put the stars in our eyes
by crybaby

Summary

Louis goes to bed having ordered a nineteen year-old husband.

Louis is set to inherit the family farm after the death of his father, but after finding out that he needs to be married in order to do so, purchasing a nineteen year-old, mail-order husband named Harry Styles seems to be the easiest answer.

Notes

WARNING: an animal does pass away in this fic (due to natural causes), so please take head to this warning

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Thank you to Angela and Alana for their very unorthodox methods cheerleading and for helping me remain calm through my periods of stress.

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This was all written in the night-hours in ten days, so I would like to thank the team for straightening out what was originally a mess of paragraphs and punctuation and to say that
Louis comes home on Monday in need of a drink.

He’s had a shit day at work and Liam had had to cancel their dinner plans at last minute, so all Louis really wants to do is pour himself a glass of white wine and kick off his shoes, maybe have a nice, warm bubble bath before curling up around Charlie under their brand new, goose-down duvet that Charlie had picked out.

He lets himself in as per usual, kicking off his work shoes next to the front door and shrugging off his coat, chucking his keys into the glass bowl. He shuffles into the kitchen, scratching at his stomach through the gaps between his buttons before he yawns, slow and strong, into his wrist.

The house is hot, and Louis feels annoyance prick at his temples because it’s only the beginning of autumn and Charlie knows how annoyed Louis gets when he wastes electricity for no reason when they don't have the money to throw around. But he just sighs instead and forces himself to swallow
it down; he’s only annoyed at his tit of a boss, he tells himself. He scratches through the cupboard for one of the wine glasses Charlie had brought along when Louis had let him move back in, before he’s pulling open the fridge and pulling out the half-empty bottle that he and Charlie has guzzled while watching *Jonathan Creek*.

He has his first sip and sighs, feeling the tension begin to lift from his shoulders before he pads into the living room. He sits down on their distressed couch, searching behind the stupid decorative cushions for the remote and mumbling annoyance at Charlie as he does.

He rests his wine glass down on the coffee table when he finally finds the remote, poised to flick the television on when he hears something that sounds a lot like one of Charlie’s moans. He ignores it, guessing that Charlie must be tossing one off quickly before he comes to give Louis his welcome home kiss. He’s about to press the power button for the second time, thumbnail digging into the rubber, when there’s another moan that is decidedly not Charlie’s.

Louis freezes, dead still, as his ears prick for more sound, trying to hear if Charlie’s just watching porn or if Louis has walked into something horrible.

He hears one of Charlie’s loud, showy moans, for when he's trying to brush up Louis' ego, and Louis’ up before he can stop himself. He charges towards their bedroom, his heart thumping as he listens to Charlie’s moans getting louder, complemented by higher, softer ones.

The bile is already rising in his throat when he curls his fingers around the handle of their bedroom door, pushing open and gulping. His heartbeat is pulsing in his fingertips and there’s dread wrapping around his bones.

He turns around and runs when he sees his boyfriend and another man, tangled up in his sheets.

Zayn opens his door on the fourth knock, and Louis barrels inside, pushing past him and wiping at the hot tears that leak out against his will. Zayn stands back and lets Louis barge into his kitchen and dig through his alcohol cupboard, pulling out his gin and unscrewing the top.
He swigs straight from the bottle as Zayn leans in the door, arms folded over his chest, looking concerned.

‘Walked in on the fucking bastard fucking somebody else.’ Louis spits, before he tips his head back for another gulp.

Zayn frowns. He looks soft and tired, and Louis feels suddenly awful for barging in on his quiet time. ‘Oh, Lou,’ he sighs, resting his head against the doorframe.

‘After I’d just taken the prick back.’ Louis mutters, grimacing as his throat burns with fire.

Zayn sighs and pries the bottle from Louis’ hand. Christ, Zayn’s even wearing his glasses and he’s got his hair down. Louis feels awful. ‘Come on, this is not the way to deal with this.’

Louis nods and swallows down the spit gathering in his mouth as he blinks away the angry tears. Zayn rubs his back and leads him to his living room, tucks him into the couch, smothers him in blankets until Louis feels like a child, ill and wrapped tight in mother’s love.

Zayn holds his hand against Louis’ forehead, just in case, and it makes something twist inside Louis’ tummy that makes him blink fast, before Zayn flicks the volume up on ANTM and goes back to the kitchen to make them each a cheese toastie, bringing them each a glass of shiraz as he bundles up next to Louis.

Zayn lets Louis cry on his shoulder.

It’s on the Tuesday morning after when Louis receives a letter.

He unlocks the front door to their, his, flat while holding his breath, pushing the door open slowly to minimize the sound it makes. He steps inside the eerily quiet living room, listening for movement, for signs of Charlie.
His wine glass from the previous evening is still on the coffee table, a sad, wet puddle formed around the base. The table’s probably stained.

Charlie isn’t there.

Louis gets ready for work as he holds back tears, gritting his teeth as he eyes Charlie’s toothbrush next to his, and his cologne, not even capped, resting right next to his own. It’s so domestic, so comfortable, and Louis feels a spike of harsh betrayal that makes his heart wrench. The longer he stares at it, the angrier he gets, until he’s fuming and his mind freezes and splashes over with white as he reaches for the pretentious Chanel bottle and draws his arm back, throws it against the mirror, so that it smashes and streaks down.

Louis looks at his own reflection through it, spitting out his toothpaste and wiping his mouth before he wipes his eyes. He can taste blood on his tongue.

He gets dressed quickly, taking time to rip every article of Charlie’s clothing out of his wardrobe and pile them up on the unmade bed. Once he’s emptied out Charlie’s drawer on top of the pile, he grapples to get hold of the corners of the duvet and bunch them together, carrying the bundle out into the living room and dropping it down in front of the door. He then goes back to rip the sheet off the bed and crumple it up. He throws it on top of the pile.

His blood is hot and his fingers are shaking when he picks his house keys off the coffee table, straightening his shirt before he leaves the flat, slamming the door behind him.

As he’s storming down the stairwell, he tries to smother his sadness with his anger, letting his mind shout out abuse about Charlie that rings in his ears as he grits his teeth. It works, to the best it can, because when he’s mad at him, he won’t cry about him as much as he could.

When he reaches the ground floor, he feels powerful, unstoppable. He feