “When we’re parked, I’ll call her and tell her.”

“No, I’ll do it,” Aaron said. “Coming from you it’s going to sound like you want those pictures for yourself.”

“I do,” Robert said bluntly. “Might raise my standing with the paper a notch or two. Certainly outdo the damage seeing you caused my career.”

“Thanks,” Aaron said with a marginal smile.
Chapter 35

The three of them walked into the hospital, Vic leading the way as she’d obviously seen Diane’s room before. They reached the room, and Robert and Aaron looked through the window. Aaron watched a man crouching over the bed, who he assumed was Andy. The woman in the bed did not look well. Diane had a patch of her hair shaved off, a prominent cut on her head. She also had a tube down her throat, keeping her breathing on the ventilator. From what Aaron had heard, he hadn’t expected Diane to look this bad. It was clear from the pale look on Robert’s face that he hadn’t either.

Vic didn’t wait, she went straight in, sitting by Diane’s side, clearly telling Andy they were there. Andy looked at the window and swapped with Vic, coming out to see them. Andy and Robert locked eyes intensely, neither saying a word. Aaron could feel the tension between both men, and it was possibly the first time that Aaron felt completely ignored in a room in years, certainly by Robert.

“You must be Andy,” Aaron said, trying to interrupt the glaring between both men. Andy looked at him and nodded.

“Surprised Robert told you I even existed,” Andy said.

“I’m not about to get in this with you,” Robert said, his hand sliding around Aaron’s waist for reassurance. “I promised I wouldn’t.”

“And you always do what others want don’t you?” Andy said. “Why couldn’t you stay away?!”

“She’s my step mother too,” Robert said.

“Who you’ve not seen in a decade!” Andy shouted.

“What, Diane doesn’t mention that she always comes to London for Christmas?” Robert snapped back. Andy scowled, but said nothing. “How is she?”

“Bad,” Andy said. “They thought she might wake up overnight, but she hasn’t. The longer it goes… the worse… It’s not looking good.”

“Right,” Robert said. “I… er… How’s Katie?”

“Look, don’t have a go…”

“I’m not, I’m genuinely asking,” Robert said sincerely. “Haven’t we moved on from when we were kids? I know I have.” That made Andy’s attention swing to Aaron, and Aaron felt like he was being appraised.

“Doesn’t look like your type,” Andy said.

“I don’t really have a type,” Robert sniped.

“Apparently.” Andy shook his head. “Can’t find any women to your taste so you moved onto men?”

“Hey!” Aaron snapped. “Don’t go there.” He knew there was history, and bad history between these two men but that was going too far.

“Robert, we both know you’re not gay. Do you not remember what went on with Katie?”
“Yeah, I do,” Robert said. “And no, I’m not gay.”

“But…”

“God, some things never change,” Robert said quickly. “You’re always so black and white!”

“How about the two of you don’t start shouting in the hall,” Aaron suggested.

“Never know,” Robert said. “Might be that that makes Diane wake up. Give us a slap and tell us to pull ourselves together.” That did make Andy smile, just a little bit. The three men turned as a blonde woman came towards them.

“Robert,” she said with a fake smile and Aaron realised who this must be. Katie. She was gorgeous, Aaron noticed with a sinking heart. She smiled at him winningly, before looking through the window. “No change?”

“No.” Katie nodded for a moment. Then she turned back to Aaron. “It’s nice to meet you!”

“Er… okay,” Aaron said blankly, not following.

“Yeah, she’s a bit of a fan,” Andy said dismissively. “Ignore her.”

“Hey!” Katie said to her husband. “This is a situation I never thought I’d be in, so… Would an autograph be totally out of the question?”

“Yes,” all three men said dully in unison. Katie had the grace to look a little ashamed.

“Look, I’m er… drawing unwanted attention,” Aaron said, noticing a small crowd gathering in the hospital corridor and pointing at him. “I’ll, er… wait in the cafeteria or something. Give you your privacy, you don’t want strangers nosing in…”

“You sure?” Robert asked.

“Yeah.” Aaron kissed him, and it lingered, Aaron feeling just how afraid Robert was. “Are you okay?”

“I will be.” Robert nodded once then turned to his siblings as Aaron turned away.

“Rob,” Andy said, looking towards a doctor approaching them. “Diane Sugden?”

Aaron sat in the cafeteria, ignoring the glances from other people, spending a lot of time on his own. Robert wasn’t hurrying back, and Aaron didn’t know if that was good news or bad, but he wasn’t about to text or call to ask. He was here if Robert needed him, and Robert knew that.

“Hi.” Aaron looked up to see a woman, middle thirties, looking tired and harangued.

“Hi,” Aaron said blankly.

“Look, are you who I think you are?” she said, sitting down opposite him without waiting to be asked. “You’re… Aaron Livesy, right?”

“Er… yeah,” he said, not really liking being recognised. Usually he had his security, but they’re back in London. He hadn’t had the time to arrange it, which meant he shouldn’t be that surprised by people approaching him. “Sorry, I don’t mean to be rude, but I’m actually here for personal reasons.” That should be obvious, it was a hospital after all. No one came here for fun.
“No, I know,” she said, and she didn’t seem star struck just overly tired. “And I wouldn’t be bothering you normally, I’m really sorry, but… my daughters a fan and I promised I’d take her to your next tour, but… well, it kind of looks like she isn’t going to be around for that long so… I wondered if you’d come and see her?” Aaron sighed. “I know this is totally out of line, but she’s eight, and… I needed to ask. I'll now leave you in peace,” she said, seeming a little ashamed.

“What’s wrong with her?” Aaron asked, his tone gentle this time.

“Cancer. Is the short answer, I’m not about to go into all the medical jargon and… Yeah.” She sniffed. “If it’s no, it’s fine. Just couldn’t not ask, now that I see you here.”

“Give me five minutes,” Aaron said. “What’s her name?”

“Julia.”

“Okay, I need to make a call, but I’ll be done in five minutes. Just don’t… advertise it, okay?”

“Thank you,” the woman said sincerely. “I mean it.” Aaron nodded, sending Robert a text to let him know that he was still around.

“Stop the car.”

“Finally.” Aaron pulled over to the side of the road, a country lane and Robert got out. They’d been at the hospital all day, and darkness was settling over them. Aaron watched as Robert raced from the car and started kicking a gate post ferociously for a few minutes, hands clenched and breathing heavily. “Are you actually going to talk to me now?”

“They don’t think Diane’s going to wake up,” Robert said. Aaron had guessed that from his black mood. “They er… said that, if she does wake up they’re going to expect severe deficits. She won’t be who she was, and that’s even if she does wake up. They’ve asked us to consider… switching off her life support if we don’t get anywhere, If she doesn’t wake up in the next couple of days and… me, Vic and Andy started arguing about it. So it’s been a long day.”

“I’m so sorry,” Aaron said, a hand around his waist. “I mean it, I am so sorry.”

“I just… I have no idea what to do here.” Robert took several breaths. “I’m sorry for leaving you alone all day.”

“I am the last thing you need to think of right now,” Aaron said.

“I knew she’d been in an accident, and I knew it was bad,” Robert said. “But there’s knowing and seeing it.”

“Yeah,” Aaron said, knowing the difference too. He wrapped Robert in his arms and held him as close as he possibly could, Robert starting to cry into his shoulder.

“I’m sorry. I know I’m not exactly close with her, but…” Robert started.

“Sh,” Aaron soothed, a hand in his hair, pulling him close. Robert let him for a few minutes, the chill of the night air wrapping around both of them. "It's okay."

“It’s just… all the parts of my family I have left, I keep losing bits of them and… God, that sounds so selfish, I don’t mean to be.”
“Robert,” Aaron said, hands around his face. “I know. I can’t even begin to imagine how hard this is for you.”

“I want a family, Aaron,” Robert said honestly, as honest as he’d ever been. “I don’t want it to end up one day being just me. That I’m all I have left. I know you don’t agree, I know that, and I hate the thought that I could lose you over something so theoretical at this point. But I can’t lie to you, I need you to know that it’s important to me.” Robert’s eyes were wet, Aaron could see it even through the darkness. His eyes had adjusted well enough now.

“Now’s not the time to be making decisions like this,” Aaron said, making Robert sigh. “Look, this is a big issue, and I know it matters to you, but your stepmother is more important right now.”

“If I can’t be honest after the day I’ve had, when can I?” Robert cleared his throat and shook his head.

“Robert, if you really want to discuss this now…”

“I do,” Robert said.

“I don’t want kids.” Robert almost growled under his breath in exasperation. “You’re not hearing me. I don’t want kids. S. Plural. But I could be open to… way, way in the future thinking about maybe having one.”

“Don’t say that if you don’t mean it,” Robert said.

“I’m reserving the right to have a complete meltdown over it at times,” Aaron said. “But… we can discuss it. Later, when you’re not this emotional and upset. It’s not completely off the table. Okay?”

“Okay,” Robert said, voice wavering. “I’m sorry, I really shouldn’t have brought this up now. God, what awful timing and…”

“However you need to cope,” Aaron said. “Now, I need some sleep Robert, or I’m going to pass out.” Robert smiled very weakly at him, pulling him into a hug.

“I don’t want her to die,” Robert whispered into Aaron’s neck.

“I know.”
Aaron woke up at about two in the morning. Surprisingly, Robert was awake, staring at the ceiling. Aaron moved across and switched the light on before looking back at him. “I can’t sleep.”

“Can’t say that’s not familiar to me,” Aaron said. “Want to talk?"

“No.”

“Want to not talk?” Robert smiled a little.

“I don’t know what to do. How am I meant to make a decision about switching my step mothers life support off?”

“There are three of you,” Aaron said. “You don’t have to do it all. Your family won’t let you take it all on yourself.”

“True,” Robert said. “But you’re not giving me an opinion.”

“No,” Aaron said. “Because it’s not my choice.”

“You know, don’t you?” Robert said suddenly. “What you’d do if it was you.”

“Robert, don’t…”

“Tell me.”

“If it was me, lying unconscious with brain activity decreasing all the time?” Aaron said. “Yeah, I do know what I’d want.”

“Go on.”

“I’d want you to pull the plug,” Aaron said. “But this is just me.”

“That easy?” Robert asked, surprised. “You’d just… give up on life?”

“I don’t want a half life,” Aaron said. “And I wouldn’t want you to spend weeks agonising over the decision either. So yeah. If it ever comes down to you, give me a few days, see if much happens… then let me go.”

“God, I don’t know if I could do that.”

“I don’t plan for us to ever be in that situation,” Aaron said fairly. Robert sighed. “But if we are, you still going to be around?” The question was light, but Robert caught the meaning and he nodded.

“I’m still going to be here,” Robert reassured him.

“Good.” They shifted on the bed, curling up together and Aaron tucked Robert against his neck, being the big spoon for once. It was comforting, and they both needed that.
wouldn’t be with Diane. Plus the car was outside, he could see it from the window. Then he guessed where Robert would be. He grabbed his hoodie and his phone before leaving the pub.

“I thought I might find you here,” Aaron said, ignoring the dew on the grass seeping through the bottom of his jeans.

“I… felt like I needed to be here,” Robert said. He stood in front of Sarah Sugden’s grave stone and Aaron came close to Robert.

“Is it okay that I’m here or do you want to be alone?”

“No, I want you here,” Robert said. “I thought about bringing you here one day. Never thought it would be under these circumstances though.”

“How are you?” Aaron said. “I know I keep asking, but…”

“I feel odd,” Robert said. “But I am very glad you’re here with me.” Aaron nodded and stood in the quiet of the breaking dawn over the village. He looked at Aaron after a moment. “I can’t imagine spending the rest of my life with anyone else but you. You do know that, right?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said. “Nice to hear you say it though.”

“I’ll just see my dad,” Robert said. “Then we can do something… something.”

“Okay,” Aaron said, sensing Robert wanted to be alone with Jack. So he looked at Sarah’s grave contemplatively.

“I’ll look after him,” Aaron said under his breath, knowing Robert couldn’t hear him. “I know he’s sometimes not as strong as he likes to pretend, but I’ll be there. I’ll make sure he’s safe, always.” He touched the top of Sarah’s gravestone before heading back to the village, knowing Robert would follow him when he was ready.

In the end, all three of the Sugdens came to the agreement to turn Diane’s life support off. It took four more days of her deteriorating and the doctor said there was no chance at all she’d wake up and be in charge of her faculties. The brain damage was too extensive.

While waiting for Diane to slip away, Aaron and Katie were in a private room, while the other three were with their step mother. Neither Aaron nor Katie wanted to crowd the room too much.

“How did you meet Robert?” Katie asked, more to take her mind off what was happening in a distant room of the hospital. Aaron was more than happy to play that game, anything to think of something else.

“He interviewed me,” Aaron said. “I liked what I saw.”

“Did you know he was gay?”

“He’s not, he’s bi,” Aaron said. “It didn’t matter. I just… I know you’ve got history with Robert.”

“Yeah, most of it bad,” Katie said. “I’m not having a go at you. Or him, actually just want…”


“No,” she said, shaking her head. “I’m happy now, I wouldn’t want to go back.” Then she looked at
Aaron, a smile appearing on her face. “Why? Worried?”

“Interested,” Aaron edited. Katie kept staring at him. “All right, I know for him, being with me is not easy. I’m away for months at a time, it’s effecting his career and… I know that. So I do… wonder.” Katie smiled, and Aaron didn’t like that smile one little bit. But it wasn’t like they had anything else to do.

“Aaron, we were kids,” Katie said. “I can’t speak for anyone else, but I was young and stupid and I don’t regret growing up and realising who I wanted. I’m not going back to Robert. I wouldn’t even if we were both single.” Aaron nodded, a little reassured. “But if you don’t trust him…”

“I do trust him,” Aaron said. “I wouldn’t be so comfortable leaving him for months when I go on tour if I didn’t.”

“But…?”

“But I know what the call of an ex can sometimes be like.”

“That sounds more like you’re talking about your own history,” Katie said.

“No, just… thinking,” Katie nodded.

“Why’re you with him?” Katie asked.

Aaron thought about it. He guessed the answer of “I love him” wasn’t quite what Katie was after. “He makes me feel safe.”

“You’re a rock star,” Katie said. “I wouldn’t have thought that was a problem for you.”

“It is,” Aaron said. “And only he knows how much.” Aaron thought about it. “I’m going to have to go away, leave him for a bit. Don’t get me wrong, I enjoy touring, but leaving him is not a good part of it. But it’s nice to know there’s someone waiting for me at home who completely understands me, who gets me. I guess that’s why.”

“The Robert I knew wasn’t that kind of man.”

“Maybe people grow up from when they’re eighteen,” Aaron said, not with any judgement. “He’s not a bad man.”

“I know,” she said. “I fell for him too, once. A long time ago.”

“He hates this,” Aaron said. “Losing Diane like this, he can’t bear it.”

“I know,” Katie said. “We all hate this.” They fell into silence, both of them just waiting. Until the door opened, and Robert came in, eyes wet. It was over, then. Aaron stood up and pulled him into his arms, feeling him shaking. On the verge of falling apart, Aaron could feel it through his chest, whether Robert was showing it externally or not.

“Where’s Andy?” Katie asked.

“He er… wanted to sit with Diane for a while,” Robert said. “I couldn’t handle it, so… sorry.” Katie left the room, leaving two men alone. Aaron sat down and held Robert. It was all that he knew how to do.
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

It has been a long time since I've managed two chapters in one day. Hope you enjoy this! (It's also been pointed out to me that I completely forgot Bernice. Oops! So for the purposes of this, she doesn't exist.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

In the next few days Robert went very quiet, and became very touchy feely. Much more so than ever before. In fact Aaron was one of the only people he was speaking to. Not that Aaron didn’t appreciate Robert’s hands lingering on him, he did. But he also knew this was a shock to Robert’s system. No one had been expecting his step mother to die.

“I’ve got to go,” Robert said one morning, speaking slowly, like words were hard to focus on. “Go back down to London for the day.”

“Why?” Aaron asked, dropping his toast.

“Because… when we packed, I don’t have my black suit with me. I need to go and get it. For the funeral.” Robert talked like he wasn’t really connected to the words, disinterested. Like he was trapped in a bubble.

“Don’t worry about that,” Aaron said. “I can go. Or I can go into town and get you something, I know your size. You’re not trekking all the way down to London if you don’t have to, not now.”

“Sure?” Robert asked.

“Yeah, I’ll pick you something out,” Aaron said. “Any preference, or…?”

“Make sure it’s something you think I look good in,” Robert said, a ghost of a smile on his face. Aaron grinned back.

“I promise.” They kissed, Robert’s hands on Aaron’s waist keeping him close. They didn’t even part when Chas came in, feeling the desperate need to be close to each other.

“I er… need to go then,” Robert said. “Andy wanted to talk over the funeral. If you’re okay with…”

“I’ve got it,” Aaron said. “I won’t be further away than Hotten.”

“Good.”

“Don’t kill your brother.” That did make Robert smile.

“We’ll be good,” Robert promised, grabbing his jacket and leaving. Aaron looked at his mother.

“What?”

“I didn’t realise how close you two were,” Chas said. “I never really… saw it.”

“He needs me right now,” Aaron said bluntly.
“I’m not criticising,” Chas said gently. “It’s just… nice to see. I want you to be happy, and I’m not stupid enough to think fame or money’s going to do it for you.”

“I am happy,” Aaron said. “I’ve almost… I don’t know, does it sound weird, but… I’m getting used to being happy? I know it’s bad for him right now, but that’s life right?”

“I thought he was all wrong for you,” Chas said. “I’ve changed my mind.”

“Good,” Aaron said. “Now, I’ve got to go, got to get two black suits.”

“You didn’t even know Diane.”

“What, you think I’m letting Robert go to the funeral alone?” Aaron smiled and Chas hugged him, much to his surprise.

“You’re a good boy,” she said.

“I’m not a boy,” Aaron said, though he was smiling.

“Yeah, well,” Chas said. “Don’t think I had anything to do with the man you are.”

“Mum,” Aaron said quietly, though he was pleased. No matter what happened, it felt good that his mum was proud of him.

“Hey,” Aaron said, picking up the phone. “How’s Matilda?”

“Being discharged,” Alex said, no denying the pride in her voice. “Got the all clear.”

“Alex, that’s great,” Aaron said. “I’m so happy for you two.”

“Yeah, which is why I’m calling actually,” she said. “I’m getting a lot of calls for pictures of my daughter and… I know Robert wanted first refusal, but in light of recent events… I didn’t know if I should call.”

“No, he wants the pictures,” Aaron said urgently. He and Robert had already had this discussion “Don’t… just give me five minutes and I’ll call back with Lucy’s number. She works for Robert, she’ll handle it.”

“No rush,” she said. “How is he?”

“I er… think he’s getting over the shock now, but it’s bad. I don’t know if it would be better if he was expecting it? I don’t know. He’s now talking to me, so there’s that.”

“I wanted to call, but I didn’t know if Rob would think I’m being a nosey cow.”

“We all know that,” Aaron said, making her sigh a laugh.

“Tell him I’m thinking of him, okay?” Alex said.

“I didn’t think you liked him,” Aaron teased.

“I was making sure you were all right and he wasn’t using you,” Alex said. “I think we’re past that, don’t you?”
“Yeah.” Aaron said. “I’ll call back.” Robert was sat on the sofa and he looked at Aaron. “Alex’s baby photos.”

“Oh, God,” Robert said. “I can’t… Not now…”

“Give me Lucy’s number,” Aaron said calmly. “We’ll sort it, you don’t have to do anything.”

“Thank you,” Robert said.

“It’s nothing.”

“It’s not nothing, I noticed your schedule on the kitchen table,” Robert said. Ah. Aaron had been sent a schedule for the next six months for the band, he just hadn’t been about to bring it up to Robert. Not now.

“It’s fine. They’ll wait.”

“Aaron, you can’t do that,” Robert said.

“Why not?” Aaron asked. “Not like they can start without me, is it? And Alex and Adam understand, they more than understand. I’m not worried about anyone else. I’m not worried about giving management a few nightmare schedules, it’s what they take their percentage for.”

“Aaron,” Robert said.

“You need me more than they do. They’ll wait,” Aaron said surely.

“Come here.” Aaron smiled, and did, both men ending up laying on the sofa, curled up together. “I’m sorry I’ve been a moody git lately.”

“I’d be kind of worried if you were throwing a party right now,” Aaron said. Robert kissed him.

“Thank you,” Robert said lowly. “For being patient, for being here. For being everything.” Aaron smiled into another kiss, and for the first time since Diane died, he felt like he had Robert back with him.

The funeral went well. For a funeral, obviously. Even Andy and Robert had stopped sniping at each other, and Aaron for one was glad. Most of the village turned out for it, and Aaron did get a few glances more than everyone else, but people had got used to seeing him around the village, so it wasn’t too extreme. In fact, it was only the kids who seemed to be paying Aaron more than usual attention, which he could hardly blame them for.

They stayed in the village for another week afterwards, but real life was catching up, and both men knew they’d have to return to London. Robert for his job, Aaron to start recording the album. They were both pushing the goodwill of the people they had to answer to now. Aaron couldn’t find Robert one afternoon, and went in search of him. Aaron still had the rental car, so Robert should be within walking distance.

Aaron eventually found him looking over the valley the village sat in, just standing at the gate, watching. Robert turned when he heard the car pull up and Aaron got out, coming to stand next to him. “All right?”

“Yeah,” Robert said contemplatively. “Yes, I think I am.”
“Lost down memory lane?”

“No, just thinking.” Robert shifted so Aaron ended up being spooned against him, both of them looking across the valley. Aaron was pressed between the gate and Robert’s body, the wonderful warmth of him as he watched the clouds roll over the village, feeling happy and content.

“There used to be a ramshackle shed over there,” Robert said, pointing to a random field. “Andy and I used to play in it all the time. Before things went wrong between us.”

“It’s peaceful here,” Aaron said.

“That’s because you don’t live here,” Robert said with a smile. “Never stays quiet for long.”

“Do you miss it?” Aaron asked.

“Er… occasionally. London’s so anonymous. It was nice, familiar when you went to the shop for a pint of milk or the paper and you’d recognise the faces.”

“All right grandpa,” Aaron said, making Robert smile.

“I’ve only got a few years on you,” Robert said with dignity.

Aaron smiled, but it faded. “Matilda’s been discharged. The record label’s really pushing us to get some time in the recording studio and get this fourth album done. And then after that…”


“I’ll have to go, to leave again, and you’ll be in London.”

“I know.”

“They want us to go to Asia this time, not just Europe.” Robert sighed heavily but didn’t speak. Not anything to say to that. “Malaysia and the Philippines are apparently big markets.”

“I’ll miss you.”

“I know,” Aaron said. “So will I. But you’ll come out, I’ll fly back, it can work, right?”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “It will work.” Aaron nodded firmly once. Robert thought about mentioning he couldn’t afford too many flights back and forth from Asia, but then decided against it. They’d work it out, even though asking Aaron to cover the bill didn’t exactly sit right with him. It was an argument, a discussion for another time. And it would work, they’d make it work. There was no other option. Because life without Aaron in it simply wasn’t a possibility. “You looking forward to Asia?”

“Yeah, actually,” Aaron said. “It’s that… nervous thrill. I get it every time we put on a show, but… it’s never quite as bad or as exciting as the first time. I feel that, when I think about Kuala Lumpur.”

“Good,” Robert said. “Because when you stop enjoying it I’m going to drag you back home and chain you to our flat.” Aaron laughed quietly before turning in his arms, looking up slightly at Robert.

“I love you,” Aaron said. “I er… picked these up in Hotten a while back. I’ve been carrying them around all week and…” Aaron reached into his hoodie pocket and pulled out a ring box. He opened it where there were two very obvious engagement rings there. “What do you think?” Aaron asked levelly.
“Were you careful?” Robert asked, not tearing his eyes off of the bands sitting in their box.

“Ordered them online,” Aaron said, knowing what he meant. “Got a PA to pick them up, so… no one knows. Which means you could say no. If you want to.”

“You haven’t asked me a question yet,” Robert said, and they locked eyes for a moment before Aaron smiled.

“I’ve already asked,” Aaron said stubbornly. “I’m not about to put myself out there again. It’s your turn.”

“I’ve already answered you,” Robert said, making Aaron frown. “The day after you said… what you said, then took it back… I gave you your answer in the paper. Page fifty three, the letters page of that Friday’s paper. Your answer’s there.”

“Why did you never say?” Aaron asked. “That was weeks ago!”

“Because you got all nervous and backed out,” Robert said with a shrug. “I know when not to push my luck. I want my life with you, the… when didn’t matter so much.”

“And I want my life with you,” Aaron said softly. Aaron didn’t ask the question, he didn’t need to hear the answer. He took Robert’s ring out of the box and slid it onto Robert’s waiting hand, Robert beaming at him. Robert took the box and did the same thing, Aaron looking up at him, his face truly happy, whenever their eyes caught. They both kept staring at their joined hands, the rings new and exciting and wonderful.

“Are we taking these off?” Robert asked practically. “You being photographed with them and…”

“No, I’m not taking mine off,” Aaron said surely, looking deeply into Robert’s eyes. “I know nothing about being someone’s husband, but I’m not about to hide this either. I’m happy, Robert.”

“We’re engaged?” Robert asked, almost shyly, very un Robert like.

“I guess so,” Aaron said, biting his bottom lip. “So, you want an exclusive for that paper of yours?” Robert laughed, then kissed Aaron for all he was worth.

Chapter End Notes

And I am leaving it there! That is the end! Thank you for all your support, this is about 40k longer than I ever expected it to be. What a marathon!
Robert settled in to his office again, it had been a while since he’d been at work, and things had changed for him personally. But this was an environment he excelled in, and it was good to get back to it. He had a rather large pile of files, with issues of the paper he’d missed and things to catch up on, but he knew Lucy had done a good job in his absence.

He found the issue with pictures of Alex and her baby, and smiled briefly at the pictures. Alex looked so happy, though they were a little bit posed. Robert only knew that because of a few pictures he had on his phone from Saturday. Once they’d returned to London from Yorkshire, they’d all had a barbecue over the weekend, to celebrate both Aaron and Robert’s engagement, and the fact that Matilda had been discharged from hospital with no problems. It had been a good day, and Robert had felt accepted by Aaron’s band mates and friends, fully accepted for the first time. Vic had been there too, spending a few days in London, and Robert pretended that he couldn’t see the flirting between Adam and his sister. Robert got the feeling they were on again off again kind of thing, but he didn’t want to ask any further.

Their engagement hadn’t got out to the press yet, they’d only been back home for a couple of days, but Robert anticipated the storm at some point today, a Monday morning with neither of them hiding their rings? Yeah, it was bound to come out, it just depended how eagle eyed the photographers were. Aaron was recording the new album today too, so he’d be leaving the house. And wherever he went, he usually had at least one photographer catching up with him. They’d both decided they didn’t want to hide their engagement rings, it felt too important to hide no matter how the press reacted.

A knock on the door of Robert’s office distracted him and he saw Lucy, smiling there. “Thank you,” Robert said instantly. “For taking over when I was gone, you’ve done a good job.” She waved her hand like it was nothing.

“How was the funeral?” she asked, closing the door behind her.

“The way funerals are,” Robert said with a shrug. He did grieve for Diane, of course he did. But no funeral ever really went "well" did it? “Do you need anything?”

“Confirmation?” Lucy said with a sweet smile. She tapped on her tablet, turning it around and showing Robert the picture. A candid shot of Aaron, leaving their flat for the recording studio (Robert assumed). His ring was obvious.

“Confirmation of what?” Robert asked, though he smiled slowly, a happy smile.

“You’re engaged?” she asked, and for a moment it wasn’t about work, how this would effect the paper.
“Yes,” Robert said, twisting his own ring around his finger. “Thought I thought it might take longer than…” he looked at his watch. “9:45 in the morning to come out, though.”

“Are you two releasing a statement?” Lucy asked and Robert shook his head. Aaron’s management had said not to. But it was the way she said “you two” rather than “Aaron” that struck Robert. Was that how life would be now? He’d be made someone “almost” famous just because of who he was married to? Yeah, he guessed. Maybe he would be.

“No, we’re not,” Robert said. “Aaron will post a photo on his bands instagram page today. About midday, if you want your confirmation.” Lucy beamed widely.

“Thanks for the tip,” she said. “Are you happy?”

“More… content,” Robert said. “It’s been a really bad month, but I’ve got him and that makes it easier.” Lucy smiled at him.

“You know the boss is going to want an interview, don’t you?”

“Yeah, but he’s not getting it from me,” Robert said. “Aaron’s the one people want to read about, not me.”

“It’ll be both of you, now,” Lucy said. “They’ll want to know about the man who took Aaron Livesy off the market.” Robert winced at her turn of phrase.

“Come on, it won’t be that big a deal,” Robert said, even knowing he was lying. “Plus I can’t keep giving us all the exclusives. They’ll say it’s biased reporting, it’s well known I work here.”

“True,” Lucy said. “But the boss is still going to want that exclusive.” Robert rolled his eyes. “Congratulations.” Robert smiled at her.

Aaron took his headphones off as he approached the studio, knowing that the photographers would most likely catch his ring. It was early in the morning, but Robert had already left for work, and Alex had a messed up sleeping schedule due to her daughter, which meant that an early morning really only inconvenienced Adam. And he’d live with it. They really needed to get this album started, which meant they had several weeks in the recording studio ahead of them. Aaron had been writing, and so had Adam, they now had to record and Aaron fully expected to enjoy this. He was good at this, he liked this. And when Alex turned up, smiling tiredly, it felt good to get back into the swing of things.

“How are you?” Alex asked, taking her coat off and sitting down, already yawning.

“Ready for this,” Aaron said with a smile.

“How’s Robert?”

“Yeah, I think we’ve come back down to earth,” Aaron said. “It’s… good to get back into the routine of things.” Alex nodded, quickly tying her hair out of her face.

“I think he’s good for you,” Alex said. “For what it’s worth.”

“It’s worth a lot,” Aaron said. “Thanks.”

“So when are you going to do it?” Alex asked. “I need to lose the baby weight before any kind of
wedding and…”

“Oh, come on, you look incredible,” Aaron said.

“Excuse me?” she asked with a raised eyebrow as he looked her up and down.

“I’m gay, I’ve got no interest in you physically,” Aaron said quickly.

“Is that meant to make me feel better or worse?” Alex asked, trying not to laugh.

“Either,” Aaron said, smiling as Adam came in, beaming from ear to ear.

“Let’s get to work!” Adam said enthusiastically. Aaron’s phone buzzed and he saw a call from his lawyer, which he ignored. That hadn’t taken long, then. When Aaron had bought their flat for them both, his lawyer had called him asking if he’d taken leave of his senses, for not being protected by buying that flat for Robert, that he could be being swindled. So being photographed with an engagement ring… yeah, Aaron anticipated that to be related to something to do with his upcoming wedding. Aaron felt a little thrill at the thought. He was getting married, it still hadn’t sunk in. Aaron woke himself up from his day dream as someone from the recording studio came over.

“Right, can we give “saving the memories” a go first?” she suggested and Aaron took up his guitar.

Robert came home, the flat empty and he sighed. Aaron had text him, letting him know he’d be late, and Robert kicked his shoes off, grabbed a beer and stretched out on the sofa. It had been a long hard day, but he’d anticipated that. He had far too many people coming by his office than he’d usually have on a day to day basis, and he knew they just wanted the gossip on his engagement. Which if he’d decided to marry anyone else wouldn’t even come up in conversation.

There had been a lot of photographers outside his flat, but he’d had a driver taking him home, after a brief argument with Aaron about his protection over the weekend. Now he was safely in his lounge, he was prepared to admit that Aaron might have had a point. Wouldn’t tell Aaron that, though.

He looked at the last months papers on the kitchen table and decided to toss them. A new batch would surely be coming soon with their engagement announcement. Robert knew he should stop reading them, it wasn’t doing him any favours. But it was like a habit, a bad one, that he couldn’t break. Robert tossed them in the recycling, pausing as his eye saw something new. Framed on the wall was a clipping from Robert’s paper, his reply to Aaron’s unplanned proposal a few weeks before. Aaron must have found the back issue and framed it, and it was hanging on their kitchen wall.

To the grumpy idiot who refused to let me talk. Of course I will. It had been Robert’s response, in case Aaron had ever returned to the question of marriage, which of course he had. Robert smiled at that, it looked so perfect in their home. He had a mental image of Aaron flicking through the back issues of The Standard, scanning the letters page of each issue until he found it. It made Robert smile, then he turned, hearing the keys in the lock.

Aaron came in, and he smiled seeing Robert, kissing him slowly. “We made it through the day,” Robert said, with more than a little relief.

“I was never worried about me,” Aaron said, pressing a soft kiss to Robert’s lips. “How was work?”

“We’re being hounded for interviews,” Robert said. “But nothing that I wasn’t really expecting. It
“Good,” Aaron said, grabbing a beer for himself.

“How was your recording session?”

“Honestly? It was so much fun,” Aaron said, a happy grin on his face. “It really was, it was like “this is what I’m good at” again. Oh, I loved it, Robert.”

“It’s so nice to see you happy,” Robert said. Apart from their engagement it had been quite a stressful month, with Diane’s death and Alex’s baby coming so early. Robert stroked his face lovingly and Aaron stopped smiling, the mood changing. Aaron breathed heavily, his eyes darting to Roberts lips and back up, gazing into Robert’s eyes. Robert kissed him, deeper than before, and before Robert knew it, Aaron had him pushed up against the kitchen wall. Robert felt a thrill, feeling those muscles of Aaron’s putting him exactly where he wanted him.

“I don’t think we’ve celebrated properly yet,” Aaron murmured, unzipping his hoodie, throwing it to the floor and letting Robert simply gaze at his forearms, muscled, perfect and Robert sighed with want.

“No, I don’t think we have,” Robert agreed, kissing him fervently.
Chapter 39

Aaron had had a late start on Saturday, which meant Robert had a day off and no Aaron to keep him company. The press had gone mad for a few days during the start of the week, but it had tailed off much quicker than Robert anticipated. Clearly bad news sold more than good, which shouldn’t surprise him. Though Aaron’s agent was still getting calls about the first joint interview, which neither of them were all that keen for.

Robert managed to waste a few hours dozing in bed, catching up on some TV he’d missed and generally doing nothing. Then realised he missed Aaron, and thought sod it. He called Aaron’s driver (the number was kept on the fridge and Aaron had always said he could use it if he needed to) because Robert didn’t really fancy a taxi. Or more honestly, didn’t fancy being questioned by the taxi driver. He told the driver to take him to Aaron’s recording studio, hoping both that he’d be able to get in, and that Aaron wouldn’t mind.

It didn’t actually take much to bluff his way in, Robert’s face had now become familiar thanks to their engagement. Robert clenched his left hand into a fist for a moment, feeling the hard solid shape of his engagement ring, reassuring against his skin.

He bumped into Alex, who was on the phone, sighing. She flashed him a smile, before hanging up. “My mother,” she said in explanation. “Having differences of opinion with my baby, apparently.” She rolled her eyes good naturedly.

“Why aren’t you recording?” Robert asked.

“They’re playing the music,” Alex said. “They don’t need my vocals at the moment. Why’re you here?”

“Thought I’d sneak in and watch,” Robert said, smiling.

“Aaron’s in room 2A,” Alex said, waving her hand in the vague direction of the room.

“Thanks.” Robert followed her directions, passing a couple of people who didn’t even spare him a second glance. Robert opened the door after knocking once, seeing the mixing board and a man with headphones on who didn’t even spare him any attention at all. Robert looked through the glass, it was obviously a sound proof room as Adam and Aaron were playing their guitars, clearly in the middle of a track.

The guy sensed Robert there after a few seconds, because he turned around and said “Who… oh.” He sighed with recognition and took his headphones off.

“We’re just getting somewhere,” the technician said, clearly exasperated and loathe to interrupt them.
“No, I’m not here to…” Robert started. “He doesn’t have to know I’m here.”

“Mm,” he grunted, apparently unconvinced. He did begrudgingly hand Robert a pair of headphones though. Robert put them on and just listened to Aaron playing his guitar. It was the instrumental, clearly the vocals would come later, but God, Robert loved listening to Aaron play. He rarely played like this at home, he’d usually do a few bars, and then get embarrassed by Robert listening. Which was so ironic and stupid considering how many people he usually played in front of. Aaron said it was such single minded attention that bothered him. Though Robert did always enjoy it when he caught Aaron singing in the kitchen, or in the shower, he had a gorgeous voice, obviously. Wouldn’t have made his fortune if he didn’t.

The track ended and Aaron looked through the glass and saw Robert. “Adam if you can do your solo for *Future Nightmares,*” the tech said, as Aaron obviously was leaving to talk to Robert. Robert took his headphones off and smiled at Aaron.

“Is everything okay?” Aaron asked.

“Fine,” Robert said. “Just wanted to see you in action, that’s all.” Aaron smiled, kissing him briefly as Adam started to play.

“If you’d said, you could have come with me this morning,” Aaron said.

“I didn’t want to get in the way,” Robert said.

“Huh!” the technician said pointedly. Aaron glared.

“I should go,” Robert said.

“Ignore him,” Aaron replied shortly. “Look, you can stay, I don’t mind. I just… kind of get nervous when I know you’re watching.” Aaron shifted uncomfortably.

“That makes no sense,” Robert said. “You perform for thousands, how does…”

“Because your opinion matters more,” Aaron said. “You know how much I put into my lyrics, you know how much of me ends up there. But if you want to stay…”

“Are you sure?” Robert asked, recognising that Aaron was being open and vulnerable with him. The trust he was showing. Aaron nodded once.

“Yeah, then I’ll take you out for dinner,” Aaron said. “Promise.” Robert kissed him soft and sweet, stroking his face gently.

“You’re amazing,” Robert whispered.

“Yeah, yeah, can you two stop me from feeling crap about how I can’t get a man to hang around,” Alex said, coming in. She smiled at Robert and gave Aaron a pat on the shoulder. “So, Robert, I couldn’t get any information from Aaron, when roughly are you two planning your wedding?”

“I er…” Robert said. “We haven’t thought about it much.”

“Soon, though,” Aaron said, trying to stop the smile threatening to break out.

“I hate to break the conversation, but I need you two,” the guy said, pointing to Alex and Aaron. “To do some work. And I need you,” he pointed at Robert. “To shut up and sit down.” Robert raised his eyebrows but said nothing, doing as he said. Aaron winking at him as he went back into the studio
“Do you have any idea how hot you are when you’re singing?” Robert breathed into Aaron’s neck later that night as they were crashing through the door of their flat. Robert’s hands were everywhere and Aaron felt so wanted, deliciously so.

“If I’d have known it had this effect on you, I’d…” Aaron teased, cutting off when he groaned as Robert’s teeth grazed against his neck, the want rolling through him. “Wait, wait,” Aaron said quickly, pushing Robert away. “Just stop for a minute.” Robert backed away instantly, and if it were possible, Aaron fell in love with him even more in that moment. Aaron put Robert’s hand on his own waist and Robert held him, smiling softly.

“I’ve been thinking about us getting married,” Aaron said.

“You’ve not… changed your…”

“Mind, no,” Aaron said, smiling at the relief on his face. “But I’ve been thinking about when. And I… I really want to be married to you before I go on tour.”

“Why?” Robert asked. “I’m not against that, but… why? Worried I’m not going to stick around?”

“I want to be committed to you,” Aaron said. “It’s going to be so hard, being away from you for that long. And I’m only doing it because I love being on tour, Robert. I love performing and singing. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t leave.”

“I know,” Robert said, fingers gently caressing Aaron’s waist through his clothes. “But I’d be here, married or not.” Aaron sighed, disappointed. “I don’t need a piece of paper to wait for you, Aaron.”

“Yeah, I know that,” Aaron said, biting down on his bottom lip. “Do I need an excuse in wanting to spend an extra few months married to you? Rather than just… not being married?”

“No, you don’t need an excuse,” Robert said smiling. “I’d like that too. Very much. But it won’t change anything, you know? I’ll still love you, I’ll still be here.”

“I know,” Aaron said.

“When do you leave?”

“We’ve got a few months,” Aaron said. “Need to finish the album, then the promotion for it. So there’s no rush, but… I feel like I want to be married to you, Robert.” Robert smiled a beautiful smile that took Aaron’s breath away. Sometimes when this gorgeous man looked at him, Aaron couldn’t believe he’d got this lucky. Surely it shouldn’t be this easy, finding someone who loved him, not for the money or the celebrity, but loved him. Robert stroked his face gently, his large hands soft on his face, the friction against his stubble feeling wonderful.

“We’ll start planning,” Robert agreed. “I don’t want a big wedding, though. I don’t need it. I want Vic there. Maybe Andy and Katie depending on how hostilities are at that point.” Aaron smiled.

“I want Alex and Adam there,” Aaron said. “And mum. I should be nice to her after everything.” Robert smiled. “But right now, I want you in bed,” Aaron said, changing the subject.

He needed to feel wanted and desired, and no one was better at that than Robert. Robert kissed his jaw, sensing Aaron’s need. He kissed behind Aaron’s ear softly and murmured, “how do you want me tonight?”
“Make me beg for it,” Aaron whispered, feeling Robert’s fingers already undoing his belt. God, Robert’s hands were so talented and Aaron tipped his head back as he just let himself feel this amazing man.
Chapter 40

“Do you think I’m attractive?”

“Er…” Alex looked at her phone, wondering if Robert had called the wrong number. “No, it’s no good, I’m going to need more of an explanation that that.”

“I need help,” Robert said.

“Not arguing that.”

“I need to go shopping for my wedding suit,” Robert said. “And I need an objective opinion, because it matters. And I don’t actually have anyone,” he reluctantly admitted. “So I wondered if…”

“You want me to come shopping with you,” Alex said.

“Er… yeah,” Robert said.

“Next time try saying that,” she said. “Course I will. When?”

“Tomorrow?”

“I’ll have Matilda with me, but yeah, that works.”

“Great,” Robert said. “Thank you for this, Alex.”

“No problem.”

“I want honest opinions,” Robert said as she sat down at the back of the shop, Matilda on her lap. “I want Aaron to like what I wear.”

“Why don’t you wear nothing, that seems to be his preference,” Alex said with a glint in her eye.

“Alex…” Robert almost growled. Matilda’s eyes popped open, and she looked at Robert with wide gorgeous blue eyes. Robert ruffled her sparse blonde hair and she gave him a gummy smile.

“She likes you,” Alex said, shifting Matilda in her arms. “Now hurry up and try on something, so I can give my stellar opinion.” Robert took the black suit into the changing room, feeling rather grateful that she was here with him.

They were in a rather exclusive shop, and they had a back room entirely to themselves. It meant that photographers wouldn’t stick their noses in. The man who owned the shop was in his middle sixties and it was clear he had no idea why Alex or Robert’s face would be in the magazines, and that he couldn’t care less. Which all worked to Robert’s advantage.

“It’s fine,” Alex said to Robert as he came out of the changing room in a black suit.

“Just fine?” Robert asked. “I want more than fine.”
“Well keep trying them on, then.”

“Should just have trusted my own judgement,” Robert muttered under his breath, though he continued going through them.

“That one,” Alex said a while later, Robert appearing in a blue suit.

“Yeah?”

“Yes,” she said. “You look great.”

“Why am I nervous?” Robert asked, smoothing the jacket down. “It’s just a suit.”

“It’s good,” Alex said, smiling at him. “Means it matters.”

“Thanks for this.”

“Have you seen Aaron in a suit?” Alex asked curiously.

“Er… yeah, once,” Robert said. “but it was for Diane’s funeral, so… yeah, I’d like to forget that one.” Alex smiled sadly, Robert's hands continuing to fiddle with the buttons on the jacket.

Robert saved the working copy on his computer before answering the door. The person on the other side was not who he expected.

“Chas, Hi,” Robert said, moving aside to let her in. “Aaron’s not here.” He didn’t actually know Chas knew where they were living now, so Aaron must have confided in her. That was something, for the fraught relationship between those two anyway.

“Where is he?”

“Working.”

“It’s three in the afternoon on a Wednesday,” Chas said. “Why aren’t you working?”

“I am,” Robert said, waving in the direction of his laptop, half empty coffee cups and a pile of notes, and it must have been obvious, because Chas didn’t bite back. “What can I do for you?”

“Are you really marrying him?” Chas asked.

“Yes,” Robert said. He didn’t want to argue with her. He planned to have her as his mother in law for a long time to come, so creating a pointless argument wasn’t going to be a good move. “And soon.”

“Oh?”

“Aaron wants to do it before he goes on tour,” Robert said. “And so do I, if I’m honest.”

“That’s… quick.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what Aaron’s lawyers said,” Robert said. Chas frowned at him. “I er… picked up Aaron’s phone by accident. Got several earfuls of exactly what they think of me before they realised who they were talking to.” Chas’s eyes lit up. “Gold digger, clearly out for a big pay check.
And worse. They should know better than trying to shout Aaron down. He’s too stubborn, when is shouting ever going to change his mind about anything?” Chas let out a quiet laugh.

“You know him, I’ll say that,” she said.

“What do you want?” Robert asked quietly.

“I just want to know he’s okay,” Chas said. “I hate the way things are.”

“They’re better,” Robert reminded her.

“Yeah, I guess,” Chas said. “He does call now. He doesn’t avoid all my phone calls, and we’re at a… status quo I guess. But I want my son back, I want…”

“He will forgive you,” Robert said. “Give him time.”

“I don’t have time!” Chas shouted. “Because once you’re married, that’ll be it. He won’t need me! I’ll never get my boy back, because he won’t need me any more!”

“He doesn’t need you now,” Robert said. Chas looked like she wanted to slap him, it was clear the impulse crossed her mind. “No, I don’t mean…” Robert sighed. “Aaron doesn’t actually need anyone. He’s in a position that he can rely on himself if it came down to it. Everyone in his life is there because Aaron wants them, and I am including me in that. He doesn’t need me, he wants me.”

“Get to your point,” Chas said sharply.

“How did you know we lived here?” Robert asked. “Last time you came to see Aaron, you turned up at his house an hour south of London. You’ve never been here.”

“Aaron told me,” she said.

“Exactly,” Robert said. “He isn’t shutting you out, Chas. But you know as well as I do that you can’t push him.”

“I looked for him,” she said, looking at her hands. “When he ran away years ago, I looked. Every time an unidentified male turned up in the morgue, I got a call from the police, asking me to come and identify the body. I didn’t do nothing, Robert. Do you know what that’s like? Waiting for the call every day for three years, thinking… maybe this time it’ll be it. Maybe this time will be when Aaron turns up dead and I have to bury my son.”

“Chas…”

“I had no idea where he was.”

“I don’t know what to say to you,” Robert said into the awkward silence.

“I thought he was better off,” she continued. “I was so young when I had him that I genuinely thought he was better off with his dad. But I… when Aaron told me he was violent, I…” Chas shook her head.

“Do you want a cup of tea?” Robert asked, extending the olive branch. She smiled a genuine smile and nodded.
Aaron had to do a double take when he opened the door to their flat. Robert was sat on the sofa, laughing with Chas. Laughing. “Er… hi?” he said to the room at large.

“Hiya love,” Chas said, smiling at Aaron.

“There’s no bloodshed?” he asked hesitantly, looking between them.

“I need to impress my mother in law,” Robert said, getting up and kissing Aaron rather chastely because of the company. “I’ve finished the interview if you want to give it a read through?”

“Sure,” Aaron said. They’d agreed that Robert would write an interview, the first interview they’d released since they’d become engaged. Mostly it was Robert making stuff up that wouldn’t be that offensive, and that would keep Aaron’s fans happy, not to mention Robert's boss. And it was going to hint at their upcoming wedding too, as the date was approaching rather quickly. Though of course the press didn’t know that.

“What do you want, mum?” Aaron asked, grabbing a beer from the fridge. He didn’t speak unkindly and she smiled.

“Just wanted to see you,” she said.

“Yorkshire’s a long way away for you just to “pop in”” Aaron said.

“I miss you,” she said. “And I’m looking for a mother of the groom outfit too, I wanted to do some “proper” shopping.” Aaron smiled at that. He sometimes held a bit of hostility towards his mum, but right now it was good to see her.

“Do you want to go out for dinner?” Aaron asked.

“I’d love to,” Chas said. They both looked at Robert expectantly.

“I can’t,” Robert said with regret. Anything to smooth the way between Aaron and Chas was good. He’d got some new perspective since Diane had died, and life was sometimes too short. “I’ve got to get this work done, I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Aaron said. “I’m going to call and make a reservation. Want to meet me at the restaurant?” Chas nodded, more than eagerly, happy to build bridges. Chas hugged him and left, leaving Robert and Aaron alone. Robert kissed him a little deeper this time.

“Hey, you listened to the demo yet?” Aaron asked, enthusiastically.

“Yeah,” Robert said, pausing to kiss Aaron. “I have, it’s great.”

“Are you saying that from a personal perspective or a professional?” Aaron asked with a grin.

“Both,” Robert said. “I love it. Actually, until your mum turned up I was playing it on repeat.” Aaron grinned.

“Your opinion is the only one that matters,” Aaron said, eyes going soft and Robert couldn't resist from kissing him again.

“Well, that and the few million fans who you need to buy it,” Robert said, making Aaron shrug. They both turned as Robert’s laptop binged, clearly sending him a message which was most likely from the office.

“I want a shower before I go out, I’ll see you later,” Aaron said as Robert resumed his place on the
Aaron came back late, waking Robert as he crawled into bed. “…mm…” Robert murmured, wrapping his body around Aaron, then shivering. “You’re cold…”

“Sorry,” Aaron whispered. “You good?” Robert kissed into his neck, feeling Aaron’s shudder under his lips.

“Am now.”
Aaron was working hard, in order to give the new album and single release all the promo necessary, and to fulfill his contract with his management team. Robert barely saw him, and hadn’t actually realised how much work Aaron would have to do. Last time Aaron was working this hard on a new music release, they’d only just started their relationship, and honestly, it was more like sex with feelings, rather than something they knew was going to be permanent. So Robert hadn’t realised how completely wiped out and exhausted Aaron was, working all the time. The way they were going Robert would be lucky to spend any time with Aaron before their wedding day at all.

So when Aaron came home the right side of nine in the evening, Robert wanted to take advantage of it. Aaron had dark circles under his eyes and looked knackered, his shoulders slumped, looking done in.

“I’m going to run you a bath,” Robert said in a tone that wasn’t going to take no for an answer. “You need to relax.” It said something that Aaron didn’t argue with him, just grabbed a beer from the fridge while Robert turned the taps on. It had been quite some time since he’d shared either a shower or a bath with Aaron, and he wanted to make the most of it.

Aaron appeared at the door of the bathroom, and Robert put his hands on his shoulders, waiting for the nod before he started to undress him slowly, piece by piece.

“I’m sorry I’m such lousy company lately,” Aaron said, Robert only just able to catch his words over the sound of running water.

“You’re working,” Robert said softly. “I understand. Though I am wondering how you ever found the energy to chase after me last time you had an album release.”

“Really good sex,” Aaron said, lips tilting up into a smile. “Plus I didn’t used to sleep in those days. I usually can sleep with you. I’ve gotten used to having a full nights rest.” Robert smiled at him, Aaron’s hands getting interested and starting stripping Robert of his clothes now too. When they were both naked, Robert kissed his gently, reassuringly and then they got in the bath, Aaron turning the taps off.

“Oh, that’s better,” Aaron sighed, the hot water already relaxing him. This large bath tub was absolutely a perk of Aaron’s wealth, because the pair of them wouldn’t fit in a standard tub, but like this it felt so perfect. Robert’s hands started wandering and he started trying to massage the tension out of Aaron’s thighs. It wasn’t sexual, it was just comforting and relaxing and Aaron groaned as Robert’s thumb ran along his muscle.

“One day you’re going to have to tell me how you learnt this,” Aaron said. “You do this so well.”

“I had a flatmate,” Robert said. “I was about twenty and she was learning to be a masseuse. She needed the practise.”
“Oh, no, there’s more to it than that,” Aaron said, his toes nudging Robert between his thighs, making him gasp. “You can tell me the whole story, if you like.” Robert smiled, thinking about it.

“It doesn’t show me in a good light,” he warned, still running his palms over Aaron’s legs.

“You’ve got me, I’m not going to run,” Aaron said, reaching to squeeze Roberts hand. “And I’ve got to admit, now I’m curious.” Robert smiled slightly, continuing to work on Aaron’s thigh.

“I had a flat mate, that’s true.”

“You slept with her,” Aaron said, cutting to the chase.

“Yeah,” Robert said. “And then her boyfriend.”

Aaron looked at him, and Robert could feel his face flushing. He wasn’t proud of himself and his behaviour back then. “I was struggling to work out who I was, how I was, and… I should not have done it.”

“Was he the first guy you…”

“Yeah,” Robert said briefly. “I didn’t plan it, I just… It wouldn’t have happened if we hadn’t had the house to ourselves, I don’t think I’d ever have gone looking. I didn’t want to be gay, and I liked women, so… it happened.”

“Keep going,” Aaron said softly. Robert dropped Aaron’s thigh and leant back against the edge of the bathtub, head rolling and staring into space. Aaron took his feet and rubbed slowly, Robert appreciating the comfort.

“I just… wanted,” Robert said. "And I wasn’t thinking that I shouldn’t be doing this, I didn’t have my fathers voice in my head for once, telling me it was dirty or wrong, and… he was fit, so I let it happen.”

“Did you like it?” Aaron asked, filling in the silence Robert had let overtake them.

“Yeah,” Robert said. “It was… a little bit frightening, but so good. Which really put me in a mess, because it wasn’t like I’d been lying to myself… I was attracted to women, I was never pretending and… yeah, took a while to realise what I was.”

“Do you miss it?” Aaron asked quietly. “Physically, I mean. Do you miss sex with a woman?”

“No,” Robert said in surprise. That hadn’t been what he’d expected Aaron to say at all. “Why would I?”

“I just…”

“Let me put it this way,” Robert said. “Do you miss having sex with other men?”

“No!” Aaron said. “Of course I don’t!”

“It’s no different,” Robert said. “It really isn’t.”

“No?” Aaron asked softly.

“No,” Robert said. “I’ve never cheated on you. I would not marry you if I didn’t think you were everything I need.” Aaron smiled gently at him.
“I don’t want you to wake up one day and think about… things you’re missing,” Aaron said. Robert shifted in the water and pressed against Aaron’s chest, looming above him and Aaron smiled.

“How fit was this guy?” Aaron asked, his hand reaching up for Robert, cupping his jaw. “Your first.”

“Not as fit as you,” Robert said.

“Good,” Aaron said, leaning up for a heated kiss.

“What about you?” Robert asked, laying back in the bath. Then he realised what he’d said, Aaron flinching briefly. “I… God, sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Aaron said lightly. “I was seventeen.” Then he smiled broadly. “He was twenty two.”

“Oh?”

“Rugby player,” Aaron said. “I was… frightened, for obvious reasons in my history.”

“Aaron…”

“It’s okay,” he said. “I… I think he could tell how nervous I was, because he was very careful. And it was good. Very good.”

“Watch it, I’ll get jealous,” Robert said lightly, making Aaron smile.

“I’d been… I felt something for boys before, but I didn’t want to because I couldn’t be that way after what happened to me. But after sleeping with this guy, it was like it all slotted into place in my head. Because it felt so good, it was like “that’s it.” And I… yeah.” Aaron raised his eyebrows for a moment.

“Do you miss it?” Robert asked.

“What?”

“Going out on the pull every night,” Robert said. “The trappings of fame, being able to just… let loose and have fun.”

“No,” Aaron said. “I enjoy sex, I always have, but… it takes a bit of trust from me, so there was always that… anticipation I guess. I did enjoy having one night stands all over Europe.” Robert snorted. “I enjoy having you to come home to a lot more.” They moved almost as one, the water lapping around them as Aaron kissed him, lips caressing his own beautifully. Robert looked into his hazed eyes and instinctively knew they weren’t going to make it to their bed.

“Where’s Aaron?” Alex asked a few days later. She was out of breath and looking over Robert’s shoulder into the flat hopefully, Matilda in her arms blinking at Robert.

“He’s on a boys night out,” Robert said, rolling his eyes. “He’s out drinking with Adam,” he elaborated at Alex’s blank look.

“Robert, I need a massive favour.”

“No,” Robert said firmly, seeing where this was going and put a hand across the door frame, stopping Alex coming into the flat. “I can’t babysit, I’m busy. I’m attempting to get my work done, so I can take a very brief honeymoon with Aaron. You know, my future husband.”
“Please,” Alex said, pushing past Robert and coming in. “She’s fed, she’s changed all she needs is someone to keep an eye on her while she sleeps, and while I try to convince my super Catholic mother that I can handle being a single mother.”

“All right,” Robert said, relenting after a moment. “For one hour.”

“Thank you,” Alex said sincerely. “I mean it, thank you.”

“Mm,” Robert grumbled, though his lips were twitching.

“Call if she needs anything,” Alex said.

“I will,” Robert said, taking Matilda from Alex’s arms. “Good luck with your mother.” Alex rolled her eyes and Robert laughed.

Aaron came home, and stood frozen, looking at the scene in front of him. Robert was sat on the sofa, laptop in his lap, concentration on his face as he was clearly working. What stopped Aaron was seeing the baby on Robert’s shoulder, snuggling into his neck. Robert had a hand on Matilda’s back to make sure she didn’t fall, his palm gently soothing her, almost absentmindedly. It looked so right, so wonderful that it stopped Aaron dead for a moment.

“Sh, sh,” Robert whispered as Matilda mewedled at him. “I’ve got you.”

“Hi,” Aaron said, still looking at the scene in front of him. Robert looked up and smiled at him, before closing his laptop.

“Good night?” Robert asked, Aaron nodding at him.

“Can I?” Aaron asked, looking at the baby.

“Are you drunk?”

“No.” Aaron’s eyes were clear and his words weren’t slurring, so Robert nodded, gently handing the baby over, Aaron smiling.

“Hi,” Aaron said, kissing him gently before turning his attention to the baby. “Has uncle Robert been nice to you?”

“Uncle Robert is annoyed because Alex was only going to be an hour three hours ago,” Robert grumbled, though it was obvious he didn’t mean it.

“Where is she?” Aaron asked, a hand cradling Matilda’s head.

“Something to do with her mother,” Robert said.

“What?” Aaron asked, face paling.


“Alex’ll probably be crying in some corner somewhere,” Aaron said. “She does NOT get on with her mother.”

“What is it with your band, is disagreeing with mothers contagious?” Robert asked as Aaron fished
his phone out of his pocket.

“Alex, are you all right?” Aaron said. Robert watched as they had a short conversation, then Aaron hung up. “Your mummy will be here in ten minutes,” he said lightly. “Promise.”

“I enjoyed looking after her,” Robert said, closing his laptop. “She’s a good baby.”

“Robert, I…”

“Don’t worry,” Robert said. “I know you’re not ready for kids. I’m not getting broody, so you don’t have to panic.”

“I’m not saying no,” Aaron said. “I just… I’m not ready for this. I…”

“Aaron, it’s fine, I wasn’t…” he sighed. “It’s fine.”

“Good,” Aaron said, taking Robert at his word.

“I got offered a new job today,” Robert said, sitting on the sofa as Aaron came over, Matilda asleep in his arms.

“Oh?”

“Editor of Now magazine.”

“That’s…”

“Trashy gossip, yeah I know,” Robert said. “But I’d edit the whole thing, and I… can’t decide if I should take it or not.”

“Is it more money?”

“Is that the first thing you ask?” Robert said with amusement.

“Is it less hours?” Aaron asked, voice softer.

“No, probably be more,” Robert said. “But I… I’m not an idiot, I know why I’m being offered it.”


“Well, they’re not going to give it to me and hope I’ll be an editor like anyone else,” Robert said. “They want the gossip for their magazine, and I…”

“You don’t want to take it, because you don’t think you’ve earned it,” Aaron said, essentially boiling down to the problem.

“I’ve worked hard to get where I am,” Robert said. “And taking a new job, a step up because of who I’m marrying… I don’t know, it feels wrong.”

“You’ll make the right decision,” Aaron said, tucking his head into Robert’s neck, Robert’s hands coming around to hold him.

“You know that how?” Robert asked.

“Because you’ll make what’s right for you,” Aaron said tiredly.

“For us,” Robert said and Aaron smiled into his fiance's arms.
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

I know it's been a while, certainly for me! Hope people are still interested in reading this, enjoy!

Robert thought about it carefully, then declined the editorship offer from the magazine. He wanted to take it, badly, but he wanted it on his own merits. Marrying Aaron didn’t make him any more or less competent at his job, though it really hurt him to turn it down. Especially with Aaron working all the time, though their wedding day was soon coming. This Saturday actually. Robert was excited, nervous and almost… thrilled by the coming day. Aaron had a signing on Friday afternoon for their newly released album (proving just as successful as the last two), and then he was free. And they were going to a villa on the south of France for a week for their honeymoon.

Aaron had booked a large private villa with it’s own pool, all for the two of them. It was private enough that they weren’t going to have to worry about photographers, the paparazzi or anything else. Robert was looking forward to it immensely. He’d not exactly got used to the press snapping photos of him, but he was suffering a reluctant acceptance that he’d have to live with it. But on their honeymoon? No. He didn’t want to have to deal with that one.

He knew he shouldn’t, Robert knew that. But he wanted to see Aaron in his element, and he remembered the last time he’d been to a record signing of Aaron’s… well, it hadn’t gone too badly had it? He used Aaron’s driver, and parked opposite, seeing the queue of fans outside. There was such a buzz in the atmosphere and Robert smiled to himself. He loved thinking that Aaron's talent was recognised like this. That he was this successful. Some critics hadn’t liked *Just the Beginning*, but it hadn’t mattered. It had sold just as well as the last album, the fans enjoying the new “uplifting” sound of the music. Some had speculated that it was because of Aaron’s relationship with Robert, being in a happy place in his life, which made Robert almost glow at the attention. Even if it wasn’t true about the music, it was true that they were both happy within their relationship.

“Thanks,” Robert said to the driver, getting out of the car and quickly striding towards the shop. He ignored the ripple of camera phones moving to point at him, hoping to walk past quickly. He was stopped by security on the door, but it didn’t take him long to talk his way through them. A special talent of his, and he walked through to see Aaron bent over an album sleeve. He looked up, frowned, then broke into a slight smile, the lines on his forehead easing.

“Everything okay?”

“Mm,” Robert said. “Wanted to see you.”

“I’m working,” Aaron said, a hint of criticism in his voice.

“I won’t take long,” Robert said quickly. “I want to take you out for dinner tonight if you’ve got the time?” Aaron looked at him sharply, and Robert knew Aaron was reading him like a book. The excitement for tomorrow, the slight nervous anticipation. Their wedding day, so important to them both.

“Yeah,” Aaron said. “Wherever you pick, leave me a text.” His eyes went behind Robert, pointing
out the crowd and Robert nodded. Then thought to hell with it. He leaned across the table and gave Aaron a brief kiss on the cheek. He wondered if Aaron would be annoyed with him, the affection so in public, but he sent him a quick wink, smiling before turning to the next fan. Alex smiled at him too, before Robert left, ignoring the many clicks of phones flashed in his direction. Once back in the car, he booked a Chinese restaurant they both liked, a private booth at the back. Mm, he’d rather enjoy rubbing his foot up Aaron’s leg while no one was any the wiser.

“So why the sudden need to treat us to dinner?” Aaron asked in the taxi ride home that night. “Anything to stop Adam taking me out to all kinds of disreputable clubs on my last night of freedom?”

“That hadn’t occurred to me,” Robert said honestly, resting on the seat, and looking at Aaron softly. “I don’t think you’d enjoy Adam’s kind of “stag night” clubs, do you?”

“Ha ha,” Aaron said sarcastically.

“Do you want to go out with Adam?” Robert suddenly asked. “I don’t want to take anything from you, it’s still early. You could…”

“No,” Aaron said. “I don’t want to go out with Adam. I’m more than happy with you.”

Robert frowned. “I don’t think that’s entirely flattering.” Aaron laughed, that easy, almost under his breath laugh that Robert still hadn’t got used to as the car drew up outside their flat. The sound that made it so clear that Aaron was happy and content.

“I am happy with you,” Aaron said, this time seriously. “I didn’t think… I’d ever actually get married. Not the marrying kind.” Robert laced his fingers with Aaron’s.

“But?” Robert pressed.

“But, I didn’t think I’d meet someone like you either,” Aaron said. He leaned across the back of the seat and kissed Robert softly.

“I’m sorry for ruining your plan,” Robert said, words whispered across Aaron’s lips.

“I’m not.” Aaron kissed him again. “Come on, I need some sleep.” They paid the driver and went upstairs, both of them almost giddy with looking forward to tomorrow.

It was not a restful night. Aaron turned over for the fiftieth time, kicking Robert in the process. Which he didn’t care about, because he wasn’t sleeping either.

“I can’t sleep,” Aaron whispered, waiting to see if Robert was awake.

“Is this because…?” Robert asked.

“I’m excited,” Aaron said. “I’ve never felt like this before.” Robert smiled, his hands coming around Aaron’s body and holding him close.

“I’m excited too,” Robert said. Then, almost marvelling at it. “I’m marrying you tomorrow.”


“I’d have never thought we’d get here,” Robert said. “Our wedding day.”
“What, thought I’d run out on you?” Aaron teased.

“Yes,” Robert said seriously. “Because everyone else does.”

“Robert…”

“I’ve never had anyone really stick around,” Robert said. “My parents are dead, my step mum’s dead. Every relationship I’ve ever had. I lose everyone and I see Vic much less than I should, and… you’re still here. I didn’t expect that.”

“Robert, I’m always going to be here,” Aaron said. “I’m not saying it’s going to be easy, I know it won’t be. But I think… I’m better with you than without you and… God, that sounds stupid and…”

“Hey, come here,” Robert said, kissing him. “It’s okay.” They spent a lot of time pressing gentle kisses to each other’s skin, comforting in the darkness.

They hadn’t gone for the traditional thing. They spent a lot of nights apart due to Aaron’s touring, there was nothing romantic about them spending the night before their wedding separately. The next morning was… slightly odd. They both knew what today was and they were eager, but a little hesitant, expecting their relationship to change for the better from today. Moving around the kitchen for breakfast, they kept touching each other, tiny little grounding touches and small smiles.

Chas turned up stupidly early to whisk Aaron away, leaving Robert to get ready on his own. He didn’t mind, it gave him a little peace and quiet to adjust his suit, making sure it was right. He wanted every little thing perfect. It was with reluctance that he tugged his engagement ring off and put it in the box next to Aaron’s. He felt wrong without it, bare. But it would only be off for a few hours, if that.

Robert took half a shot of whisky to steady his nerves. How could he be so nervous??

Robert got out of his taxi outside the registry office, to be confronted with Alex, looking fabulous in a red dress, but she had a glum look on her face. “What’s wrong?” Robert asked instantly.

“Er… tiny snag,” she said, hoisting Matilda up in her arms. “This one managed to throw up all over uncle Aaron’s jacket, so we’re hunting down a replacement now.”

“That’s all?” Robert asked.

“Yes,” Alex said. “He just wants to look nice for you.”

“He could wear jeans and a hoodie and he’d look great,” Robert said. “I just… don’t want him having second thoughts, that’s all.”

“He won’t,” Alex said with a certainty that Robert found reassuring. “And you look great.”

“So do you,” Robert said. “And this one looks amazing,” Robert added, stroking Matilda’s foot lightly. She was in a very white lacy dress and looked perfect. She gave Robert a gummy smile.

“Right, shall we get on with it then?” Alex asked brightly.

Robert walked in, saw Aaron and stopped breathing for a moment. Aaron looked stunning. The suit was obviously tailored, much more fitted than whatever Aaron picked up usually. The white shirt showed his body off perfectly, skimming his skin, promising the muscles underneath. The muscles, the body Robert was intimately familiar with. Robert’s eyes followed the lines of him, before seeing his hand fiddling with his tie, blue, then snapping his eyes to Aaron’s face.

“I'm okay?” Aaron asked, chewing his bottom lip slightly. How couldn’t he see how gorgeous he was?

“You look…” Robert exhaled heavily. He put his hand in the center of Aaron's chest, smoothing down the fabric. “Wow.” Aaron grinned, clear he was a little relieved.

“You look so good too,” Aaron said. “For the record.”

Robert planted a gentle kiss on Aaron’s lips. “Ready?”
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

A short-ish chapter, because angst is coming! (I'm not splitting them up, don't worry.)
So I hope a small update is better than none. Enjoy!

Aaron felt overwhelmed when they exchanged their vows. They were pretty standard, nothing that they had written themselves. Aaron said he’d have felt too embarrassed in front of his mother, and Robert didn’t push. Aaron already said all the things he felt in his song lyrics, Robert didn’t need anything more. Aaron smiled, almost shyly as he slipped the ring onto Robert’s hand. It was amazing how such a simple move made him feel so much more committed to this man. Aaron hadn’t even thought that was possible.

Robert surely took Aaron’s hand and did the same motion, the cool ring slipping perfectly onto his hand. Aaron gripped Robert’s palm, unable to stop smiling, unable to stop looking at those beautiful blue eyes overwhelming with love, thinking how did he get this? And before Aaron knew it, Robert was kissing him, a little more chastely than normal, his lips warm and welcoming. And they were married.

They were at the reception, and bearing in mind that there weren’t that many people there, it felt full and happy and Aaron couldn’t stop smiling. Robert currently was talking to Vic, voice loud and carrying across the room as Aaron took a swig of his beer. He’d had one glass of champagne to celebrate the occasion, before switching to his usual pint.

“Hiya love,” Chas said, coming over to him. “Congratulations.”

“You almost sound like you mean that,” Aaron said, looking at her critically.

“I do,” Chas said. “I have never seen you look this happy.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever been this happy,” Aaron said. “I love him so much, and… yeah, here we are.”

“No reservations?” Chas asked. Aaron looked at her sharply. “No, I mean… just… no cold feet or anything?”

“No,” Aaron said. “I need him in my life, and… he is the only thing that makes me want to stay home and forget the tour.”

“When do you leave? Soon?” Chas asked.

“Yeah, soon,” Aaron said, a hint of disappointment in his voice. But he didn’t want to think about that. He wanted to think about one uninterrupted week in the south of France. Because that, he’d enjoy thoroughly.
Roberts face when they went into the villa was worth the price tag alone. Robert liked the finer things in life, Aaron was well aware of that. And he also knew that money could become a touchy subject with them, and probably would at certain points down the line. But if he couldn’t treat his new husband on their honeymoon, then was there any point in being as well off as he was?

“This is…”

“Nice?” Aaron supplied.

“Yeah,” Robert said, eyes going over the fully stocked kitchen, the pool visible outside the windows. At the moment the sun was just sinking below the horizon in the distance, and it did look amazing.

“You didn’t have to spend all this…”

“I wanted to,” Aaron said, reaching for Robert and grabbing him close by his hips. Their bodies were pressing everywhere and Robert’s eyes darkened with lust.

“Which way’s the bedroom?” Robert asked, kissing him.

“Spoil sport,” Aaron uttered, tilting his head so Robert could kiss his neck properly, gasping as his teeth nipped his skin. “I really hoped I’d have you in the pool.”

“Mm,” Robert said, stepping back so he could look Aaron up and down in a physical way that made Aaron feel so wanted. “I like the sound of that.”

The week flew by, and they barely left their villa. It was so nice to have such a slice of privacy and both of them enjoyed it immensely. But time wouldn’t wait for them, and it seemed to tick by double quick. Aaron had turned his phone off for the entirety of their holiday, just checking his messages every morning. But beyond that, they had all their time to themselves, and Robert hated it was soon ending.

On their last day, Aaron woke to hear Robert singing in the shower. He was out of key slightly and Aaron bit down on his pillow so he wouldn’t laugh. Then Aaron tuned his ear in, and he could hear that it was one of his songs. And he felt so warm and loved as Robert continued, the sound of his voice and running water almost washing over Aaron. He thought about moving, but decided against it, and in ten minutes a dripping wet Robert was back in the bedroom, rubbing his hair with a towel. Aaron sighed happily, he looked so good, and Aaron enjoyed a good few seconds staring at his husband.

“Are you getting back into bed, or what?” Aaron said, pushing the bed sheets down.

“You’re insatiable,” Robert said, sitting on the edge, kissing Aaron softly. “You married an old man, remember?”

“Believe that and you’ll believe anything,” Aaron grumbled.

“Breakfast?” Robert suggested. “Could go down to that boulangerie down the road and pick up some croissants.”

“You and your croissants,” Aaron said, amused. “Got to be careful or you’ll get out of shape.” He’d spoken teasingly, but Robert flinched and he realised what a stupid joke that was. “Sorry,” Aaron said. Robert shrugged, trying to brush it off. “Hey, I’m sorry,” he repeated.
“It’s all right.”

“Robert, I didn’t mean that,” Aaron said. “Honestly, I was just… sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Robert said, sounding more sincere this time. He kissed Aaron deeply until they’d both melted into it, the tension easing a little.

“I’ve been thinking,” Aaron said as Robert crawled back under the sheets, skin brushing against Aaron's a little. “I want to change my name,” Aaron said. Robert looked at him in some surprise. Out of all the things Aaron could come out with he hadn’t expected that.

“Wh… to mine?” Robert asked, looking a little star struck.

“No, I thought I’d go with Smith,” Aaron said sarcastically. “Of course yours.”

“But… why?” Robert asked.

“I… never really liked sharing my name with… my dad,” Aaron started. Robert looked like he was going to interrupt him but Aaron shook his head. He wanted to keep going. “But by the time I thought about changing it, realistically… When I was stable enough to be able to change it, the band started getting a bit of notoriety. And I felt that I couldn’t change it without giving a good reason, and I was hardly close with my mum either, so what would I change it to anyway? So… I put it off and ignored it.”

“But now…?” Robert asked.

“I want to change it. I’m not running from something this time, I’m running towards something instead. I want us to have that start, to share your name. If that’s okay with you.”

“If it’s okay?” Robert asked quietly. Aaron suddenly worried that he’d completely misread the situation, and this wasn’t something Robert wanted at all.

“Right, if you don’t want to, that’s fine, I was just… it was a thought, it doesn’t matter if you…” Aaron started rambling. Robert pressed the tiniest, softest kiss to his lips.

“I’d love it,” Robert said a hand carding through Aaron’s hair. “I’m not asking you to, but if you want to…”

“I do want to,” Aaron said. “A lot.”

“Your management will hate it,” Robert said, and Aaron shrugged, feeling so much more at ease now he knew Robert liked the idea.

“Yeah, well they’ll live with it,” Aaron said easily. “They’ll have to.”
Robert came home to an empty house. Aaron was currently doing the sound check at the O2, which meant for the first time pretty much, since coming back from their honeymoon, Robert had the flat completely to himself. A stark reminder of the next few months, how lonely he was going to be. He wasn’t sure if and how he’d be able to handle this separation. He knew Aaron was doing what he loved, and he’d never take that from him or even suggest it. But he was going to miss him so much. This was going to be much worse than when they’d first started dating. He’d become used to having Aaron in his life, waking up with him every day. He supposed he’d got a bit selfish, Robert had always known what Aaron’s life would be like. And lately Aaron had been home and settled much more than he ever expected. And now it was coming to an end.

Robert breathed in and out deeply, trying to settle himself. He’d lived alone for years, of course he could do it again. And things like Skype, it would feel like Aaron had never left him. Yeah, like hell it would.

Robert was coming to see Aaron perform, his last night in London before he’d leave for more shows in more cities. Robert was tempted to tell his own bosses he’d jack in the job and go with Aaron, but he knew he couldn’t. Or more realistically, shouldn’t, despite Aaron’s many attractions. He wouldn’t be happy, sitting at home, doing nothing but waiting for Aaron to come home, he knew that. And that was the thought he clung onto as the taxi dropped him off at the stage door. A few fans were hanging around, but Robert ignored them, ducking his head as he was let in, security obviously having been told about his arrival. It didn't take long to find Aaron.

“Hi,” Aaron said, kissing him in greeting.

“Good warm up?”

“It was all right,” Aaron said with a shrug. He looked much less enthusiastic than when he was normally performing, and Robert looked at him straight on, as if daring him to lie.

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t want to leave,” Aaron said. “I don’t want to leave you. Or leave home. I want to stay.”

“I know,” Robert said. “I don’t want you going anywhere either. But I know you, and I know you’d regret it if you stayed. Not to mention it’d cost you a million or two to cancel now,” he added lightly.

“Yeah, yeah,” Aaron grumbled. “Enjoy the show tonight, you’ve got a private box at the top. Almost to yourself, Adam’s mum’s here.”
“Oh?” Robert asked, a little surprised. “That’s an upgrade.”

“Last time we toured, you were just the guy I really wanted to sleep with,” Aaron said with a grin. “Now you’re my husband.”

“Say that again,” Robert quietly asked.

“What?” Aaron asked, feigning ignorance. “My husband.” He said the words lowly, voice vibrating with them and Robert sighed happily. It was still new, and felt so good to hear that commitment to each other. Aaron kissed him deeply and Robert put a hand on the small of his back, pulling him as close as possible, chest to chest, warmth, love, everything shared between them.

“Oi, Livesy!” They broke apart with a sigh. “You’re needed.”

“Yeah, give me a minute,” Aaron said.

“You haven’t told them about your name?” Robert asked, trying to pretend it didn’t matter.

“I have,” Aaron said. “Doesn’t mean they listen. I’ve worked with some of the crew for years, it’ll take more than a few days for it to sink in.” Aaron kissed him briefly. “It’ll be up on the bands twitter after the show, it’ll catch on.”

“Good,” Robert said. He kissed Aaron again, then all too soon, he was gone.

Robert found his seat, surprised at the great view. He was in a private box, but could see pretty much everything in the arena. He had certainly been upgraded since last time, and there was already a selection of drinks waiting for him. He grabbed a beer (didn’t want to get drunk on whisky quite this early in the evening) and watched as the venue started to fill up, the buzz of excitement in the air. Tickets to this show were hard to come by.

The room he was in clearly could seat about ten to fifteen people, but he was the only one here so far. A man walked in, middle forties maybe and clearly at home here. His eyes landed on Robert, and he recognised him. One of Messenger’s managers, the name escaping Robert for the moment.

“Hi, I don’t think we’ve officially met yet,” he said holding out his hand to Robert. “James Hume. I…”

“Manage the band, yeah,” Robert said. “Nice to meet you.” Though internally Robert was asking himself what this man wanted with him.

“Listen, Aaron’s been talking to us about his change of name,” James said. Ah. All slotting into place then.

“I am not going to get him to change his mind,” Robert said, firmly but not being loud about it. “It would be better from a PR standpoint…”

“No,” Robert said. “You should be grateful this is the only PR problem you’ve got at the moment. You know it could be worse. I report on people like Messenger, I know that it’s so rare to have them all clean and without any major brushes with the police, or anything else. It doesn’t matter to you. His name matters to him.”

“Right…” James said slowly. “And you didn’t push for it at all?”

“It was his decision,” Robert said. “And whatever name Aaron wants is his business. Not yours.
Change one name on all the websites and merchandise. Fans’ll catch on.” James looked at Robert with dislike. Robert didn’t care. “His last name doesn’t matter.”

“Why don’t you take his then?” James said.

“Because I don’t want to,” Robert said. The Sugden name mattered to him, more than he’d ever be able to admit. Aaron understood it a little, but no one ever would completely. It was also something he wouldn’t have asked Aaron about if he hadn’t suggested it first. “Aaron did.”

James said nothing and left, almost bumping in to two women coming in. “Oh!” the younger one said as James rushed past, before making a beeline straight for the champagne. Robert assumed the older woman was Adam’s mother, smiling easily as she came to say hello to Robert, a general hubbub of greeting.

“I’m Holly, Adam’s sister,” the blonde girl said, all smiles and sunshine.

“Hi,” Robert said. “I’m… Aaron’s husband.” It was new enough to give him that little thrill down his spine when he said the word. Especially to a stranger.

“Oh,” she said, deflated, looking him up and down obviously, stare grazing his body. “That’s a shame.” Robert smirked at her for a moment. He’d never do anything, but he couldn’t deny it gave his ego a nice boost to see someone looking at him so blatantly.


“Yes, it is new,” Robert admitted. “Though I think Aaron might be about to announce it tonight.” The thought made Robert waver slightly, because it wasn’t exactly a small audience to do it to. But it did, as Aaron rightly said, avoid the press and someone breaking the story. They did it on their own terms.

"Good luck," Moira said with an easy smile and Robert rolled his eyes.

They turned to the stage as the noise level suddenly ramped up and they got to enjoy the show.
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

I feel like I should add a warning for this chapter for domestic violence. But also, it isn't within Aaron and Robert's relationship, it's secondary characters, so I hope it's okay. That said, enjoy!

“I have to go,” Aaron whispered, kissing Robert gently to wake him up. Robert looked at Aaron, already dressed and packed, ready to leave, heart sinking.

“No,” Robert moaned, by instinct. He wanted Aaron to stay in their warm cosy bed, wrapped up together against the outside world.

“I'll see you in two weeks in Edinburgh,” Aaron said.

“I might have recovered from last night by then,” Robert said, making Aaron grin. They’d indulged in a long thrilling session of sex, both of their bodies sore in all sorts of pleasurable ways this morning. They hadn’t drifted off to sleep until about three a.m.

“I love you,” Aaron whispered, kissing him deeply.

“Love you more,” Robert replied. Aaron planted a gentle kiss on his lips, then grabbed his guitar case, a security guard already taking his suitcases out of the flat. Robert watched him leave, the door closing behind him with a kind of finality he hated. Instead of sinking into a morbid depression, he curled up in the bed sheets, breathing Aaron in and reliving some of the highlights from the night before.

“This song is dedicated to someone really special,” Aaron said. “He’s here tonight, somewhere up there,” pointing to the top of the arena. “This is for my husband.” The band started playing the intro to Coming Home, Robert's heart thumping almost painfully in his chest. There had been a gasp from the audience at large, then a few cheers, as Aaron had divulged the information that he was actually married now. It had felt wonderful. For everyone to know, for Aaron to be publicly admitting Robert was his alone.

Maybe it should have felt a little wrong, embarrassing in front of so many people. But it hadn’t, it had felt so right. And then he and Aaron had spent most of the night and morning reliving the highlights of their honeymoon. So, even though Aaron had left, Robert dozed with a smile on his face.

The first week of separation flew by. Robert was busy at work, releasing their first joint interview since getting married, an interview Aaron hadn’t seen, by the way. He’d told Robert “print whatever you want, just let me sleep for five more minutes.” So Robert had. It was fluff and waffle, nothing serious in there at all, besides the fact they planned to live in London for the foreseeable future, which was perfectly true. Robert had his hands full at work, and it wasn’t until Friday night that Robert felt Aaron’s loss acutely. They had been texting, they had tried to skype a few times, but Robert was either at work, or Aaron was busy with the press or actually on stage. It meant no more than snatched conversations, and Robert missed him. He called Aaron before he’d even left the
office on Friday, sitting in the back of a cab to take him back home.

“Hi,” Robert said when Aaron answered the phone.

“Hi,” Aaron said warmly. “Off work?”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “I miss you.”

“Yeah, I know,” Aaron said. “I miss you too.”

“Are you having fun?”

“Right now I’m on babysitting duties,” Aaron said. “Alex is doing a photoshoot, and it’s going to take an hour or two to get her hair and make up done. So Matilda is currently asleep in my arms.” His voice was soft, gentle and Robert almost melted into it. “She’s a good baby.”

“She is,” Robert agreed. Aaron saw a lot more of her than Robert did, but he knew Matilda didn’t create too much fuss. “Don’t you have childminders for her?”

“About four of them,” Aaron said, happily agreeing. “But she’s having some good old fashioned uncle time, aren’t you?”

“You sound happy,” Robert said.

“I am,” Aaron said. “God, the crowd last night in Manchester… it was amazing. It was so… it gave me such a buzz to feel that.”

“Good,” Robert said. “I’m so glad.”

“Are you?”

“I miss you,” Robert said. “The doesn’t mean I don’t want you to have the time of your life.”

“Thank you.” Then... “No, no, don’t do that!” Aaron hissed “Matilda, don’t… don’t…” the phone line got cut off and Robert assumed Matilda had pressed something on the phone. It made Robert smile to think of Aaron spending time with Alex’s daughter. Maybe one day...

“How’s she doing?” Alex asked, taking a (finally) sleeping baby from Aaron’s arms.

“She was perfect,” Aaron said. “Apart from hanging up on Robert for me.”

“Oh,” Alex said. “Sorry. I know you’ve been missing him lately.”

“It’s okay,” Aaron said. “I didn’t mind, and he won't either.”

“Aaron, are you getting broody?” Alex asked, watching him levelly.

Aaron snorted. “Me? Yeah, right, I don’t see that happening.”

“Mmhm,” Alex said in a tone that was thoroughly unconvinced, Matilda burying her head into Alex’s neck. “You ran that one by your husband?”

“Are you stirring trouble just because you can?” Aaron asked, both of them walking through the arena to their dressing rooms.

“Yes,” she said, determined. “I think you and Robert would be great parents.”
“I think you’re a few years early, and should keep your nose out,” Aaron grumbled, though Alex knew he didn’t mean it. She grinned widely at him.

“I know you miss him,” she said.

“Oh, and missing him means we need to add a baby into the mix, does it?” Aaron said. “The ink’s barely dry on our marriage certificate yet!”

“I didn’t get married at all,” Alex said with a shrug.

“How is Freddie?”

“Let’s not go there, shall we?” she asked brightly.

“Fine,” Aaron said. “Then mind your own business.”

“I’m going to remind you that if it wasn’t for me, you’d have never flown back to London for your cheeky one night stand that got you a husband in the first place,” Alex said. Aaron hugged her, mainly to shut her up.

The following Wednesday Robert had just finished a long satisfying conversation with Aaron when there was a knock on the door. He grabbed his wallet, thinking it would be the pizza he’d ordered, unable to be bothered cooking tonight. He opened the door and stopped, gripping hold of his wallet rather tight. Katie. Heavily pregnant, and obviously upset.

“What are you doing here?”

“Can I come in?” she asked, face down, blonde hair covering her face. Robert moved aside, letting her in to the flat, and then he saw it. Her left eye bruised, a cut through her eyebrow where she’d obviously been hit by someone. “God, what happened to you?”

“I… er… didn’t know where to go,” Katie said. I just… I couldn’t stay there. I got in my car and drove and… ended up here.”

“You’re quite a way from Yorkshire,” Robert said. “Let me have a look at that.” Katie winced as he pushed her hair away, tilting her chin up gently and he knew that was going to bruise terribly. In fact, she’d be lucky if it didn’t swell up completely shut.

“What happened?” Robert asked. “Has a doctor seen that?”

“No, I just… needed space, needed to get away,” she said. Robert looked and noticed the missing wedding ring.

“Did Andy do that?” She didn’t deny it and seemed to hunch into herself which was more than enough of an answer.

“Can I stay here for a few days?” she asked. “I er… don’t have the money for a hotel right now, and I can’t go back home. Not yet.”

“Er… yeah, okay,” Robert said. He could hardly kick a pregnant woman out could he? “I’m gone on Saturday night though, I’m meeting Aaron.”

“Fine,” she said with a sniff, taking her coat off and sitting on the sofa. There was another knock and
she looked up sharply.

“It’ll be my pizza,” Robert said, correctly guessing, and paying for it before turning back to Katie. “Want to share?” She smiled very weakly.

“Can I have a shower?” Katie asked, looking much more her normal self now that she’d had something to eat, and Robert nodded. He really couldn’t say no. He showed her through to the bathroom and showed her how the temperature worked.

She took her jumper off and Robert couldn’t help it, he gasped. Her entire right side was mottled with bruising. “I… oh no, I fell down the stairs,” she said quickly.

“Right,” Robert said, completely disbelieving her.

“No, I did.”

“God, doesn’t he realise you’re pregnant?”

“Robert, you try walking down the stairs when you can’t see your own feet and your center of gravity is about two foot forward that it used to be!” she snapped.

“Okay,” Robert said. “I’ll let it go. Have you called the police?” Katie just looked at him and Robert rolled his eyes. "Of course not."

"Stop telling me what to do," Katie said. "I just need somewhere to stay for a few days. Is that okay?"

"Of course it is."
Chapter 46

Aaron got off stage and turned his phone back on. There were no messages from Robert, but he was getting alerts from gossip websites mentioning Robert's name. He'd only signed up to them because of Robert’s job, he didn’t have too much interest in them himself. But he read “caught sight of an unnamed blonde woman in his flat. His husband, Aaron Sugden (formerly Livesy) is currently on tour.”

It was total trash, Aaron knew that, but there was an accompanying picture. It was pointed at the window of their flat from the street. Robert was smiling at the woman, who Aaron recognised. It was Katie. Katie was in their flat while Aaron was nowhere to be seen. Katie, Robert’s ex.
He called Robert, and it went straight through to answer phone. That was not reassuring in the slightest. Aaron wondered how worried he had to be.

“No, you’re not coming in,” Robert said firmly, an arm across the door frame. “She needs a break.”

“She’s my wife!” Andy snapped, clearly near desperation.

“Before you go any further, if you touch me, I’ll be doing what she should have done and call the police,” Robert said. “You’re not coming in. And I have security guards on speed dial, so don’t try it.”

“Robert! Just let me talk to her!”

“Andy, calm down,” Robert said. “She’s safe, she’s fine, the baby’s kicking so you don’t need to worry about that. Give her some time, and go and take an anger management course or something.”

“Robert, let me see her.”

“She doesn’t want to,” Robert said. Robert’s phone started ringing, and he guessed it would be Aaron, but he ignored it for the moment.

“She can’t stay here with you,” Andy almost spat.

“Andy, if I wanted to sleep with her, I wouldn’t have waited until she’s about to give birth to your baby,” Robert said quickly. “If I’d wanted her, you think I’d have wasted my time over the last couple of years with Aaron?” Andy breathed in deeply. “What’s happening at home?”

Andy paused, as if debating how much to tell him and Robert waited. “We’re losing money,” Andy said. “The farms failing and the baby’s coming which means… it’s all pilling up and I snapped. I shouldn’t. I know, I’m sorry.”

“Cool off,” Robert said. “She’ll still be here tomorrow.”

“It was an accident.”

“I’m sure,” Robert said, his tone not meaning it.

“Look… since Diane died things have got… I know I need help, but I can’t afford that kind of thing. It’s expensive and we can’t…”
“If you really want help, Aaron and I will cover it, don’t worry about the money,” Robert said. Andy looked at him as if waiting for the catch. “You’d do that?”

“You’re my brother, of course I would,” Robert said. “Get some help, send me the bill.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “Go on. She’ll be safe.”

“Were you always a good man?” Andy asked. “What happened to you?”

“I met a good man,” Robert said. “Who I now have to call, because I’m sure he’s seen the press outside.”

“Okay,” Andy said. Surprising both of them, he gave Robert a hug and then left, going down the stairs of the building.

“Is he gone?” Katie asked.

“Yeah,” Robert said.

“He’s your brother, I shouldn’t ask you to take sides.”

“I’m not taking sides,” Robert said. “But I am leaving on Saturday. Okay?”


“I need to talk to you,” Aaron said five minutes later when Robert called back. The wait hadn't made him calmer.

“I’m sure you’ve seen it online,” Robert said briefly. “Do you trust me?”

“Robert…”

“Do you?”

He hesitated for only the barest moment. “Yes,” Aaron said, meaning it.

“Then you don’t need to talk to me, you want to and that’s different.”

“I need to know what’s going on,” Aaron countered.

“Katie’s due date’s any day now,” Robert said. “Do you think I’d start anything with my heavily pregnant sister-in-law?”

“No,” Aaron said. “No, I don’t think that.”

“Good.”

“But please, Robert, talk to me,” Aaron said.

“Katie turned up on my doorstep,” Robert said. “She’s got a black eye. Andy’s been hitting her. I don’t know if it’s more than she told me, but she… just wanted somewhere to run away to.”
“Right,” Aaron said slowly, taking that in. “Is the baby all right?”

“She says it’s kicking, and she refused to go to hospital, so as far as I know, yes.”

“That’s good I guess,” Aaron said. “How are you?”

“Nice relaxing night in,” Robert said and Aaron snorted a laugh. “How was your show?”

“Mm, it was all right,” Aaron said. “Few empty seats right at the front.”

“Oh?”

“It just sticks out,” Aaron said. “Probably one of those ticket touts who buy a hundred at a time. It was fine,” Aaron said. “Ignore my moaning, it was a good show.”

“Good,” Robert said softly. “It is so good to hear your voice.”

“I feel exactly the same,” Aaron said. “How’s work going?”

“You don’t want to hear about my boring office job,” Robert said.

“No, I really do,” Aaron said. Robert smiled and told Aaron every mundane detail. It just felt so freeing to talk to him.

Saturday afternoon came, Robert had locked the next few issues of the paper down and he was ready to leave. Katie had booked in to an air b and b, and she was in much better spirits. Especially as Andy kept calling her every morning, letting her know how his therapy was going. Robert didn’t really agree this would change anything, but he also realised that heavily pregnant Katie was highly unlikely to leave him. Because she loved him. But Robert also knew Andy wasn’t a bad man.

“How’s married life treating you?” Katie asked over lunch.

“It’s good,” Robert said. “I like feeling this committed to him. It feels really good.”

“I didn’t picture you like this,” Katie said.

“Settling down with a man?” Robert asked, stung.

“Settling down at all,” she said. “The man’s got nothing to do with it.”

“Good,” Robert said.

“I never pictured you being happily married.”

“I didn’t either,” Robert said. “You know my history, you know what I’m like. And then… adding the fact that I found out I liked men too. Well, I didn’t see myself settling down.

“Did you know you liked men when we were together?” Katie asked, more curious than critical.

“I don’t know,” Robert said thoughtfully. “I’d never have been able to put a name to what I felt, but I kissed a boy when I was… fifteen.”

“Oh?” she asked curiously.

“Dad caught me.”
“Oh, God,” Katie said. Robert looked at her, and knew that she appreciated the problem instantly, and he smiled at her. “Vic and Andy might like to worship the ground he used to walk on,” Katie said in explanation. “But my memory works. And I can’t imagine Jack reacted well to that.”

“He didn’t,” Robert said. Then he sighed heavily. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Does Aaron know?”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “I love him, I don’t keep things from him.”

“Who’d have thought you’d turn out to be the reliable Sugden brother?” Katie said. “Funny how things change.” She looked at him, a look Robert recognised and remembered.

“You get any closer to me and you’ll ruin two marriages and any friendship we could hope to have,” Robert said firmly. He wasn’t going there, wasn’t even going to entertain the notion.

“Ugh, sorry,” Katie said, wiping her eyes. “Can we blame hormones?”

“Can we?” Robert asked levelly.

“Yeah, gone for you before, wasn’t that memorable to be honest.”

“Now, I know you’re lying.” She smiled slightly, then groaned, hands going around her bump. “Are you okay?” Robert asked, watching her, her face suddenly very far away.

“I… ah!” Katie gasped. “I think the baby’s coming.”
Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

A huge THANK YOU to those who're still reading this story, it means so much to me. It is going to get a little angsty, and I hope you enjoy the direction it's going in. (I'm going to say again, NO CHEATING here!) Enjoy!

“Have you landed?”

“Er, yeah, about that,” Robert said hastily. “I never actually made it to the airport.”

“You’re kidding?” Aaron said, sighing with exasperation. “Robert, I want to see you.”

“I know,” Robert said. “I’m in hospital.”

“Are you all right?!”

“Yes, yeah, I’m fine,” Robert reassured quickly. “Katie went into labour and I didn’t… I’d have felt wrong leaving her alone, even if it was to see you.”

“Right,” Aaron said heavily. “I get it, I do. I… just miss you.”


“Yeah, sure,” Aaron said heavily. “Though I don’t know how much I’ll be able to see you, France is busy.”

“I was stuck, Aaron,” Robert said. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know what to do.”

“Is Katie all right?”

“Yeah, she’s great.”

“And…”


“Good,” Aaron said. “You’re an uncle.”

“Again,” Robert said. “He’s a chubby baby, looks so happy though.”

“I’m glad,” Aaron said. “Look, I’ve got to go. I’m due on stage soon and…”

“Aaron? I’m sorry.”

“I know you’d be here if you could,” Aaron said. “Love you.”

“I love you more.”

“Bye.”
Robert jerked awake, Aaron’s lips on his in the darkness. “Aaron?”

“No, it’s your bit on the side,” he said, grinning as he pressed another kiss to Robert’s mouth.

“What’re you doing here?” Robert asked in surprise, Aaron moving the duvet so he could lay on top of his husband.

“Got a flight home after the show,” Aaron said. “Missed you.”

“Oh, God,” Robert whispered. “I missed you so much.” Robert opened his thighs so he could touch Aaron everywhere, Aaron sighing into Robert’s body.

“You’re cold,” Robert said.

“Mm,” Aaron replied. “So warm me up.”

When Robert woke up on Sunday morning, he was alone in bed. He suddenly had a horrible feeling that he had dreamt up Aaron, and he wasn’t here. He rolled over in bed and pressed his face into Aaron’s pillow, with a little bit of relief, because he could smell him. Feeling a little reassured, Robert slipped some joggers on and went through to the kitchen. He saw Aaron leaning over the sink, looking out of the window across London. His entire body language screamed that he was unhappy, and Robert’s good mood dissipated instantly.

“What’s wrong?” Aaron turned a little, forcing a smile on his face.

“Nothing,” he said, moving to the kettle. “Want a brew?”

“Talk to me.” Aaron’s shoulder stiffened, Robert could see through the thin T shirt he wore.

“I’m struggling,” Aaron admitted.

“Is it me?”

“No!” Aaron said instantly, in a way that was certainly reassuring for Robert. “I can’t write.”

“What?”

“Songs,” Aaron said, biting his bottom lip. “I don’t know why, but it’s just not happening any more.”

“Oh.”

“I thought seeing you would help.”

“So... I was just the quick screw to try and get you writing again?” Robert asked. Aaron suddenly looked afraid Robert was taking that the wrong way.

“No, I wanted to see you, so much, I...”

“Don’t worry, I’m winding you up.” Robert moved close and held his hips, making sure they were
touching. They communicated better with their bodies, especially when the actual conversation was hard. “Use me for sex whenever you want,” he teased. Aaron huffed a small smile, rolling his eyes.

“I feel lonely, sometimes,” Aaron admitted, almost breaking Robert’s heart. “This… on tour, it’s not as fun as it used to be.”

“Oh,” Robert said. He had no idea how to react to that, this separation was only bearable because Aaron was doing something he loved. If he wasn’t enjoying it, what was the point?

“I do love performing,” Aaron said. “I love singing to sell out crowds, but it is a hard slog these days.”

“Why?”

“Everyone’s got someone,” Aaron said, shrugging. “Alex is occupied by Matilda, Adam’s seeing Vic.”

“What?!” Robert cut in.

“Yeah, they’re keeping it quiet,” Aaron said. Then looking at Robert’s face... “I didn’t know you didn’t know. I thought she might have called you.”

“How long?”

“I don’t know,” Aaron said. “They’ve been on and off for a while, but she’s coming along on tour with us, so I’m guessing it’s now very much on.”

“Right,” Robert said, trying to accept that. Why hadn’t she told him? Yes, she didn’t want the media scrutiny, he could understand that. But he was her brother. And he understood this situation so much better than most.

“Sometimes I just miss it, when it was just the three of us. And I miss you terribly.” Robert hugged him tightly, trying to reassure him.

“I don’t know what to say,” Robert said, sitting at the kitchen table. Aaron followed suit and sat opposite him. “I can’t leave my job to follow you around the world. I’d love to, and I miss you like hell, but I can’t do it. I don’t want to be just… your husband. I love my job, and you love yours. You know?”

“I’m not complaining that you have a job,” Aaron said. “I’m just telling you how I feel.” They both sighed and Aaron reached across the table to grab Robert’s hand.

“How long are you staying?”

“I’m catching the Eurostar tomorrow morning,” Aaron said.

“Okay,” Robert said, heart sinking.

“Look, you should just ignore me, I’m bitching about stuff that I shouldn’t be. I’ve never had this though.”

“Had what?”

“The feeling like I’ve got something to lose.” Robert squeezed his hand.

“I’m going nowhere.”
“Good.”

After lunch, there was a knock on the door, Katie and her new baby, both looking happy. “Hi,” Robert said. He didn’t hate seeing her, but he really had limited time with Aaron.

“I won’t stay long,” she said, clearly reading the hesitation on Robert’s face. “I just wanted to thank you.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Robert said. “Wasn’t going to do anything else, was I?”

“I mean it,” she said. “We’re heading back home today.”

“We?”

“Me and Daniel,” she said. “Andy’s staying here until he’s finished his therapy course.”

“Good,” Robert said. “I’m really glad.”

“I’m sorry for making you miss your flight,” Katie said. “I didn’t want to be alone, I’m sorry.”

“It’s all his fault,” Robert said, stroking the baby’s head. “I’ll just be stingy on his Christmas present this year.” Katie smiled tiredly. “Are you okay to drive that far?”

“Yeah, it’ll be fine,” Katie said. “Driving down was the problem, my bump kept pressing against the steering wheel.”

“Okay then,” Robert said. He gave her a hug, being careful of the baby and she left. Robert turned to see Aaron.

“You could have invited her in,” he said. “I haven’t even met the baby yet.”

“I didn’t want to waste our limited time,” Robert said, kissing Aaron’s neck. Aaron “hmmed” but didn’t say anything else, enjoying Robert’s lips on his skin.
“I’ve been thinking,” Aaron said quietly. It was maybe two in the morning, and he couldn’t sleep. Robert had just got up for the loo, so he used the opportunity to talk.

“Oh?” Robert asked, snuggling into Aaron’s warm body. “About what?”

“Kids.” The word felt like it’d been dropped in a vacuum and Robert stilled. “I… I’ve thought that maybe we could look into it.”

Aaron sounded incredibly nervous, like he was afraid of Robert’s reaction. “What made you say that?”

“I knew it was a mistake bringing it up,” Aaron huffed.

“I’m not saying that,” Robert said, making sure his hands were keeping Aaron close, so he couldn’t run off. “I’m saying that we’ve not been married all that long, and that’s quite a change of mind from you. One we need to talk about.”

“I see Alex and Matilda,” Aaron said softly. “I look after her, and… I think maybe I could be a good dad.”

“You’d be a brilliant dad,” Robert said. “You have such a full heart, you have so much love.”

“All right, don’t go overboard,” Aaron said, but even in the darkness Robert could sense his smile.

“I want more people,” Aaron said. “It actually surprises me how much I want our little family. If you do,” he added.

“Of course I do,” Robert said. “My only concern is it’s a bit quick. I… we’ve not been married two months yet.”

“I don’t see it being a quick process though,” Aaron said. “It’ll probably take months. Or years.”

“You’ve been thinking a lot about this, haven’t you?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said. “I… er, I’ve not been around small children in years. I didn’t know how much I liked them. I know this is me changing my mind, but I want you to think about it.”

Robert didn’t need to think about it. He knew he wanted children with Aaron, but he knew such a quick answer wouldn’t do it for Aaron. “Of course I will. So… what’re you thinking? Adoption? Surrogacy?”

“I don’t know,” Aaron said. “Wanted to run it past you first.”

“I love you,” Robert said. “You know that.”
“Yes,” Aaron said. “I know that.” Aaron kissed him deeply, and now, he could sleep.

Aaron woke up to the alarm on his phone, reaching over Robert to shut it off with a groan. He had a train to catch. Robert ran his fingers through Aaron’s hair, before rolling over and slipping into a doze. Aaron smiled, getting up and throwing some of his stuff in a bag. Most of his things were still with the band, he’d only come home with an overnight bag. He really was pushing it with the band’s schedule, but he wanted to see Robert. To talk about what had been so heavily weighing on his mind.

He put the kettle on and made two, looking over London. That conversation with Robert had gone better than he expected. He knew Robert wanted children, but he also knew this was soon. None of this changed the fact it was how Aaron felt. He hadn’t expected this, hadn’t expected to feel secure enough and settled enough to even contemplate a child, not ever. Things change, though, Aaron thought with a smile, pouring the hot water into two cups.

“I’m here!” Robert called, jumping out from the bedroom, throwing random items of clothing on as he hurried. “Don’t go!”

“Morning,” Aaron said, eyes sparkling. “Going somewhere?”

“I thought I’d missed you,” Robert said, getting his breath back. “Thought you’d already left.”

“Are you coming to Paris?” Aaron asked levelly.

“Just for the one day,” Robert said. They’d already arranged this, Robert booking the Monday off work, to have a weekend of sorts with Aaron. “If you’ll have me?”

“You know I would,”

“How long’ve we got?”

“Oh…” Aaron looked at the clock. “Forty five minutes before we leave for the station.”

“Great,” Robert said. “I can have my breakfast then.” Aaron watched Robert move around their kitchen, two of his buttons done up incorrectly, and he smiled. He really could imagine the rest of his life like this. Happy, content. Aaron’s childhood had been so bad, his young adult years were either horrible or incredibly poor, that to end up like this? Life was good.

“We need the company, do we?” Robert asked, nodding at the two security guards.

“Not at home now,” Aaron said, rolling his eyes. He didn’t like the presence of them any more than Robert did. But they had booked an hour of time that they could do the typical tourist thing, go up the Eiffel tower. Both men had, shockingly, never done that.

One advantage of Aaron’s position was they could skip the queue, and even though it was selfish, Robert wasn’t complaining.

The lift up to the top jerked and wobbled far more than felt safe or right and Robert gripped Aaron’s hand tightly. “Okay?” Aaron asked, teasingly.

“Not so keen on this,” Robert muttered.
“I’ll keep you safe,” Aaron said with a wink. Robert rolled his eyes, but he was relieved when they got to the top. And the views did make it worth it.

“I didn’t know you were a soppy romantic,” Robert teased as they looked over the city, a little cloudy today.

“Sh, don’t tell,” Aaron said.

“You seem happy,” Robert said.

“I am,” Aaron said. Robert glanced around.

“How long had children been on your mind?” he asked. It seemed like a weight had been lifted from Aaron, and he looked young again.

“A while,” Aaron admitted. They moved so Robert was curled around Aaron, his chest to Aaron’s back. It was warm and comfortable and so right. “I love you.” Aaron leaned up to kiss him, neither of them caring that they were in public.

Backstage, Aaron and Alex were busy with the press, Adam nowhere to be seen. Robert had a sneaking suspicion about it, so he rushed to Adam Barton’s dressing room.

“I’d appreciate it if you’d put my sister down,” Robert said, not being tactful about it. Vic detached herself from Adam and flashed Robert a smile.

“Hi!”

“Don’t give me that,” Robert said, though he allowed his little sister to hug him. “Why didn’t you tell me about you two?” He glared at Adam.

“We’re keeping it quiet,” Vic said. “Plus I’m going back to Yorkshire tomorrow.”

“Adam, the journalists want you,” Robert said briefly. This wasn’t strictly true, Adam didn’t speak any French, (Aaron only spoke enough to get by) but Robert wanted to talk to Vic.

“Yeah, yeah,” he said, leaving.

“How are you?” Robert asked.

“Good,” she said. “I wanted to tell you about me and him,” she admitted. “It wasn’t serious at all, and then… well, things changed.”

“I’d have understood,” Robert said calmly. “You know I would have.”

“I just…” she shrugged. "You'd have told me it's not easy. Wouldn't you?"

"I might have," Robert admitted.

“It’s good to see you. How’s Aaron?” Vic asked.

“Good,” Robert said. “Are you happy?”

“Yeah,” Vic said. “I am.”

“That’s what matters.” Robert hugged his sister again. “Want to grab some food before the show?”
“Yes,” Vic decided. She was starving.
Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a normal day, a normal evening when everything changed. Robert had been at work, had a good, albeit tiring day, came home and stuck the telly on. Things were good, easy. Robert grabbed a beer, sat on the sofa and started absentmindedly flicking through the folder of information he’d got on different surrogacy agencies. He wanted to have it ready for when Aaron came home. The band were having a couple of weeks break after Europe, before the Asia leg of their tour kicked off and Robert couldn’t wait to have Aaron back in London with him. But he also wanted to show Aaron that he was serious about children. It wasn’t something only Aaron wanted, and that Robert had thought about it seriously.

“Bringing you back to our main story this evening, a high rise hotel in Barcelona has caught fire.”

Robert dropped his beer. He looked at the rolling news in horror as they cut to live footage of a building, flames licking up the side of it. “The fire started on the third floor of the Grand Resort hotel…”

“No!” Robert shouted at the TV, like that would automatically fix it. It couldn’t be, this couldn’t be happening. That was Aaron’s hotel. But… it was at the end of the day, he wouldn’t be in the hotel, he’d be at the arena, doing sound check, or press calls, or anything else. Of course he would, that was the logical assumption. Yes, of course. Robert fumbled for his phone, and quickly dialled Aaron. It went straight through to voicemail, which wasn’t that unusual when he was working, but it sent Robert into a panic.

“Aaron, it’s me,” Robert said. “I’ve seen the news, and I’m worried about you. Just… call me when you can. I need to know you’re okay. Love you.” Robert was shaking by the time he hung up. He kept his eyes glued to the TV, thinking how could anyone make it out of that alive? After staring for thirty seconds, frozen, he made a quick decision. He called Trisha, Aaron’s PA and demanded that she book him the first flight from London to Barcelona. She didn’t argue, just did it, and Robert hung up before calling Alex, and hunting for his passport at the same time.

Alex picked up on about the tenth ring. “Hi,” Robert said briefly. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Alex said, and Robert didn’t like the emphasis on “I’m.”

“Just… tell me he’s not in that building, Alex. Tell me he’s safe.”

“He’s inside,” Alex said tearfully. “Oh God! So’s Matilda! I don’t know what to do, I don’t, I can’t…”

Robert barely heard anything else. “Right.” He had no idea what to say to that. He couldn’t offer any kind of platitudes or assurances. Alex wouldn’t believe him anyway. “I’m on my way to the airport,” he said. “Let me know if anything happens.”

"Robert, I'm scared!" she almost wailed. "It's..."

"Me too," Robert said. "I'm on my way. T... if you see Aaron, tell him I love him." Alex agreed tearfully and Robert disconnected the call.
“Woah!” Aaron said, looking at the building as he came around the corner, a group of people on the pavement, watching it burn. He saw Alex almost immediately, nearing a panic attack, and arguing with a firefighter twice her size.

“Alex, calm down,” Aaron said, gripping her arms tightly. “You’re okay.”

“My baby’s in there!” she wailed, mascara running down her face. “Matilda! I can’t just leave her!” They both looked at the building, the flames almost cascading down one side of it, the implications of Alex’s words truly hitting him.

“What room?” Aaron asked. She read his face and they came to an understanding within seconds, nothing more needed to be said. They didn’t need an in depth conversation, they both knew what Aaron was going to do.

“503” she said. “Up the stairs, turn right.”

“Great.” Aaron reached into her jean pocket and grabbed the key card just in case he couldn’t kick the door down. They were being penned in by the fire service and police, trying to keep people away from the building. “Give me a distraction.”

“Aaron…”

“Or argue with me and waste time,” Aaron said bluntly. She nodded, the decision already been made. She was trying to argue with one of the fire-fighters, holding back the crowds when Aaron made a break for it. He ignored the screams and ran towards the building. He was either too quick, or everyone else was too sane to stop him, because he was at the door before anyone reached him.

The building was hot, he could feel the sweat breaking out as he went up the first flight of stairs. The fire had started on the third floor, so Aaron didn’t anticipate any problems till beyond that point. After that… well, he wouldn’t have been able to live with himself if he hadn’t so much as tried.

It was the smoke, not the heat that was giving him problems. He kept coughing, and the more he tried not to, the worse it got. Fourth floor. One more to go. It was thicker up here, and he started to wonder if this had been an incredibly stupid mistake. Should he turn back? Then he heard a baby crying and knew he couldn’t. He had to try.

The heat actually felt less on the right hand side of the building, and he could see 503 through the haze of smoke, printed on the door. He let himself in, Matilda’s crying getting a lot louder. The first time Aaron had ever been grateful for it, it meant she was alive. He found her in her cot, red face and wailing. The actual room looked okay, unharmed. Aaron’s throat felt shredded by the smoke, but here it was okay.

“Hey,” Aaron said, picking her up. “I got you, calm down.” He arranged her so she was tucked inside his hoodie, zipped up securely. Matilda stopped crying, instead snuffling into Aaron’s T shirt. “That’s it,” Aaron soothed, a hand against her head, keeping her safe as he left the room. He didn’t have much time.

He turned to go down the stairs and froze. Flames were at the bottom of them. “Oh shit.”

Robert had never been more grateful for Aaron’s celebrity status than that night. Within about an hour and a half of him seeing the news, he was sat on a plane, waiting for take off. He’d gone through security quicker than he even thought possible. He’d called Alex a few more times but either
he couldn’t get through or she had no news. And no news was bad news. This would be the second
time Robert’s life had been completely uprooted by a fire. The second time he lost the most important
person in his world. No, don’t think that. Aaron would be fine, he had to be. But as time went by, it
was a thinner and thinner hope. How long could he live in a fire like that? Long enough, it had to be.

His phone rang, Alex flashing up. “Tell me good things,” Robert said, already on the edge of
completely breaking down.

“Aaron and Matilda are in hospital,” Alex said, obvious she’d been crying. “They… er… Aaron
went inside to get Matilda.”

“What?” Robert asked hollowly. “He did… but…” He could hardly say how stupid his husband
was, when saving Matilda from a burning building would exactly be something Aaron would do,
and something Alex would support. “How is he?”

“Touch and go,” Alex said. “Matilda’s going to be fine, but Aaron…” Robert couldn’t say the things
going through his mind, not to Matilda’s mother. He couldn’t, and it would be words he couldn’t
take back out of anger and fear.

“But he’s alive?” Robert asked.

“Yes.” Alex cleared her throat. "At the moment."

“I have to turn my phone off, we’re just about to fly,” Robert said, catching the flight attendants eye
who was gesturing at him. “Leave me a message with Aaron’s condition.”

“I will,” Alex said, voice wobbling. “I am so sorry.”

“I need a whisky,” he told the flight attendant. He clearly looked bad enough to warrant it, because
she said nothing, just gave him one of those miniature bottles, which Robert drank with shaking
hands. He hardly even tasted it.

Chapter End Notes

I know I’m not going to be liked after this chapter! Eek!
Chapter 50

Robert had talked himself into the fact that Aaron had probably died when he’d been airborne. So he was in a state of near panic by the time he cleared customs, and he listened to the message on his phone. Anything better than death would be a bonus. “In ICU, a tube down his throat helping him breathe.” They were the words Robert heard before Alex’s voice faded into a blanket of white noise. That meant Aaron was alive.

“Thank God.” Robert took in three deep breaths, to calm himself down as he tried to grab a taxi outside the airport, and listened to the message again. Now that he knew Aaron was alive, other words started to filter in. “Critical care. Lack of oxygen. Chances of survival.” His husband could still die, just because it hadn’t happened yet doesn’t mean it wouldn’t.

On the flight over, he’d been haunted by images of that hotel fire, mixed with things he remembered. Pictures that were so sharp and painful. How hot a fire felt. How you could still hear the screams of those trapped inside. The smell of it. How it never left you. Memory was mixing with the recent, and Robert was struggling to function.

The taxi dropped him off outside the hospital, already press there who’d realised what had happened. Exactly who was in that hotel fire. And then Robert realised all he had in his wallet was pounds. No euros.

“It’s all right, I’ve got this.” Robert looked up to see a man, a stranger proffering the taxi driver money. “Alex said you were coming.”

“You’re… er… with the band?” he nodded, ushering Robert into the hospital away from the cameras. “How… how is he?”

“Unconscious last I knew,” he said. “Aaron’s an idiot, he never should have gone back into that building.” Robert didn’t waste the effort even arguing with him, it was pointless.

Alex stayed by Aaron’s bedside. He had a tube down his throat, soot over his face, and from what her broken Spanish could gather, they were worried about how long he’d been without oxygen. So even if he’d wake up, they didn’t know if he’d be okay, long term. Alex gripped his hand and squeezed tightly.

“I love you,” Alex said. “I love you for doing it for me, and for her. But God, I’m never going to forgive you if you don’t wake up. Robert won’t either.” She’d left Robert a message with the hospital, Aaron’s room number and the fact he was still unconscious. But she hadn’t left anything else, simply because if she were Robert… Well, she wouldn’t blame Robert for hating her. Alex watched Aaron’s chest rising and falling slowly, steadily.

Adam came in, looking at them both. “I heard what happened.”

“I’m suing the agency,” Alex said quickly.

“Agency?”

“I pay those people an extortionate amount of money to watch my daughter while I’m working,” Alex said. “Nowhere does that say “oh, we’ll just leave her screaming while we go out for dinner
“And a building catches fire.”

“Is that what happened?”

“Yeah,” Alex said. “The child minder was too self interested, and thought a baby monitor would be fine while she met with her date in the hotels restaurant.” Alex’s nostrils flared. “And what makes me so angry is this probably isn’t the first time Matilda’s been left all on her own while I’m working. It’s just the first time I know about it.”

“How is she?”

“Matilda’s on oxygen in the paediatric unit,” Alex said. “I’m… sort of going between both rooms until Robert gets here.”

“Matilda needs you,” Adam said. “I could stay with him until Robert gets here.”

“She’s not the one the doctors are worried about,” Alex said. “I mean… yes, I’d much prefer her to be out of here, but… doctors keep coming in here and sighing when they look at Aaron. They don’t think he’ll make it.”

“They’ve said that, have they?” Adam asked.

“No,” she said. “But… I can tell. And I feel… so, so guilty.”

“Alex, it isn’t your fault.”

“Aaron went into that building for me,” she said, shaking her head. “He risked his life for me.”

“He did it for Matilda,” Adam said. “Aaron’s a good guy, I bet he didn’t even think about it.” They both looked at Aaron’s face, tube down his throat, the machines beeping in the background.

“Robert’s going to kill me,” Alex said.

“No, I’m not.” They turned to see him and Adam felt like he was in the way. He mumbled something about leaving, but Robert didn’t have the attention to spare for him, just looking at Aaron’s immobile face. He sat opposite him, stroking his face gently.

“Hey,” Robert said, kissing his cheek. “Not quite how I planned our reunion.”

“Robert, I’m so sorry,” Alex said.

“Robert…”

“It’s who he is. Believe me, I’m not thrilled,” Robert said, catching her eye. “But a two hour flight gives you time to think about everything. Every worst case scenario, and Aaron’s still alive.” Robert was clearly trying to steady himself, behave rationally. “Can I…?”

“Yeah,” Alex said. She forced a smile and left the room, no doubt going to check on Matilda.

When Robert and Aaron were alone, only then did Robert allow himself to completely break down, the sobs racking his body, unable to get a full breath in his lungs. He’d been panicking, worrying for so long that now Aaron was laid out in front of him, it was almost as if something inside him broke.

“Come back to me.” He kissed Aaron’s cheek, feeling the stubble on his skin. But he didn’t feel as
Robert barely slept. Every time he got near drifting off, a fear of losing Aaron washed over him and he jerked awake, hoping for some change, which of course there wasn’t. Robert started talking to him, thoughts spilling from him as he held Aaron’s hand, stroking the skin gently.

“I’ve been looking at surrogacy agencies,” Robert said, speaking calmly, trying to connect with Aaron. “I think there’s two we could consider. It’s expensive, but… well, we always said we’d use your money for something special. I… How many kids do you want? Two? Or… start with one and see how that goes? Shouldn’t push you too much. One’s good. What do you picture in that beautiful head of yours? A girl or a boy?” Still nothing. “I’m thinking a girl. Matilda needs a friend. Someone she can boss around. Plus you’re going to be favourite uncle Aaron for the rest of all time. I think you’ve earned that one.”

Robert’s voice started to break. “I don’t really care what kind of future I have. I just know I want it with you.” He took in a shuddering breath when the door opened.

“A phone call from my son-in-law would have been nice.” Robert turned and saw Chas, looking as tired and drawn as he felt.

“Oh, God,” Robert said. “I’m so sorry, I didn’t even think to call you.”

“It’s okay,” Chas said. Robert looked at her. “Well, it’s not, but… I like that he’s got someone who loves him like this.” She stroked a hand through Aaron’s hair. “How’s he doing?”

“Alive.”

“Robert,” she said critically.

“His throat closed up, so they’re giving him oxygen,” Robert said. “We’ve just got to wait for him to wake up.”

“Which will be…”

“They’re hoping today,” Robert said. “I’m just… waiting. And… they’re not sure about the state of his voice. When he comes around.” They both let the implications of that sink in, what would they do if Aaron couldn’t sing again? It would hurt Aaron enormously, if he lost that part of his life. It was something Robert wasn’t really allowing himself to think of, he had to concentrate one step at a time. First he needed Aaron awake, everything else would wait.

“Do you want me to sit with him while you get some sleep?” Chas offered.

“No, I can’t leave,” Robert said. “But… er… could you stay while I get a coffee?”

“Course,” she said, forcing a smile. She sat down next to Aaron and sighed as Robert left.

“Why do you do it to us?” she asked, shaking her head. “You better wake up soon, or I’ll kill you.”
Chapter 51

Aaron twitched and Robert looked at him, full of hope, tightening his grip on his hand. Please, wake up Robert pleaded to whatever God was listening. And Aaron did, his eyes looking up at the ceiling in alarm, eyes wide.

“Hey, you’re okay,” Robert said soothingly, moving so he was in Aaron’s eye line. Aaron looked panicked and started to move, trying to get off the bed. Robert put his hands on Aaron’s shoulders, stopping him from moving, he was connected to far too many machines. “I’m here, you’re safe,” Robert said. “You’re going to be all right.” Aaron’s free hand moved slowly to the tube down his throat, trying to pull it out and Robert shook his head.

“No, you can’t do that,” Robert said. “You need it, you’re not breathing properly without it. I like you breathing.” Aaron’s eyes were asking a question so Robert carried on. “Matilda’s fine. She’s safe. You got her out.” Aaron nodded very slightly, eyes still burning at Robert, wanting more answers. “Do you remember what happened?” Robert asked softly, moving his hands now that Aaron seemed more settled. He nodded, and Robert could see from his face that he did remember it.

“You breathed in a lot of smoke from the fire,” he said, voice wavering. “They said… your throat was black and without the tube your throat kept closing. You need it.” Aaron panicked. Aaron dropped Robert’s hands, both going to his throat, rubbing at the skin.

“I’ll get a nurse,” Chas said, but Robert knew that wasn’t the problem. A nurse couldn’t give Aaron the answer he wanted.

“Don’t bother,” Robert said to Chas before returning his attention to Aaron. “They don’t know. It’s not impossible, but they don’t know. It’s going to depend on you and your recovery.”

“What’s he asking?” Chas said. She was surprised by how much Robert could read what Aaron wanted, just from movements and the look in his eyes.

“He wants to know if he can sing again,” Robert said sadly. “You’re not going to lose your voice completely, they do know that.” Aaron closed his eyes, and Robert hated himself for being the bearer of bad news. “You were unconscious for two days.” That did make Aaron open his eyes, looking at Robert. And he could see the fear, the uncertainty in Robert’s face. Two days after being caught in a fire, he knew what that could do to Robert. Aaron struggled to move, he felt incredibly weak.

“Wh… what are you doing?” Chas asked, seeing Aaron fidget in bed, wincing through the pain.

“No, don’t,” Robert said, but Aaron wasn’t to be deterred and Robert decided to help him move, shifting him over in bed gently, keeping his hands as light as he could. “You are a stubborn arse,” Robert said and Aaron’s eyes smile at him. Robert, very, very carefully got into bed next to him. He was so careful with his hands, not wanting to hurt Aaron.

“If you could not scare me like that again, I’d appreciate it.” Aaron blinked in agreement. “Am I hurting you?” Aaron shook his head once and Robert kissed his cheek.

Aaron hated being trapped in his own body. He couldn’t speak, he could barely move, and even having Robert by his side didn’t help much. Though he would much prefer having him, than being alone. He could still see the flames, taste the smoke. Even though he knew it was in his imagination,
his throat was so raw he couldn’t taste anything at all.

Robert came in with a coffee and Aaron felt a sudden rage of jealousy. What he wouldn’t give for a drink, food, anything that wasn’t down a tube. Then he saw the dark circles under Robert’s eyes, the tiredness, the way he hadn’t bothered with his hair at all, and Aaron knew he’d put Robert through hell.

“Hi,” Robert said, kissing his cheek before sitting down. “The doctors are hopeful about your breathing today.” Aaron rolled his eyes, which did have the effect of making Robert smile. “They’ll be in in a minute.” Aaron nodded. “I love you.” Robert’s fingers ran through Aaron’s hair, and he found a comfort in that. But he hated being this useless.

The doctors had been checking Aaron’s stats all day, and had decided they were going to try and see if he could breathe on his own. Aaron’s eyes had been begging for it, and Robert knew he hated being this helpless.

“Right, we’re going to try and take the tube out,” the doctor said, a faint accent to his voice. “I’m going to stay on hand, because it might be necessary to reintubate him. Okay?”

“Yes,” Robert said and Aaron blinked in understanding. Robert moved aside, though he kept his grip on Aaron’s hand, Aaron squeezing tightly. The doctor took the tube out, resulting in a hacking cough from Aaron. Robert rubbed his thumb over Aaron’s palm softly.

“Oh, breathe deeply for me?” Aaron did, the doctor.frowning at him with concentration as he listened to his lungs. “And again?” Aaron repeated it. “Okay, your lungs sound good, all things considered. We want to keep you under observation, and there’s a chance you’ll need help breathing again.” Aaron nodded.

“Now can you talk for me?” Aaron shook his head. The doctor looked at Robert.

“You could try,” Robert said softly. But Aaron didn’t want to, he didn’t want to know how much he’d damaged his life, and he didn’t want either Robert’s hope in him, or his disappointment.

“Well… I’ll… er… come back later,” the doctor said after a long minute of no one saying anything.

“Why aren’t you even trying?” Robert asked bluntly when they were alone. Always one for subtleties, his husband, Aaron thought uncharitably. He knew he wasn’t being fair, but he didn’t care. He just shook his head.

“Come on, Aaron, you could at least give it a go!” Robert snapped. Aaron bit his bottom lip, ignoring how sore it was, refusing. “Aaron, please.” Aaron closed his eyes, and only opened them when he was alone.

Robert left the hospital room and leant against the wall, closing his eyes as he felt the hopelessness wash over him. He knew Aaron had been through a lot, but to not so much as try…

“Robert? What’s wrong? Is it Aaron, is he…?” Chas started speaking quickly, fear on her face.

“He’s fine,” Robert assured her quickly. “The doctors took the tube out, he’s breathing on his own.”

“That’s great!” Chas said. Robert didn't react. “Isn’t it?”
“He won’t talk, Chas.”

“You mean he can’t?” Chas asked.

“No, he’s not even trying. I just… left, I shouldn’t have but…”

“Go to your hotel,” Chas said. “Have a shower, get some sleep, then come back. And I’ll give him a lecture.”

“I don’t want to leave,” Robert said. “I just want him to be better.”

“I know you do,” Chas said. “Just go and get some food. Give yourself a break, you’ve not stopped for two days.”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “Maybe… food’d be good. Thanks.” He gave Chas an unexpected hug, and Chas smiled at him, though it was forced.

“I’ll knock some sense into him,” she said, and Robert nodded, grateful.
Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

Thank you for being patient! I know there's been a delay on this, I've become ill with some pesky virus all week, and been taken in by one of my other hobbies. Oops! Anyway, hope you enjoy this chapter, it's unusually from Aaron's perspective. Thank you!

“Right, are you going to tell me why you’re being so stubborn?” Aaron sighed, seeing Chas. He really didn’t need a lecture. “I know you can talk. You never used to shut up, so open your mouth.” Aaron wasn’t biting. She could rile him up all she wanted. “Come on, Robert’s worried.” That did make Aaron look at her. He didn’t want Robert to worry about him more than absolutely necessary, after all the circumstances of recent events. “Talk to me,” Chas said softly. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

Aaron sighed again, then Chas’s phone beeped. Aaron was struck with a brain wave, and held his hand out for it. Blankly, Chas gave it over and Aaron started to type, pushing himself up so he was sitting up.

“I don’t want to disappoint him.” Aaron typed.

“Oh, love, you won’t,” Chas said softly, a hand through his hair before Aaron flinched away from her, instead typing away on her phone.

“If I can’t do this, it means our life’s over.”

“It won’t be,” Chas said. “Robert doesn’t think that, Robert doesn’t care. He wants you well.”

Aaron shook his head. He couldn’t really believe that. Of course Robert would want the best for him, but their lives would really change if his voice didn’t work properly again. Why did he go back into that building? You know why, a little voice said at the back of his head. “It’s just me and you, I won’t tell Robert anything if you don’t want me to. You could give it a go.”

Aaron coughed, and swallowed, almost as if bracing himself for it, trying to give his voice a go. It took maybe five full minutes before he managed to actually try to speak. “…Hi.” Chas beamed at him, but Aaron winced. It was noise, but it sounded cracked and hoarse. Certainly not a singer’s voice.

“Oh God,” Aaron said, closing his eyes. “I sound terrible.”

“No, you don’t,” Chas said, but it didn’t matter what platitudes she offered, Aaron knew he did. But he could speak. Maybe that was progress. Aaron hummed to himself, almost trying to loosen it up a bit, but it wasn’t really helping.

“Mum, can you find Robert?” he asked weakly.

“Of course I can.”

“Aaron?” Robert asked hopefully as he came in.
“Hi,” he tried. Robert smiled like he’d never heard anything that good in his entire life, and it did make Aaron feel slightly better about his pathetic attempt.

“You’re speaking,” Robert said quietly.

“If you can call it that,” Aaron said. “It’s awful.”

“It’ll get better,” Robert said surely.

“Can you just stop!” Aaron shouted, then winced as his voice cut off abruptly and he had to cough to clear his throat, Robert’s reassuring touch on his shoulders. “You don’t know it’ll get better.”

“No,” Robert said, seeing that Aaron was devastated. “But I think it will. You’ve got to try.”

“Robert, just shut up,” Aaron grumbled.

“There,” he said. “Tell me that three or four hundred more times and you’ll be fine in no time.”

Robert smirked and Aaron couldn’t feel that sorry for himself.

“It’s not that simple,” Aaron said.

“I know,” Robert agreed. “But you’re alive. And I spent what felt like an incredibly long plane journey thinking you were dead. So I can’t get too upset over your voice. I’m sorry.”

“I get it,” Aaron said quietly. “Now can you get me out of here?”

“I’ll do my best.” Robert kissed him, meaning it to be soft. But Aaron moved, trying to catch his lips again, make it deeper. He hadn’t tasted Robert in far too long. “You’re feeling better,” Robert said with a grin. Aaron didn’t deny it.

Robert was getting the discharge papers ready, trying to organise flights home, and doing everything else Aaron felt incapable of doing. Aaron kept typing away on a new phone Robert had bought for him. Most of his possessions that he travelled with had been completely obliterated in the hotel fire. Not to mention his passport, but sometimes there were benefits to being rich and famous.

Aaron looked up to see Alex and Matilda in his hospital room. Alex looked upset, and Matilda smiled at him, fidgeting in Alex’s arms. Aaron took her, smiling at the little girl. “Hey gorgeous,” Aaron said.

“You’re talking?” Alex asked, sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Sort of,” Aaron said. “I know I sound rough.”

“That’s so good though,” Alex said. “Thought I’d ruined your life.”

“It would have been me, not you,” Aaron said. “It was my choice, you know that.”

“I can’t believe you did that,” she said, pulling at her hair in anxiousness.

“Alex, come on,” Aaron said. “I didn’t even think about it. I don’t blame you.”

“You should,” Alex sniffed. “I do.”

“Come here.” They both moved until Aaron ended up hugging her. “You’re my best friend.”
“Don’t tell Adam,” Alex said. They both laughed.

Robert and Aaron were both quiet on the journey home, neither really having much to say. The tour had been put on hold, not cancelled, that would be based on Aaron’s progress with his new voice therapist back in London. He’d already spoken to Caroline on the phone, who seemed strangely hopeful. Probably because Aaron could actually make himself heard on the phone line.

But now, on the plane home, Aaron just leant into Robert’s body, letting himself be held and comforted. Robert felt warm, smelt familiar, strong, his. He liked being held like this, and he knew Robert appreciated the closeness between them too.

Aaron walked into their flat, seeing things left exactly as they were when Robert left, Robert moving around to make them some tea, more to keep himself busy than anything else. The entire house looked like it had been left in a hurry. The light in the bedroom was still on. The TV had even been left chatting away to itself. Aaron flicked it off, dropping the remote and seeing a folder on the floor, papers having spilled out of it. He put it back, and caught the word “Surrogacy.” Aaron smiled, going through it and realised it was information Robert had ferreted out for them. Different agencies, the process they’d have to go through, and Aaron smiled.

“You want this?” he asked as Robert came back into the living room, putting their mugs on the table.

“It was meant to be a surprise,” Robert said. “I wanted you to have something nice to come home to. Something that… to show you this isn’t just what you want, I want it too.” Robert shook his head. “It doesn’t matter now. Other stuff… I’m just glad you’re alive.”

“You know what?” Aaron said. “This is wonderful.”

“Yeah?” Robert asked nervously.

“Yes.”

“Good,” Robert said. He kissed him gently, before Aaron got distracted, going through the folder of information himself.

“She said I’m making progress, but it doesn’t feel like it.”

“You are,” Robert said. “Your voice sounds stronger.”

“I tried singing today,” Aaron admitted. “I won’t be trying it again in the near future.”

“Bad?” Robert asked with trepidation.

“To be fair, it would probably be fine for anyone else,” Aaron said. “It’s not like it was though. I don’t know if I’ll ever get there. Wow, you look nice,” he added, actually seeing what Robert was wearing. White button down shirt, black blazer jacket over it and jeans. He looked very smart, and Aaron could smell something delicious cooking in the kitchen.

“What’ve I missed?” Aaron asked, feeling like he’d completely misstepped.

“We’re… er… meeting with Jodie tonight,” Robert reminded him. “I’m cooking a meal and…”

“Oh, God,” Aaron said quickly. “I forgot, I completely forgot. I…”

“Have a shower, get dressed,” Robert said. “You’ve got plenty of time. I don’t look like… I’m overdoing it?”

“No, you look great,” Aaron said, kissing him briefly. “I’ll change into something that’s not a hoodie I’ve been wearing all week.”

“Don’t be too smart, she won’t recognise you,” Robert called, turning back to the oven. Robert was nervous about this meeting, it had to go well. Jodie could potentially be their surrogate. They’d met two women before, but no. They’d both been a bit fan obsessed, something Aaron didn’t want. Robert wasn’t too keen on that either. But they’d spoken to Jodie on the phone a few times, and she seemed nice. And normal, that was the most important thing. Now they needed her to like them.

Aaron came out of the bedroom, wrapping his arms around Robert’s waist. He had jeans on and a dark blue shirt on. Not overly smart, but definitely making an effort. “This has to go well, Robert,” Aaron said, biting his bottom lip.

“I want it just as much as you do,” Robert said, kissing him softly. “Come on, she’ll be here any minute.”

The first five minutes were incredibly awkward with Jodie. After all, this was a stranger they were
asking for something so important. Usually first meetings were in a coffee shop, or somewhere else public, but what with Aaron’s fame the agency has agreed that was probably a bad idea. After the first five minutes though, things became much easier between the three of them. Aaron was obviously recognisable, but she didn’t seem to be too star struck which could only be a good thing.

“Who’s going to be staying home and looking after the baby?” she asked easily, being very open with them. Robert said “me” at the same time Aaron said “both of us.” Aaron looked at Robert and frowned, waiting for an explanation. Robert looked at his plate, moving around his spaghetti.

“I was fired,” Robert said, not looking up.


“I’ve been working just so the transition’s easy for my replacement,” Robert said. “It’s fine, I’m fine. Just…” Jodie was looking at them both, almost eagerly. “Do we have to discuss this now?”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because you’re so worried about your voice,” Robert said. “What am I supposed to do? Add more pressure by telling you I don’t have a job? I would have told you,” he added softer. “When things have calmed down.”

“What happened?” Aaron asked.

“I left,” Robert said. “I left for Spain when you were in that fire.” Robert looked at him, eyes soft, full of hurt memories. “So no one covered the paper, and I didn’t even think about someone to cover it. My compassionate leave quota has been reached for the year, because of Diane dying. I could have fought it, to be honest with you. But I didn’t want to, our lives are… different now.”

“You should have told me,” Aaron insisted.

“I would have,” Robert said. “Maybe not when we’ve got company, but…”

“Don’t mind me,” Jodie said, taking a sip of her white wine.

“I thought I could write freelance,” Robert said. “I could be with you more often. I could follow you around the world, and I don’t want our family to be split in two when you’re on tour. I miss you enough as it is.”

“You don’t know I’ll ever go on tour again,” Aaron said honestly, even though the words hurt him to say. It was a realistic possibility for their future.

“I’ve got faith in you,” Robert said, covering his hand and squeezing it gently. “And even if you don’t, I can still write freelance wherever I am.” Robert smiled. “It’s not the end.”

Aaron shook his head, clearly not happy. “And we’re ignoring our guest,” Robert added. “Another drink?” he asked her, but she shook her head easily and they got lost in conversation once again.

“You should have told me,” Aaron repeated as they were getting into bed. It was clear he was a bit annoyed Robert had kept losing his job from him.

“I would have once I’d finished handing over the office,” Robert said. “It’s not like we need the money, Aaron. And I’m not sponging off you, it’s not that…”
“I know it’s not that,” Aaron interrupted. “I know it’s not about the money, don’t even think of that.”

“Good,” Robert said. That had been a slight fear of his, and he didn’t like not working either. But on the flip side, Aaron was a millionaire, it wasn’t like they’d be struggling.

“I just… if you’d come to this conclusion a while ago, we’d never have had to be separated when I went on tour,” Aaron said heavily.

“I know,” Robert said. “But… knowing you could have died in that fire. Knowing that… this could be it. This could be all we get,” Robert swallowed uncomfortably. “It changed things for me. It made me see what was really important, and it wasn’t my job, the paper or my office.”

“I’m not planning on going anywhere,” Aaron said seriously.

“I know.” Robert swallowed against the lump in his throat and Aaron kissed him, trying to reassure him. “Come on, let’s just go to bed.”

“Yeah.” They did, undressing quietly. “You think that went well tonight?” Aaron asked.

“I think it went okay,” Robert said. He didn’t want to get his hopes up more than that.

Robert woke up, hearing Aaron singing. He kept his eyes purposefully shut, not wanting to break the moment. Not wanting to do anything to make Aaron feel shy or self conscious and stop.

“You are my sunshine, my only sunshine…” Robert couldn’t help the smile on his face, even with his eyes closed. “You make me happy when skies are grey. You’ll never know dear, how much I love you. Please don’t take my sunshine away.”

“You’re singing,” Robert said quietly with wonder, opening his eyes and caressing Aaron’s cheek.

“Badly,” Aaron said, smiling softly. “But yeah. I’m singing.”

“Aaron, that’s great,” Robert said. “That’s really good.”

“I wanted to try and if I couldn’t manage it… well, you were asleep. You’d never know if it didn’t work out.”

“Does it hurt?” Robert’s palm went to Aaron’s neck, his fingers gently pressing against his throat in a way that oddly came off as reassuring.

“No,” Aaron said. “Feels a bit stiff, but not painful.”

“You’ll get there,” Robert said. And for the first time, Aaron truly believed he would.

Chapter End Notes

This is a chapter I’m actually really nervous about posting! Hope you enjoyed it.
They were having an easy night at home, wrapped up in each other, just the two of them. Both of them were happy and content. Robert kissed the top of Aaron's hair before fluffing up his curls, knowing it would wind him up and laughing.

“Get off!” Aaron snapped, wriggling away from him.

“I wonder if our son will have hair like yours,” Robert said. “Fluffy. A mess.” Aaron would have said something sarcastic, but the affection in Robert’s voice was perfectly clear and Aaron didn’t have the heart to say anything against it.

Robert opened his thighs, Aaron snuggling up to him so they could lie as close as possible. Aaron pushed his arse into Robert and he moaned with want. Aaron chuckled but Robert didn’t rise to the bait. They were watching this film no matter how desirable Aaron was. Didn’t mean he had to make it easy for him though. Robert tightened an arm around Aaron’s waist, pushing his shirt up, stroking the soft skin of his stomach, keeping his touch light and teasing. Aaron’s breath hitched and Robert smirked. This had now crossed the line into foreplay.

Robert was perfectly happy to tease him all night. Truth be told, it gave his ego a boost, knowing that he could have Aaron, a man hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions around the world wanted and adored, that he could have him panting in his ear, body undulating with want. Sometimes, mostly, Robert took it for granted. He’d been with Aaron a long time after all. But he still felt those moments that he couldn’t believe he got this. Aaron whimpered and Robert pulled his fingers back, prolonging the tease.

“Oh, come on,” Aaron begged.

“Patience,” Robert said. “Got to earn it.” Aaron’s phone rang, but they both ignored it in favour of carrying on. Aaron pressed his hand above Robert’s, pushing it where he wanted, throwing his head back and groaning. Robert planted feather light kisses to Aaron’s throat, continuing to push his fingers down against Aaron’s bulge. He loved having control over Aaron like this.

Afterwards, Aaron looked lighter, younger somehow. “Been a while since we fooled around on the sofa like teenagers,” Aaron said, a bit smug. Robert grinned back, completely unashamed as he grabbed them a couple of beers from the fridge.

“I’ve been thinking,” Aaron said, sitting on the sofa and taking the beer Robert offered him. “I think we should start looking at houses, outside London.”

“Oh?” Robert asked.

“You don’t have a job tying us here any more,” Aaron said. “And if we’re going to have a kid…”

“That’s a big if at the moment,” Robert interjected, obviously.
“I don’t really want to raise him or her in the centre of London when we’ve got other choices,” Aaron said. “We’re lucky enough to have other choices.”

“I love you,” Robert said warmly.

“What’s that for?” Aaron asked, rolling his eyes.

“I love how you think,” Robert said. “How you consider our future. Both of us plus one.”

“Of course I think about our future,” Aaron said, putting his feet up on the coffee table. “It’s important.” Robert smiled as Aaron checked his messages. Then Aaron froze, phone to his ear.

“What’s wrong?” Robert asked. “Aaron? Talk to me!” he snapped, seeing Aaron immobile.

“We’ve passed,” Aaron said. “The agency called. The background checks, the initial meetings, Jodie’s… actually agreed to be our surrogate.”

“That’s…” Robert started. “Oh, my God. That’s amazing. We’re… God, we’re really doing this?”

“If you want to,” Aaron said, biting on his bottom lip, almost to contain his joy. “If you want to back out, speak now.” Robert broke into a huge smile, one Aaron mirrored.

“We’re going to be parents,” Robert said quietly, with awe.

“Long way to go yet,” Aaron said. Though while his words were hesitant, his face wasn’t. Robert hugged him tightly, almost unable to believe it. They were really, truly on their way.

“We need to decide who’s going to be the father,” Robert said, biting down on his lip. It was a subject he’d been avoiding until it was absolutely necessary, because he guessed both he and Aaron would want to be.

“I like the suggestion the agency made,” Aaron said slowly. “Try with one of us, if it doesn’t take, next time try with the other one.” It had been what they suggested, standard practice apparently, but there was only one problem.

“But the trick is…” Robert started.

“Who goes first,” Aaron finished for him. “Yeah, I know.” They fell into silence, both of them thinking about it, then Aaron sighed and got his wallet out. “I’ll flip you for it,” he said hunting for a coin.

Robert looked at him blankly before realising, “you’re serious.”

“Yeah,” Aaron said. “It’ll be our kid, whoever’s the dad. You know that.”

“Yeah, Robert agreed, nodding at the coin, in almost stunned silence. “Go on then, I’ll go along with the madness. Tails.”

“Okay,” Aaron said. He flipped the coin and they both watched as it landed heads. “Me first then,” Aaron said. “Are you okay with that?”

“Yes,” Robert said. “I like the idea of a little girl with your eyes.” Aaron smiled at the picture in his head.

“We’re doing this?”
“Yeah,” Robert said, kissing him deeply. “We are.”

The first cycle didn’t take. Nor did the second. Aaron was starting to regret even mentioning surrogacy, suggesting that this was what he wanted. Because it was giving them an added pressure, a thought always niggling away at the back of their minds that it hasn’t worked. They couldn’t get what they wanted, just because they were well off, just because they wanted a kid, well, it didn’t mean anything in the end, did it?

They could both feel the added stress. Plus Aaron’s voice therapist had had a meeting with Messenger’s agents, and they’d decided that they were ready to rearrange and finalise the tour dates that had been delayed. Life was moving on, and for some reason it felt like some of their relieved “Aaron’s still alive” bubble had burst. Real life was kicking in now.

It was three weeks until they left for Manila, and Aaron had a nervous thrill about it. He wanted to sing, to perform, but he was terrified he wouldn’t be able to do it, despite getting the green light from his voice therapist and the bands sound technicians. He needed Robert with him for his first show, he wasn’t too proud to admit it. He needed to know he’d have someone if it all went wrong, plus that first show was going to have a lot of press around it. The papers had all covered the fire and Aaron being trapped in it, though Aaron hadn’t read the articles himself. He hadn’t wanted to indulge in the speculation for his career, he was worried enough on his own.

Deciding to ignore the fact Robert was in the shower, he went through to the bathroom, sitting on the edge of the opposite bath. Sometimes he really liked having a bit of money put by, and their luxurious bathroom definitely was a perk of the job. Robert turned the water off.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Nothing, just want to talk,” Aaron said.

“Pass me a towel.” Aaron did, Robert wrapping himself up in it before appearing outside the steamed shower glass. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong,” Aaron said.

“I know you better than that,” Robert said impatiently. “Spit it out.” Aaron sighed, watching a droplet of water work its way down his husband’s chest. God, Robert really was gorgeous. “Am I distracting you?” Robert asked with a smirk.

“Yes, but I don’t see that stopping any time soon,” Aaron said honestly. “Look, I’m worried about the Manila show.”

“I know you are,” Robert said softly. “I’ll be there with you, holding your hand.”

“Would you?” Aaron asked, hating himself for needing Robert this much. Robert was coming with him on tour, that was a given. But this one show… Aaron was nervous.

“Hey, I’ll be there, whatever you need.”

“Thank you,” Aaron said sincerely. He kissed Robert gently.

“Look, I know it’s been a tough few months, what with… things not going quite as well with Jodie as we hoped, but… it’s not the end. If it doesn’t work out, we can always adopt. We’ve got plenty of options.”
“I know,” Aaron said. “Sometimes it’s tough, that’s all.”

“Believe me, I get it,” Robert said. “Let me take you out for dinner. Somewhere nice.” Aaron screwed his nose up. “Fine, somewhere cheap where you can get a greasy cheeseburger.”

“Sounds much better,” Aaron agreed. “We’re going to be okay, right?”

“I know we are,” Robert said, kissing him again. “Let me get some clothes on.”

“I don’t know, I quite enjoy that view,” Aaron said. Robert smiled, then went into the bedroom. Aaron didn’t think anything more of it, until ten minutes or so passed and he hadn’t heard so much as a noise from Robert or the bedroom.

“You’re taking your time,” Aaron said, seeing Robert sat on the edge of the bed, shirt on but unbuttoned.

“We need to call Jodie,” Robert said slowly.

“Why?”

Robert held up his phone and Aaron saw it. The picture of a positive pregnancy test. Aaron snatched the phone, almost double checking what he was looking at.

“Oh my God,” Aaron breathed. “We’re… Jesus.” Robert broke out into a huge smile and wrapped Aaron in his arms, the joy almost pouring out of them both.

“Sod dinner, I want to crack open the champagne,” Robert said into Aaron’s neck.

“You know something, even I’d drink champagne for this,” Aaron agreed, pulling away from him. “We need to call her first though.”

“Yes, we do.” Robert kissed Aaron for all he was worth.
Chapter 55

Chapter Notes

I am going to attempt to finish this monster fic this month, so I've got a lot to get through! Thank you for the encouragement on this, it means so much to me. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They called Jodie far too often in the first two weeks. In fact, she’d had to get really annoyed and told them she wouldn’t be answering more than one call a day. Robert didn’t blame her, they had gone a bit full on. And nagging a newly pregnant woman probably wasn’t a good move for a healthy pregnancy anyway. But they were both so happy almost in awe actually, that this was finally happening. They hadn’t told anyone. They hadn’t even told the band, wanting to keep it quiet until after the three month scan. When they would know things were going well.

Also, one tiny snag was they were going to be halfway around the world for the twelve week scan, and the gender scan too. Jodie playfully said it was a good job too, it would give her a break. Aaron thought about mentioning it to management, asking them to rearrange the dates again, but realistically, what good would he be if he stayed in the UK? It wouldn’t actually help matters. Robert wanted to tell Vic. She was the one person he wanted to confide in, and the waiting was almost painful. But they both knew they should.

On the flight to Malaysia, Robert and Aaron had a lot of time to kill. They were in first class and it was a long flight. “We should start thinking of names,” Aaron suggested.

“Bit early isn’t it?” Robert said smiling anyway.

“It’ll take us the rest of this pregnancy to find a name we agree on,” Aaron grumbled. Robert laughed.

“How about I pick the girls name, you pick the boys,” Robert suggested, Aaron snorting.

“No, I’m not going to be on the losing end of that deal,” Aaron said. “Can’t give you free rein.”

“You say that like I’m going to pick something outrageous,” Robert said. “And we’re not going down the “celebrity baby names” route. Nothing stupid. I’m not asking for the kid to be bullied in school.”

“No, I don’t want anything stupid,” Aaron said. “James or Ben for a boy.”

Robert thought about those for a moment. “That doesn’t sound too bad actually.”

“Good.”

“What girls names have you thought of?” Aaron asked. “And don’t tell me you haven’t thought of any.”

“Eleanor,” Robert said.

“No,” Aaron said, screwing his nose up.
“What’s wrong with that?”

“I don’t like Ellie,” Aaron said. “Which is what it will be shortened to.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Robert grumbled. Aaron just shrugged. “Ava?”

“That’s okay,” Aaron said fairly. “Ava,” he repeated slowly as if debating it.

“Well, we can’t agree that quickly,” Robert said in the silence. “We’re meant to argue this for months yet.”

“I’m sure we’ll change our mind when bump gets here,” Aaron said, leaning his head on Robert’s shoulder. “Can you believe we got here?”

“No,” Robert said. “I can’t.”

Sightseeing was a must. Robert allowed himself a couple of days that he got really excited that they were halfway around the world. It couldn’t really get much better, so they did almost have a second honeymoon. They’d flown out a little earlier than they really needed to. The one bad thing about sightseeing is that a lot of people had been waiting for years for Messenger to come to the Philippines and Asia. Which meant that once they were out of the door of their hotel, security was needed. Aaron actually had more security guards than Robert had ever seen, outside of one of the band’s press events and CD signings. Sometimes Robert forgot just how sought after and famous Aaron was. They lived in a patch of London, where pretty much all the locals had become used to them. Sure, you still got phones trying to snap pictures of them, but it was much more low key than it could have been otherwise. This? This was full on.

It was somewhat of a relief when they got back to the hotel, and Aaron had to start doing some actual work for the band. As the day of the show dawned, Aaron was almost vibrating with nervousness. Robert could feel the energy radiating off him even lying in bed next to him.

Robert was by his side all day. He didn’t leave the arena, not through sound check, not through any of it. Aaron sounded fine, Robert knew that, but Aaron didn’t have the confidence any more. It probably hadn’t helped that it’d been quite a while since his last show.

Sound check was over, Adam and Alex were getting some food, but Aaron still stood on stage, almost clutching the microphone and looking among the empty arena. Robert let him do that alone for about a minute before he joined him. Aaron looked around and forced a smile.

“It will be fine,” Robert said, even as he did so, knowing the words were pointless. Aaron was being stubborn.

“I want it to be like before,” Aaron said.

“The fear of it will be worse than actually performing,” Robert said.

“That and half the world’s press out there.”

“You don’t mind the press,” Robert said. “I seem to remember you married one of them.” Aaron rolled his eyes easily, then kissed him.

“That was a black mark against you,” Aaron said. “When I was deciding if you were worth it.”

“Oh, what other black marks did I have?” Robert teased. “Now I’m interested.”
“Older than me,” Aaron said. “That went against you.”

“Why?!” Robert said. “Can’t help my age.”

“I’d been sleeping with guys who were a bit younger than me,” Aaron said. “Didn’t want a relationship, didn’t want anything serious.”

“And then I came along,” Robert said.

“You were persistent,” Aaron said.

“I wasn’t the one who flew to a different country because I was horny one night,” Robert reminded him. Aaron shrugged, but the smile met his eyes this time. “Let’s get something to eat,” Robert suggested and Aaron nodded.

“How is he?” Alex asked Robert, poking her head into Aaron’s dressing room. Alex and Robert hadn’t been alone much, not since the fire anyway. Things had… shifted in their friendship. Robert knew and understood why Aaron had done it, gone back into that fire. And no long term damage had been done, not really. Aaron’s voice problems were largely in his head at this point. But it still was incredibly frightening how close he’d got to losing his whole world.

“I think he’s scared,” Robert said. “He’s not got a problem, his voice recovered, but…”

“He doesn’t think so,” Alex finished for him. “I know. There’s no talking to him though.”

“Yeah,” Robert said heavily.

“Rob? I’m so sorry. About Barcelona, the fire, I… I didn’t think, then Aaron was in there, and…”

“Yeah, well,” Robert said. “I know it’s not your fault, and I know what Aaron’s like. I was just so scared I was going to lose him.”

“I know,” Alex said. “I was too.”

Robert cleared his throat. “My… mother. She died in a fire when I was fourteen. I… that flight from London to Spain. I spent all of it thinking he’d died. I’d lost my entire world for the second time.” Robert didn’t know why he was sharing something so personal with her, but he just felt like he needed to.

“I didn’t know that,” Alex said.

“My brother set the fire,” Robert said. “The fire that killed my mum. Insurance,” he added to Alex’s questioning look. “I just… sometimes I wonder what she’d say. How my life is now. What she’d think of Aaron.”

“A grumpy git with a good heart,” Alex said, making Robert smile.

“I like to think she’d like him,” Robert continued.

“I think she’d like how happy you are,” Alex said. “You two are made for each other, anyone can see that.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” Alex said. “You’ve not been hounded by fans who think you’re not good enough for him,
and that does happen. I know.”

“Speaking of, how is the lawyer?” Robert asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Gorgeous,” Alex said quickly, making Robert smile.

“Are you falling for him?” Robert asked.

“I might be,” Alex said. “God, he’s amazing.” Robert smiled at her. “I should go. Need to do my makeup before the show.” Robert nodded, and then hugged her on instinct.

“I know it’s not your fault,” Robert said into her hair.

“I’m still sorry.”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “I know.”

Robert stood at the side of the stage as the opening bars started playing. He was almost holding his breath, for how Aaron would cope, how he’d perform. After one line, Robert managed to breathe again. He was fine. Fans were screaming, and he gained his confidence. He’d make it. Aaron’s eyes flicked to him at the side of the stage and smiled. Robert breathed in deeply. Thank God. Robert didn’t care, not for himself. But he did care about Aaron being able to live his life the way he wanted. They were here, Aaron was ruling the stage like he always did, and they had a baby coming. Could life get better?

Jodie sat in the waiting room, flicking through a magazine while waiting for her appointment. She’d done this often enough before that she wasn’t overly nervous. Though it was odd that neither Robert or Aaron were here, but she’d promised to call them as soon as she’d finished the appointment, making sure everything’s okay. She understood, she wasn’t stupid, just would have been nice had they been here.

“Jodie Perry?” She smiled at the nurse and went through to the examination room, hoping up on the table.

“Hi,” the doctor said, smiling brightly. Far too cheery for this early in the morning, Jodie thought to herself. “So I’ve got your information here, surrogate pregnancy, have you had any problems? Any spotting or anything?”

“No,” Jodie said. “It’s all fine, no problems at all. As far as I know anyway.”

“Are we waiting for the parents today?”

“Er, no,” Jodie said. “Busy working at the moment.”

“Okay,” she said. “If you can pull your top up, we’ll have a look.” The doctor got the gel and started using the wand on the machine.

“I just need to know he’s all right,” Jodie said. “Especially as he’s not mine. That would be an awkward conversation.”
“Him?” the doctor questioned with a smile, focusing on the machine.

“I’ve got two girls of my own,” Jodie said. “This one… feels different. I can’t explain it, just does.”

“Right,” the doctor said to herself, focusing the image. Jodie watched as she frowned, then tapping away on the keyboard.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” she said. Way too quickly.

“Come on, just tell me,” Jodie said heavily, fear filling her. “What’s wrong with him?”

“Nothing, I’m checking the size, looks good for twelve weeks,” she said, reassuring. It didn’t exactly work.

“There’s something though,” Jodie pushed. The doctor turned the screen around, did a few more taps on the keyboard. “Right, here’s the heartbeat,” she said, and a reassuring thumping filled the room. “Just what we’d expect.” She moved the wand. “And here’s heartbeat number two.”

“What?” Jodie asked faintly. “It’s twins?”

“Yep,” she said, smiling. “They both look perfectly developed, no need to worry.” Now she knew what she was looking for, she could see two distinct shapes on the ultrasound. Twins. Bloody hell.

Chapter End Notes

I’d planned twins from the first time Aaron mentioned children but now we’re here, I don’t know if everyone will like that development! Thank you for reading!
“Robert, good!” Jodie called on the phone. “The connections bad, can you hear me?”

“Just about,” Robert said, going into Aaron’s dressing room for a bit more quiet. Aaron was currently on stage and he could feel the music reverberating through the walls. But he’d been waiting for this call. “How did the scan go?”

“The doctors are pleased with the size, say everything’s going well,” she said.


“No, nothing like that,” she said. “Sorry, I’m in a bit of shock. It’s twins.”

“What?” Robert asked. Then after a pause. “Two embryo’s… took?”

“Apparently,” she said. “Are you and Aaron okay with that?”

“Why wouldn’t we be?” Robert asked. He was shocked, but there was no denying this was a good thing. “Twins? It’s wonderful!”

“I’m glad you think that,” Jodie said. “I was a little worried.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know,” Jodie said. “Just all over the place. Let’s blame hormones shall we?”

“How are you?” Robert asked.

“I’m fine,” she said. “Just a bit… God, I’ve got to give birth to two.”

“I would say I’m sorry, but I’m not,” Robert said. Jodie laughed slightly.

“I’m going to send you a picture of the scan, okay? I’ll leave telling Aaron to you.”

“I’ll enjoy that,” Robert said amused. “He’s on stage at the moment, so I’ll tell him after the show.”

“Great,” she said.

“Jodie? Thank you,” Robert said sincerely.

“I’m going home, I’m going to scoff on chocolate and not move for the rest of the day.”

“Sounds good,” Robert said. “Take care of yourself.”

“Will do.” The phone call ended and Robert stood perfectly still, thinking about the implications of this. Twins. Two babies. That was going to be such a nightmare, a wonderful, joyful mess of a family. Robert already couldn’t wait. It took about two minutes for a picture of the ultrasound to come through. Robert smiled. There were two definitive… well, splodges for lack of a better word. Their kids. His and Aaron’s children. No one could take the grin off his face.

Robert sat in Aaron’s dressing room, waiting for him to get off stage. Aaron knew Jodie’s scan had
been today and he was antsy about it too, worried.

“Hey, is…” Aaron started, throwing the door open. He suddenly went white, seeing Robert’s face, misreading it. “It’s the scan isn’t it?” Aaron said. “Is something wrong? Has she lost it? Is…”

“Slow down!” Robert snapped, trying to get Aaron to stop rambling. He put a hand on Aaron’s shoulder, trying to stop him from panicking. “Yes, it is the scan, but it’s fine.”

“How fine?” Aaron asked. “What levels of fine are we dealing with? Is the baby not healthy?” Robert gave up, instead showing him the picture. It was the simplest way to stop him from panicking. Aaron froze, looking at it, and Robert saw the moment the penny dropped.

“She’s carrying twins?”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “We’re going to be very busy in six months,” he added with a grin.

“Are they… okay?”

“Yeah,” Robert said. “She said they’re perfect.”

“Twins?” Aaron asked, the fear changing into something else. “We’ve got two kids?”

“We’ve got two kids,” Robert said, breathing deeply to try and stop the shaking. “I think we really need to tell your mum now.”

“She’s going to go through the roof,” Aaron said with a broad grin. “I know she wasn’t a great mother to me, but I think she’d be a good grandmother.” Robert blanched. He hid it quickly, but Aaron caught it. “Sorry, I didn’t think.”

“I’ve got no one to tell,” Robert said sadly.

“You can tell Vic,” Aaron said softly. “I know it’s not the same thing, I know, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have…”

“You’re allowed to be excited and want to share this with your mother,” Robert said. “It’s just sometimes… I miss mine.”

“Of course you do,” Aaron said. “Come here.” Aaron pulled him into a hug and Robert fell into it. Sometimes he felt lonely, without those family connections. But it was always nice to be reminded that Aaron was his family, and he was here.

On an overnight flight a few weeks later, Aaron was asleep, enjoying the perks of first class, but Robert couldn’t sleep. He kept thinking about their future, the four of them, and he got his laptop out, and started to do some work. Aaron’s tour had nearly ended, they had about another week before they flew home to London. The first thing they were going to do was talk to Jodie, then very close behind, assuming all was still going well, they were going to go to Yorkshire and tell Chas she was going to be a grandmother. Robert and Chas got along… okay. Things had been tetchy, but hopefully this would smooth the way a little bit more. Chas could hardly resent her grandchildren after all. Soon after that, Robert knew it would become public knowledge in the press. Let them. Robert was happy, they could write whatever they liked.

“Hey?” Robert looked up to see a bleary eyed Aaron watching him.
“Why aren’t you sleeping?” Robert asked.

“I was going to ask you the same thing,” Aaron said. “Worried?”


“Writing what?” Aaron asked.

“A book,” Robert said levelly and Aaron frowned at him, not following. “I’ve been given an offer. For a novel.”

“Oh?” Aaron said in surprise. He’d heard nothing about this.

“I’m not stupid, I know I’ve been offered it because of who I married, but… I like the idea.” Robert shrugged. “Want to see if I can hack it. A different kind of writing.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Aaron asked.

“I sent off a couple of chapters to a literary agent,” Robert said. “He might have told me it was crap, but he seemed interested.”

“You could have said.”

“I am,” Robert replied. “This is me telling you. It's new. No idea if I can even string a book together. And I know I’m getting ahead on name recognition, and I don’t like that particularly.” Robert shrugged. “We’ll see.”

“You and your books,” Aaron said fondly. “You realise that your dream place to go was a library?” Robert was drawn back to the time that Aaron promised he’d take him anywhere he wanted. After Aaron’s first tour, when they were still dating. Getting serious, but not quite there, and he’d gone to the Bodleian library in Oxford. It had been a wonderful special day.

“My mum used to read to me,” Robert said, voice going soft. Aaron knew better than to interrupt when Robert was talking about his parents. He did it so rarely. “Every night she’d come in to read a bed time story to me. Even when I was strictly too old for it, she’d still do it.” Robert tailed off, and Aaron pushed gently.

“You can always talk about her,” he said. Robert closed his laptop, almost staring into the middle distance.

“I can’t even remember her voice,” Robert said. “I heard it so often as a kid and now… I can’t quite remember it.” Aaron knew this was coming from the pregnancy, the fact that they were soon to be parents themselves.

“I want… a box. Of things,” Robert said, the words hard to come out. “I want things that our kids can remember me by, if I’m not here.”

“Robert…” Aaron said. “Come on.” He didn't like even considering a world that didn't have Robert in it.

“I’m serious,” Robert said. “You never know what’s coming and… I’d hate for them never to know me. Never remember me. I want them to know they’re loved. Even if I’m not here.”

“Robert, nothing’s happening to you,” Aaron said. “We’re going to have a long, long life together. I’ll make sure of it, I’m not raising two of our tearaway kids on my own!” Robert smiled slightly at
“Things happen every day,” Robert said. “My mum was fine one day, dead the next. My biological mother died in a car crash when I was four months old. I've no memories of her at all. My dad had a heart attack. You can’t guarantee it, and I want something. Just in case.”

“Robert…”

“Do you know what I’d give to have something of my mums? A few things that I know she’d have wanted me to have?” Robert said.

“Okay,” Aaron said, a hand on his thigh reassuringly. “If that’s what you want, we can do that.”

“Thank you.”

“But don’t you even think of leaving me,” Aaron warned. “I didn’t get out of a fire and go through a long and painful surrogacy process just so you’d get in the way of an oncoming truck.”

“I’ve got the point,” Robert said, pressing a closed mouth kiss to his husband. “I want our children to know they’re loved. Always.”

“They always will,” Aaron said surely.

“I’m driving,” Robert said enthusiastically. Aaron threw him the car keys, enjoying Robert’s grin. Neither of them got to drive nearly as much as they liked, what with living in the centre of London, and Aaron’s full schedule. Maybe when they bought a house, maybe that would change. God, Aaron missed driving sometimes. He put the last of their suitcases in the boot and got in the car, Robert enjoying getting the rental going. They were going to see Chas, she knew they were coming but not what they were going to tell her. Robert had said he wanted to see his brother (almost kind of true) and Aaron was coming up to see her.

“How do you think she’s going to take it?” Robert asked once they were well on their way north.

“She’s going to be thrilled,” Aaron said. “Or I think she is.”

“Aaron,” Robert said, rolling his eyes.

“Anyway, if she’s not, we tell her, you catch up with Andy and Katie, we go home right in time for Jodie’s next scan. It’s win win.”

“What do you want?” Robert asked. Aaron knew what he meant.

“Is it too much to ask for a girl and a boy?” Aaron asked softly. “One of each?”

“That’d be good,” Robert said. “I’d like a little girl, you know.”

“Well, you’ve got double the chance,” Aaron said. “Jodie said she felt well?”

“Yes,” Robert said. “She did. Could feel some fluttering, not quite kicks just yet, but… definitely there.”

“Good,” Aaron said with a warm smile.
I've thought of the name and gender of one of the twins, but I'm struggling with the other, so suggestions would be gratefully received! Hope you enjoy this chapter, and thanks for sticking with it.

Chas hugged Aaron tightly, almost before he’d walked in the back door of the pub. “Is it alright if we stay here?” Aaron asked. That was one thing that Robert loved about him. He was a rock star, and yet he was so down to earth and never let his money effect things.

“Of course!” Chas said eagerly. She even smiled and nodded at Robert, for which he was grateful for. “It’s so good to see you. A brew?”

“Please,” Robert jumped in. It had been a long drive and a cup of tea would be very welcome. Chas busied herself with the kettle, Aaron taking a couple of their bags upstairs.

“We've got something to tell you,” Aaron said when he reappeared.

“I know,” Chas said. “So, what is it? You haven’t just “dropped in” from London. And you’re both smiling, so I’m guessing you’re not getting divorced.”

“Mum!” Aaron snapped, then looked at Robert, worried.

“No, don’t mind me,” Robert said easily, then looked to Aaron. His mother, his job to tell her.

“You’re going to be a grandmother,” Aaron said, rather bluntly. Chas’s eyebrows rose. “In about four months.”

“What?!”

“Our surrogate,” Aaron started, he looked at Robert for reassurance. “We didn’t want to say anything until after the three month scan. So we knew everything was okay.”

“Seriously?” Chas asked. “You’re going to have a baby?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said, grinning widely and squeezing Robert’s hand as he got the scan picture up on his phone.

“Or actually…” Robert interrupted. “Two. It’s twins. That was not planned.”

Aaron got the picture of the scan up on his phone and passed it to his mum. She smiled, a happy smile and Robert felt something inside him relax. She wasn’t going to create problems then. Thank God.

“Love, that’s wonderful!” Chas beamed, pulling Aaron into a tight hug.

“All right, don’t go too mad,” Aaron said, pulling free after a too long hug, but he was grinning from ear to ear.
“Why did you never mention it!” Chas asked, eyes going between both men.

“We er… we’ve been trying for the last year or so,” Robert said. “We couldn’t find a surrogate, and then we had a couple of failed attempts, so we didn’t want to tell anyone until it was a sure thing.”

“I’m going to be a grandmother?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said. “That’s why we’re here.”

“I need to get a bottle of something to celebrate!” Chas almost squealed, going through to the bar, giddy with excitement.

“I should go,” Robert said. “You celebrate with your mum, I want to see Andy and Katie. Tell them. See how they’re getting on with Daniel.”

“Go up in a bit,” Aaron said. “Stay for a drink first. Do you want me to come?”

“I feel like I should do it on my own,” Robert said. “I never know how Andy’s going to react.”

“Okay,” Aaron said. Aaron pressed a kiss to his lips and then Chas reappeared, champagne and three glasses. Robert would stay for a drink, then go and find his brother.

Robert knocked on the farmhouse door, and within seconds it was opened, Katie appeared with Daniel on her hip, the former looking exhausted. “Robert!” she said, surprised. “I didn’t expect you.”

“Hi,” he said. “Andy around?”

“Yeah, he’s feeding the cows, he’ll be back in about ten minutes.” Robert nodded, going into the warm house, seeing it look homely and almost familiar.

“How are things?”

“Much better,” Katie said. “Thank you. For everything you did when he was born. We both really appreciate it.”

“How’s Daniel doing?”

“Teething and keeping me up all night,” Katie said. “But he’s perfect.”

“Good,” Robert said, ruffling his blonde hair. He looked very much like his mother, especially around the eyes. How much would their twins look like Aaron, he wondered. He hoped they’d be the spit of him, he honestly did. He loved Aaron more than he thought it was possible to love anyone.

“You want a drink?” Katie asked. “Help yourself, I’m just going to put him down for his sleep.”

“Thanks,” Robert said, making himself a coffee. He’d driven up here, and after one glass of champagne at the pub, he didn’t want to overdo it.

Just when he'd finished making his coffee, Andy came in and stopped, seeing Robert. “Oh. Hi.”

“Katie’s trying to put the baby to sleep,” Robert said in explanation.

“Daniel looks like he’s growing,” Robert said. Andy had a hint of pride about his son and he nodded.

“He’s a good baby,” Andy said happily. “Why are you here?” There was less hate in his voice this time.

“Aaron wanted to see his mum,” Robert said. “Because we’ve got good news.”

“Oh?” Andy asked. “Married for even more money?”

“You know what, this was a mistake,” Robert said, turning to the door.

“Sorry.” That made Robert stop and look at him.

“Did I just get an apology?”

“Don’t get used to it,” Andy said, though he was smiling. “News?”

“Yeah,” Robert said as Katie came back, baby free. “Aaron and I. Well, we’ve been to a surrogacy agency, and we’re going to have a baby. Or two, actually. It’s twins.”

“Wow!” Katie said, surprised but obviously pleased, and Robert grinned back.

“How does that work then?” Andy asked, frowning. Why exactly had Robert thought this was a good idea again?

“What, two men raising a kid too out there for you is it?” Robert asked bitterly.

“Please don’t fight,” Katie said, more tired than upset at this point.

“No, I just meant… who’s the dad?” Andy said. “I didn’t mean anything else by it. I’m happy for you.”

“Aaron,” Robert said after a moment, foolishly taking Andy at his word.

“Right, so they’re not yours,” Andy said. “You’re just pretending.”

“Thanks for that,” Robert said after a beat of silence. “So glad I shared with you our good news.”

Robert turned away.

“Rob, he doesn’t mean that,” Katie called.

“Yes, he does,” Robert said.

“Oh, relax,” Andy grumbled. “Don’t be so sensitive.”

“Unlike most other people, Aaron and I don’t have the luxury of creating a child with the person we love. We have to spend thousands of pounds to do it, and we have to rely on a stranger to carry our baby for us. It takes a lot of planning, a lot of effort, and a need to really want to do this together.”

“Robert…” Andy interrupted.

“I don’t need a reminder that those kids are not genetically related to me,” Robert continued. “There is nothing I can do about that. They are mine and Aaron’s children. No matter how prejudiced you are.”
“Calm down!” Andy said. “I didn’t mean that. I just… Look, stay for a drink.”

“No thanks,” Robert said, walking out of the house. They knew, and that was that. But it didn’t stop the hollow feeling he felt, and the echo that this would have been exactly how his dad reacted, if he’d been alive. It didn’t matter anyway, he was going back to Aaron, the person who always felt like home.

“I’m not that surprised,” Chas said. “You’ve been together years.” Aaron smiled at her, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m a bit frightened, mum,” Aaron said. Robert stopped, listening intently in the hallway. He hadn’t expected to walk in to a conversation like this, but he also didn’t want to interrupt. “I’m excited, but I’m scared. I don’t want to be a shit dad.”

“You won’t be,” Chas said.

“You don’t know that.”

“I know that you have the biggest heart of anyone I know,” Chas said. “Just don’t follow my example, and rely on Robert and you should be just fine.”

“How’ve you got that faith in me?” Aaron asked quietly.

“You’re a good person,” Chas said. “And I may not have always got on with him, but Robert adores you. I love that you have that. Your kids are going to be perfect.”

“I want to be good for them. I do, so much. I’m just scared.”

“That’s a good sign. Believe it or not.”

“Thanks,” Aaron said, voice soft. “I just… we didn’t plan for two. I thought… we can get to grips with one. Learn on our feet, but two… it’s a lot.”

“It is a lot,” Chas agreed. “And you will love them more than you think possible right now. When you meet them, you will love every single part of them. It’ll hit you.”

“Will it?”

“Have you told Robert you’re worried?”

“No,” Aaron said. “It’s more… I don’t want to get it wrong. I want these kids, more than anything. But God, I don’t want to screw it up.”

“Aaron, trust yourself,” Chas said. “It’ll all turn right in the end.”

“Yeah,” Aaron said quietly. “Thanks.”

“Can I ask whose they are?” Chas asked quietly, so quietly that Robert was straining to hear. “I mean… yours or Roberts?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Aaron said. “They’re both ours, and that’s that.”

“I love you,” Chas said. Robert decided that this was the time to make his presence known and he popped his head around the corner.
“Okay?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said, smiling at him, tired and genuine. “How’d they take it?”

“Let’s forget about that and go to bed,” Robert said, forcing a smile.

“Charming,” Chas said, though it was clear she didn’t mean it.

“Are you okay?” Aaron asked as Robert was getting undressed. He’d been almost silent since going upstairs.

“Yeah,” Robert said, getting into bed. “I overheard some of your conversation with Chas. I wasn’t eavesdropping, I just…”

“It’s all right,” Aaron said, snuggling into Robert’s body. “I do worry. I worry I’m going to be no good at it. That doesn’t mean I don’t want them, Robert.”

“We’ll learn,” Robert said. “And we’ll love them. That’s what matters.”

“I know,” Aaron said.

“You could have told me you were worrying about this,” Robert said, his fingers carding through Aaron’s hair, keeping his touch light. “I need to know what’s going on in that head of yours.”

“I know,” Aaron said. “Sometimes it feels a bit overwhelming. That doesn’t mean I don’t want this. I want our baby. The planned one and the surprise.” Robert kissed him, gentle, soft. “Do you ever worry?” Aaron whispered against his lips.

“Sometimes.” Robert kissed him again. “But we’ve got each other, and that’s what matters.”

“I know.” Robert pulled Aaron to him, them both reassuring each other with their bodies. They didn’t have sex, but the touches, the kisses, and the comfort, it was sorely needed between them.
Robert was the first up in the morning. It was an unfamiliar kitchen, but he managed to make two cups of tea without too much trouble. Before he could take them upstairs, Chas appeared in her dressing gown, smiling at him. “Tea or coffee?” Robert asked.

“Tea, thanks,” she said. Robert did as she asked, and before they could get into any type of discussion, there was a knock on the door, and Chas opened it to find Andy there.

“Do you know what time it is?” Chas asked, letting him in. “I’m guessing you’re here to see your brother.”

“I don’t want to talk,” Robert said firmly from the kitchen, seeing Andy. “No.”

“I’m sorry,” Andy said. “I didn’t mean it last night, I was tired, it’d been a long day and I spoke without thinking.”

“Don’t you always,” Robert said dully. “Look, say whatever crap about me that you want. I’m sure I can guess what you think of me. But the second you start criticising my kids, we’re going to have a problem.”

“What?” Chas asked darkly, chipping in.

“I didn’t mean it,” Andy said.

“You’re adopted, what does it matter who the biological father is?” Robert continued. Andy had hurt him with just a few short sentences last night, he wasn’t going to let that go.

“Yeah,” Andy said. “And you know how hard I tried to fit in?”

“Oh, give me a break,” Robert said impatiently. “You were always dad’s favourite, and you got away with twice the crap I did.”

“You got away with your fair share,” Andy said. Robert was too hurt to admit he might have a point. “I’m sorry. Congratulations.”

“Do you mean that?” Robert asked. “Really?”

“Yeah, I do,” Andy said. “Are we okay?”

“Don’t talk rubbish about my twins, and we’ll be fine,” Robert said. “Okay?”

“Yeah,” Andy said. Both brothers did an awkward kind of nod at each other. “I’ll leave you to it. Sorry to interrupt.”

“Do I want to know what that was about?” Chas asked.
“No,” Robert said. “I’m going to go and wake Aaron up.”

“Didn’t need that visual,” Chas said, and Robert rolled his eyes.

“With tea, not anything else.”

“Oh okay,” Chas said, smiling.

Robert opened the bedroom door and saw Aaron curled on his side, asleep. They hadn’t drawn the curtains last night, and the morning sunlight was shining on his skin. He looked so beautiful. Even now, Robert’s breath caught when he saw Aaron like this. He’d got so incredibly lucky. He put the mug of tea down on the bedside table. “Hey, wake up,” he said, pressing a soft kiss to Aaron’s cheek.

“…no…” He could hear the smile in Aaron’s voice and lay next to him in bed. Aaron curled up to him, all dozy and soft and just... beautiful. There was no other word for it. They both looked at the closed bedroom door as they heard a stomping up the stairs, then a quick knock.

“Is it safe?!?” Robert sighed, hearing Vic’s voice, and he felt Aaron’s body under the covers briefly, pleased he was actually wearing something. Unlike Vic’s first impression of him so long ago. A memory that still made Aaron’s face red even now.

“We’re in bed, but yes,” Robert said. Vic peered around the door, almost anxiously, then smiled seeing Robert in a T shirt and jogging bottoms, laying on top of the covers. “I heard!” Vic squealed. “You’re going to be a dad!” She almost threw herself at Robert, giving him a big hug. “This is so great! Have you thought of names yet?”

“Slow down,” Aaron said. “It’s not even eight in the morning, yet.” Though he was smiling at her. Her enthusiasm was catching.

“Was Katie right? Is it twins?”

“Yes,” Robert said. Vic squealed again, hugging her brother. “Are you two’s happy?”

“Yes,” Robert said, smiling at her.

“Very,” Aaron chipped in.

“Oh, let me take you out for breakfast,” Vic said. “Celebrate.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Robert said at exactly the same moment Aaron muttered “Get the full English on order.”

“Great!” she said. “You two get dressed and I’ll meet you there!”

“She’s way too bubbly for this time of day,” Aaron grumbled, but it was well meant, Robert knew.

Aaron was having a drink in the pub with his mum and his many Dingle relatives who’d come out of the woodwork. He was having a great time, and Robert was being introduced to people he’d only know by name. Their wedding had been small, so Robert hadn’t met a lot of these people before.
Cain, Aaron’s uncle in particular looked like someone you wouldn’t want to get on the wrong side of. After about an hour, Robert managed to slip away. He caught Aaron’s eye, but he said nothing. Aaron knew where he was going, and could also tell Robert didn’t want the company.

Robert made his way up the village to the cemetery. The sun was sinking, so he had it to himself and he walked to his mother’s grave without even thinking about it. “Hi mum,” Robert said softly. “I know I should visit you more often. Sorry.” He sighed. “I’m going to be a dad. I know. Can you believe it? Two kids. Kind of like what you took on when you came into my life. Vic’s doing well. She seems so happy. I do keep an eye on her, though probably not as close an eye as you would.” Robert sighed deeply. “I miss you, mum. I wish you were here to spoil all your grandkids. God, they’d be so lucky. I’ll bring them here when they’re born. I promise.”

He moved on to the other grave he came here to see. “Dad.” Robert shuffled. He always found talking to his father much more uncomfortable, even when he was alive. “I’ve got twins coming,” he said. “I love them so much even before they’re here. Did you ever feel that way about me?” Robert cleared his throat. “I’m sure you did. But sometimes it just… didn’t feel like it. I should let it go, I know. Life’s moved on so much, I’m…” Robert sighed. “I love you. And at times like this, I do miss you.” He didn’t really have anything else to say, he touched the headstone gently, and then left.

Outside the cemetery he saw Aaron, pacing too and fro, waiting for him. “Want me to leave?” Aaron asked. Robert hugged him, burying his face in Aaron’s neck, enjoying the scent of him, the warmth.

“Heard.”

On the day of the scan, they met Jodie at the hospital, she was already in the waiting room and her baby bump was a lot more pronounced than they expected. She looked well on her way to two healthy babies now.

“How are you?” Robert asked, giving her a hug.

“I’m doing well,” she said. “They’re both kicking, so I’m guessing it’s going okay.”

“You can tell them apart?” Aaron asked softly as they sat down.

“Maybe it’s in my head,” Jodie said. “But I like to think so.”

“Thank you,” Robert said. “For doing this for us.”

“Shut up,” she said, not unkindly. They were in a private hospital, none of them wanting the press attention, and Aaron saying to hell with the cost. They didn’t want people gawping at them, but it also meant they didn’t have to wait long for their appointment.

The three of them were showed through and Jodie hopped up and got comfy on the table. Or as comfy as she was likely to get, all the while Aaron was biting down on his bottom lip. He was really anxious, Robert knew.

“Right, any problems since last time?” the doctor asked.

“No,” she said. “Apart from the fact I can’t see my own feet way earlier than my other pregnancies.”

“Twins,” she said in explanation, smiling at her as she focused the machine. “Right, let me…” the doctor tapped away and Aaron slipped his hand into Robert’s. They were both worried about this, so
desperate for it all to go well.

“Good,” the doctor said. “They’re developing well, the size is within normal range…” She clicked again, and a thumping noise filled the room. The heartbeat and Aaron looked at Robert, almost brimming over with happiness. “Are you interested in the gender?”

“Yes,” Robert said fervently, making Aaron smile. “If that’s okay with you,” he added to Jodie.

“Yeah, it’s good,” she said. “Save me calling them “it” all the time.”

“Twin A is a boy,” she said, smiling at them. “And twin B is a lot harder to see. Hiding behind its brother.” She clicked on the machine and moved the wand to a different angle. “Here we go… Twin B is a girl.”

“Really?” Aaron asked, his voice so quiet. “We’ve got one of each?”

“Yes,” the doctor said. “Couldn’t be going smoother at the moment. I assume dads want pictures?“

“Yes!” Robert snapped, making the three of them laugh.

“I’m happy for you two,” Jodie said. “You’ll be great parents.”

“Thank you,” Robert said. “For everything.”

Robert had been quiet, unusually so since they got home. They’d put the scan picture on their fridge, sent a copy off to Chas who would undoubtedly share it, and then he’d fallen silent. Aaron didn’t understand why. The scan could not have gone better, so why was Robert so quiet? “I thought you’d be happy,” Aaron said.

“I am,” Robert said.

“Tell your face that.”

“No, I am,” Robert said, sitting down. “I just worry that something some where’s going to go wrong. It’s been far too easy so far, and I don’t want… I’m worrying, that’s all.”

“Worrying won’t change anything,” Aaron said. “The doctor said they look perfect.”

“According to UK law, they’re her children until she signs over parental rights to us,” Robert said heavily. “I’m just… terrified something’s going to go wrong.”

“She’s been a surrogate before with no problems,” Aaron said fairly. “And we’re going through an agency. We’ve got the money for a legal case if we need one.”

“You think about that?” Robert asked quietly.

“They’re our kids,” Aaron said, smiling a little. “They’re coming home with us, one way or another.” Robert smiled at him and kissed him softly.

“God, I love you,” Robert said. “You’re perfect.”

“I know,” Aaron said with a wink.
“Grumpy git, but I love you so much.” Aaron smiled.

Time ticked down. Both of them were counting off the weeks and days until Jodie’s due date, with the knowledge that she’d probably go into labour a little earlier, carrying twins. All they did was look at the date, discuss names, and argue over the colour of the nursery. Robert wanted blue, a pale sky blue. Aaron wanted white, because babies don’t care, and it’s easier to change it when they grow and get their own personalities.

They had relocated from London. They’d gone to living in Aaron’s house, about an hour outside of the city, the one that hadn’t been touched in years, since they were dating. It had actually taken quite a bit of work to bring it up to scratch again. The boiler had gone and there was a thick layer of dust over the entire place. So that was a project they worked on, while waiting for their children to make an appearance. It was good to have a focus on something.

The phone rang at two in the morning, waking them both. Robert instinctively knew something was wrong as he blindly reached for it. “Yeah?”

“Robert, hi,” Jodie said. “I er…”

“What is it?” Robert asked bluntly, putting the phone on speaker. She’d not called at this time of day for a chat.

“I don’t want you to worry, the doctors say it’s normal,” she said.

“What’s normal?” Aaron asked tightly.

“I’m bleeding. Not a lot, but they’ve got me in hospital, and they think… they’re probably going to induce labour at some point. You probably need to get down here.”

“We’re on our way.”
The silence in the car on the way to the hospital was thick, uncomfortable. “What if…”

“Don’t,” Robert said harshly. “She sounded okay, she’s in the best place possible. Anything else is just needless worry.”

“Of course I’m worried!” Aaron snapped. “We’ve got so close and… I just need them both to be okay.” Robert put his hand on Aaron’s thigh reassuringly. They were both quiet until they got to the hospital, there was nothing else to say.

“Jodie Perry?” Aaron asked almost breathlessly when they reached the maternity unit. It was way too early in the morning and the receptionist just gave the room number, pointing. Both men followed her, finding Jodie looking surprisingly calm in a private room.

“Hi,” she said tiredly.

“Are you okay?” Aaron asked quickly. “Is everything…”

“Yeah, doctors keep checking me over, they like my contractions and there’s no more blood, so it’s all okay.” Aaron kept gibbering as Jodie winced, obviously going through another contraction, and she snapped.

“For God’s sake, who’s the one in labour, me or you?!” Jodie shouted. It did the job of getting Aaron to calm down, and he nodded once.

“Right. Sorry.”

“A little bit of bloods fine,” she said. “And the doctors are happy. See, no concerned faces everywhere.” Robert nodded, squeezing Aaron’s hand in reassurance.

“So… now we wait?” Aaron asked quietly.

“Easy for you to say,” Jodie muttered.

Jodie had kicked them out, because they’d started to annoy her, and were irritating as hell, telling them to get some breakfast or something. It wasn’t like she was going anywhere. By the time they got back, a lot more people were in Jodie’s room, and it was clear the labour had progressed.

Aaron looked scared, Robert could read it all over his face. Robert himself was a little alarmed at how quickly everything seemed to be happening and gripped Aaron’s hand.

“Right now, I hate you two,” Jodie said, obviously in pain.
“Okay, Jodie, on the next contraction you need to push,” the midwife said.

“Okay,” she breathed. She half groaned, half screamed, pushing for all she was worth and Robert felt like he was just in the way. Though he also felt like his feet were rooted to the floor, and he couldn’t move even if his life depended on it.

The thin crying filled the room, and Robert beamed. “Your son’s here,” the midwife said, obviously smiling. “We’re going to give him the once over, then you can hold him, all right?” Aaron could barely breathe, and then the nurse was handing the baby over to Robert who was the closest.

Robert held him so carefully, he looked so fragile and small. “Hey little man,” Robert soothed, grinning broadly, looking at his tiny, perfect face. “Wow, you’re finally here.” He was so beautiful and Aaron was watching his husband and son with quiet awe. Robert looked so right holding this baby, like he’d been built for it.

“Ah!” They both looked to Jodie who was obviously still in pain. Neither of them thought it was much beyond “normal” labour until they caught the midwife saying two words.

“Slowing heartbeat.”

“What?” Jodie breathed. Both men looked at each other, the instant panic there, understood immediately.

“Right, she’s breeched, she’s backwards,” the midwife said shortly. “I’m sorry, you’re going to have to push even harder.”

“I can’t!” Jodie wailed. “Oh God,” she added, head rolling backwards in complete exhaustion.

“Hey, you can,” Aaron soothed. “In ten minutes, it’ll all be over, and we’ll finally sod off and leave you alone.” She breathed a laugh then groaned as a contraction went through her.

“Come on, Jodie, push!” the midwife shouted at her. She squeezed Aaron’s hand, almost breaking his fingers. No one needed to announce when their daughter was here, the crying would have woken the dead.

“Is she okay?” Jodie asked breathlessly.

“Got a good set of lungs on her,” the midwife said, pleased. “Here we go.” She handed Aaron their daughter, and Aaron’s breath caught and heart almost stopped for a moment. She was still squalling, but she was here and perfect, and Aaron was already so in love with her. She had dark hair, a screwed up red face, and Aaron had never seen anything more beautiful. He looked up at Robert, who seemed to be going through a similar thing with their son.

“There you go, you’re all right,” the midwife said to Jodie. “Well done.” Jodie rolled her eyes before settling back on the bed, closing her eyes. She drifted off for a few moments, the doctors and midwives leaving the room, just one doctor in the corner, keeping an eye on everyone. Aaron and Robert sat down next to each other, precious bundles in their arms. Aaron looked over at their son, and smiled.

“They’re both... so special,” Aaron said quietly.

“They are,” Robert agreed. “You still like the names we picked?”

“Yes,” Aaron said. “I think... they’re perfect.” Aaron leaned across and kissed Robert softly.
Jodie looked absolutely exhausted, Aaron and Robert coming into her recovery room. She smiled at them tiredly. “Can I see them?” Aaron passed over their daughter with a little trepidation, Jodie smiling at her.

“Wow, she’s beautiful. She looks just like you.” She did. Her dark hair, her blue eyes, they screamed Aaron to them all. She yawned, looking absolutely adorable before settling into sleep.

“What names have you picked?” Jodie asked, cradling her head gently.

“Annie,” Robert said, almost proudly. “My grandmothers name.”

“The boy?”

“Joe,” Robert said. “Joseph.”

“I’m really happy for you two,” Jodie said, relaxing back on the pillows as Aaron took Annie back.

“We can’t thank you enough,” Aaron said. “What you’ve given us…” She just smiled.

“I know this is probably out of place,” Jodie said. “My daughter… she really wants an autograph, if that’s okay? She wasn’t into your music when I first met you, but she’s growing up. Way too fast if you ask me.”

“Of course that’s okay,” Aaron said easily. “After everything you’ve done? Really is the least we could do.” Jodie smiled at him. “If you want tickets to a show, the next time we’re on tour, I can send them over.”

“Really?” Jodie asked brightly.

“Yeah, it’s no trouble,” Aaron said. “I’ll be on stage with my friends, you and your daughter will be enjoying the show, and Robert will be looking after two screaming infants. It’s win win.”

“Hey!” Robert said with mock offence.

“She’d love that,” Jodie said. “Thanks. And congratulations.”

“If you’d like to sign there, everything’s in order.” A very young vivacious woman from the agency was giving them the final paperwork, the last thing they had to do before their kids were truly theirs. Aaron’s lawyer had insisted on reading everything over, and Joe was fussing while he painstakingly read every line.

“Sh, sh,” Aaron soothed, a hand on his back. His warm little weight in his arms as he nuzzled into Aaron’s neck. “Come on,” Aaron said to his lawyer. “It’s not rocket science.”

“You want everything right, don’t you?” he said and Aaron shut up, Robert just looking at him in the silence. Annie was currently asleep in Robert’s arms, mouth open, looking the most content baby Robert had ever seen.

“Okay Aaron, you can go ahead.” Aaron shifted Joe into his left arm, so he could scrawl a signature, then the lawyer gave Robert the papers, and he signed too.

“Great!” the woman said. “Here’s my copy and your copy. Have fun with your handful,” she added, nodding to the twins. Robert smiled, his heart so full he thought it might burst. Aaron’s lawyer took the documents.
“I’ll copy them and send you one,” he said, shuffling his papers before leaving.

“They’re ours,” Robert said softly when they were alone.

“They’re ours,” Aaron mirrored, a big smile on his face.
Aaron had Joseph, Robert had Annie, as they went into their house, finally home with their kids. Annie was asleep, had drifted off in the car easily and was still sleeping in Robert's arms. Joe was staring at Aaron with complete wonder. Aaron shifted his weight slightly, looking at his face. He had a tiny wispy bit of dark hair, not nearly as much as his sisters. His eyes were the same, though. Big, blue. Trusting almost. Joe seemed bigger than Annie, he wasn’t according to the hospitals measurements, but he looked it. A little stockier and more solid than Annie.

“So, who do we call first?” Robert asked.

“No one,” Aaron said. “I want a few days. Just you, me and them.”

“Your mum will kill us,” Robert said conversationally.

“I don’t care,” Aaron said. “I want this time with them, before real life kicks in again.” Aaron looked at his son softly.

“I need food,” Robert decided, breaking the silence. “How about… you look after those two, and I cook us something.”

“I like the sound of that,” Aaron said. Robert moved through to the nursery, and put Annie down, very carefully, his large hands almost swamping her. Aaron sat on the chair, awake Joe in his arms. But Joe wasn’t crying, and that’s all he could ask for. Robert leaned over his husband and kissed him deeply.

“I can’t tell you how much I love you,” Robert whispered. “And them.”

“Go and cook,” Aaron said, half teasing. “I’m hungry.”

“Yes boss.” Robert laughed as he went into the kitchen, putting some pasta on. They were both hungry, and he didn’t want to do anything too fancy. He could hear one of the twins (Annie maybe?) on the baby monitor, starting to gear up for a cry, so he made up a bottle as well. How much formula were they going to go through with two?

“Dinner,” Robert said, coming through to the nursery and giving Aaron a bowl of pasta. He jerked out of his doze and smiled at Robert, before Robert picked up a fussing Annie and gave her her bottle.

“Are we going to do anything other than feed them and change nappies for the next few months?” Aaron asked, shifting Joe so he could eat himself.

“No,” Robert said, watching Annie’s tiny fist curl against the plastic bottle.
Several days later, Robert jerked awake from a nap he wasn’t supposed to be taking. He went into the living room, all quiet and smiled. Aaron was asleep on the sofa, sleeves rolled up. Annie lay on his chest, Aaron’s left hand supporting her back, wedding ring glinting in the low light. Joseph lay on Aaron’s stomach, both twins small enough to do it, Aaron’s other hand supporting him. The three of them looked so content, and Robert felt a brief stab of want for his husband. It had only been a few days, but fatherhood suited him. Robert reached for his phone and snapped a few pictures.

“I am awake,” Aaron said with his eyes still closed. “Just comfy.”

“You look like it,” Robert said. Carefully he lifted Aaron’s legs up and sat on the other end of the sofa, Aaron’s calves draping over him.

“Annie was whining,” Aaron said. “Don’t know what she wanted, but she seemed to calm down when I held her. Then Joe joined in.”

“I think that’s the picture we put on the bands instagram,” Robert said, looking at the image on his phone. “To announce them. We’re going to have to.”

“I know,” Aaron said. “I’ve liked it, just us.”

“You need to tell your mother,” Robert said.

“Yeah, because you haven’t been putting off telling Vic,” Aaron said sarcastically.

“I’ll tell her now,” Robert said. “If you will.”

“They’re ours,” Aaron said. “They were… abstract, not really real for a long time, and now they’re here. I’m selfish and I don’t want to share.”

“Your mum lives in Yorkshire,” Robert said. “It’ll take her at least half a day to get here. And she’ll be more upset if she finds out from the press.”

“I know,” Aaron said. “Send her the photo then.”

“Sure?”

“Just do it,” Aaron said easily. Robert tapped away on his phone, adding the names and he sent the picture to Chas. It took about forty seconds for Aaron’s phone to start ringing. He groaned and answered it. Robert could hear Chas’s squealing even from where he was.

“Sh, I’ve got two kids asleep on me,” Aaron said, and Robert could hear the grin in his voice.

The knocking on the door was so heavy, Robert knew who it would be. Joe was in his sling on Robert’s chest as he opened the door to his mother-in-law.

“Chas,” he said, smiling at her. Whatever she’d been about to say got swallowed up by her focus on the baby.

“Oh, he’s gorgeous!” Chas said.

“I know,” Robert said proudly. “Come in.”
“Where’s Aaron?” she asked, looking around the living room full of the debris of two small children.

“I’m here,” Aaron said, appearing in the doorway. “Annie’s sleeping and no one’s waking her.”

“Joe’s so perfect!” Chas cooed. “Can I…”

“Yeah, sure.” Robert took the baby out of his sling, and handed him over to Chas, holding him carefully. “Granny.”

“Don’t you even think about it,” Chas said, a hint of her usual self coming through. “Only two people can call my that, and they can’t talk yet.” Robert grinned and went through to the kitchen to make a brew for them all.

“How’re you doing?” she asked Aaron.

“Good,” he said. “Not used to the sleepless nights yet. It seems like one’s always awake. But I love them so much, so much more than I thought.”

“I’m glad,” Chas said quietly.

“My life feels… full,” Aaron said. “I’m happy. So happy, and I didn’t think I’d ever get this.”

“Aaron, he’s gorgeous,” Chas said. “How old is he?”

“Eight days.”

“Aaron!”

“Don’t,” Aaron said firmly. “We wanted some time on our own, a proper little family. We didn’t want the press sticking their noses in.”

“I am not some sordid little newspaper!” Chas said. “No offence,” she added as Robert came in. “I’m your mother!”

“You’re here now,” Aaron said. “And don’t shout, it upsets him.”

“You should have told me,” she said.

“We have. They were early anyway.”

Chas looked like she wanted to give Aaron another mouthful, but Joe was looking at her, big blue eyes and she lost whatever it was she was going to say.

Aaron hesitated over the “post” button. He knew he had to share this, and he’d rather break the news of his twins himself, rather than have a journalist dig them up, like they were some dirty little secret. Which of course they weren’t. They were his whole world. Well, and Robert. Aaron looked at the photo again. It was a good shot, Aaron holding both their sleeping children. He hit post, before he could change his mind. He got distracted by Joe squalling and got up to make the formula for both of them. He knew enough by now to know that they’d be like a chorus within no time.

By the time the kids were fed and happy, Aaron checked his phone. There were hundreds of comments, most of them overwhelmingly positive. “Gorgeous!” “Aw so cute!” was a common theme. “Thank God, normal names!” came up a couple of times too. “Bloody hell, fatherhood suits you.” That made Aaron smile. “Where’s the gorgeous husband?” Aaron clicked like for that one.
“They’re both asleep,” Robert said, sitting next to him. “You shared it, then?”

“Yeah,” Aaron said, tucking his phone away. “How’d you know?”

“My phone keeps ringing,” Robert said. “My old editor had the nerve to ask for an exclusive.” Aaron snorted and didn’t even ask if he was considering it, he knew Robert wouldn’t be.

“You were right. It was a good photo.” Aaron snuggled into his husband’s body tightly.

That night in bed, Aaron pushed his hips backwards suggestively. “Oh, like that is it?” Robert murmured, making Aaron grin. They hadn’t had sex since the twins were born, and Aaron wanted him.

“As long as you do all the work,” Aaron said. “I was up with them five times last night.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Robert said, kissing into Aaron’s neck as his hands started roaming. Aaron smiled, pleasantly dozy as Robert pulled his shirt up, skinning over his skin.

Then, all too predictably, they heard a crying on the baby monitor. Robert sighed. “It’s your turn.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Robert said. He kissed Aaron deeply.

“Go on, before she wakes Joe up.” Robert sighed, escaping the warmth of their bed and Aaron listened on the baby monitor as Robert picked Annie up. “Sh, sh sh,” Robert soothed. “I’ve got you.” A pause. “You’re hungry aren’t you?” Aaron slipped into a doze as he heard Robert go downstairs, presumably to make some formula.

He jerked awake to Robert’s voice on the baby monitor. “Right, you’re fed, you’ve got a clean bum and daddy’s tired. So… go to sleep please?” Aaron could see in his minds eye, Robert rocking her. “Do your daddy a favour, eh? I think I’m going to get lucky tonight.” Aaron almost snorted into the pillow. “There, there, good girl.” Aaron smiled as Robert came in and got back under the covers, spooning behind Aaron.

“You’re going to get lucky are you?” Aaron asked.

“Oh. You heard that.”

“I might have,” Aaron said.

“Are you too tired?”

“I’m not too tired,” Aaron said, arching his body into Robert’s.

“That’s good to know,” he smirked.
And we've reached the end. Phew! I struggled a lot with this chapter, but I finally managed it, thank you to everyone who's been reading, leaving comments, kudos and subscribing to this marathon! It means so much to me! Hope you like the last little bit...

Aaron looked around the crowd, obviously enjoying every second of it. The O2 was full to the rafters on their final concert, and the atmosphere was electric... well, Aaron had never performed another concert like it. With only the encore to go, the band were saying their thank yous to the crew, the management, everyone behind the scenes, many of whom had stuck with them for years.

“There’s not much I can add to what Alex and Adam said,” Aaron said, looking over the crowd, the sea of faces, a chorus of cheers. “There is one very important person I’d like to thank, who I wouldn’t be here without. My husband, Robert…”

“Are you getting sentimental?” Robert asked from the doorway. Aaron hit pause on the DVD and looked at his husband with a smile. “Reliving the good old days?”

“You say that like right now is so much worse,” Aaron said with an eye roll. “I just wanted to watch it again. It was a really good night.”

“You miss it?”

“Sometimes,” Aaron said honestly. “I wouldn’t trade what we’ve got now, though.”

“It was never an either or kind of thing,” Robert said, wrapping his arms around Aaron’s waist.

“I know,” Aaron said. “It was time to end it. We went on for years longer than our management ever thought we would.” Robert kissed him softly.

“You could always go solo,” Robert suggested. “You were offered before.”

“I could,” Aaron said. “I don’t want to, not yet. Not when they’re still so little.”

“They’re not that little,” Robert said. “Not like when Annie and Joe decided to tear up my proof copy of my book.”

“It wasn’t the only one,” Aaron said fairly.

“You weren’t the one who had to beg your publishers for another copy of it,” Robert grumbled, good naturedly. “They weren’t happy.”

“It was funny though,” Aaron said. They both knew it, they’d framed the pictures of the twins with a mess of confetti like paper around them.

“Daddy!” Aaron looked to see Annie, her hair a mess of dark curls, face perfectly innocent. “You said we were going to grandmas!!”
“We are,” Robert said. “So get your coat and shoes on, okay?” Annie raced off to do it, much more amenable than Joe was. “Come on,” Robert said. It took another twenty minutes for the four of them to be ready, leaving the house into the cold air.

They’d bought a house outside Emmerdale, a short walk away from the village. Aaron had wanted to settle down, and Robert didn’t disagree, and however many places they travelled to and lived around the world, that tiny corner of the Dales was home to him. And Aaron liked the idea too. People around the village had got used to Aaron being around, he didn’t get the stares, the begging for autographs, and it was as good as anywhere else.

Annie let go of Aaron’s hand and started splashing in the puddles. Joe caught on very quickly, following suit and laughing as they made their way into the village. Their laughter was infectious and both men were grinning at them.

“They’re going to be filthy by the time we get to the pub,” Aaron said.

“And Chas will love it, and you know it,” Robert said. Aaron put a hand on Robert’s waist, pulling him closer for a kiss.

“I love you,” Aaron said. Robert winked at him and Aaron laughed.

“Daddy! Annie pushed me!” Joe shouted indignantly. Robert looked at him and sighed.

“Duty calls.” Aaron watched, Robert crouched down, trying to reason with both of their children. He was so calm with them, he had such patience. Fatherhood really had brought out the best qualities in him, even though Robert said the same about Aaron.

“Okay?” Robert asked them. Joe nodded and Annie held her arms out, and Robert nodded, carrying her instead. “You’re getting too big for this,” Robert muttered, knees creaking as he stood up, Aaron trying not to laugh. And failing.

They had all had a lovely family meal together, to celebrate Chas’s birthday even though none of them were mentioning that was the occasion. Chas had left the back room to deal with the evening rush, which meant they had the back room to themselves. Both Annie and Joe were curled up asleep on the sofa, Aaron stood by the sink washing up when Robert came in from the bar with two whiskeys in hand. He looked the kids and grinned, before putting the glasses down, going up to his husband and entwining his arms around Aaron’s waist.

“Not sure that’s going to get this done any quicker,” Aaron grumbled, but Robert could tell he didn’t mean that in the slightest.

“Mmhm,” Robert said, kissing into his neck. Aaron sighed, arching his body back into Robert’s.

“I still want you,” Aaron said. “Even after all this time, I still want you so much.”

“That’s nice to hear,” Robert said. He’d put a little bit of weight on lately, and was feeling the age gap between them a little more as each year passed. To him, Aaron looked the same as when they’d met, and Robert knew he didn’t. So to hear Aaron still wanted him felt so good. To know Aaron meant it, was something he needed to hear. Robert kissed him on the mouth and Aaron groaned. Ignoring the suds, he pulled wet hands from the sink and grabbed Robert closer, deepening the kiss. Robert clearly didn’t care either, water seeping into his shirt.

“I never thought…” Aaron breathed against his lips. “When I married you, I kind of thought… half of me thought the want, the love… It’d reach a point and it’d burn out. Because people don’t stay
together forever, it doesn’t happen.”

“I hope there’s a but,” Robert said easily, reading his husband well.

“I want you more than I did then,” Aaron said. “Much more.” Aaron’s eyes glowed and Robert kissed him again. Things were getting heated and out of control, and Aaron looked away, breathing heavily. “Our two kids are asleep over there.”

“Later, then,” Robert said firmly and Aaron’s eyes lit up with the promise. “Aaron, I don’t know what I’d have done if you hadn’t turned up in my life,” Robert said seriously.

“You’d probably still be working in that dingy office,” Aaron said, making Robert smile into his neck.

“It was not dingy,” Robert murmured into another, less heated kiss.

“Yeah, yeah.”

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!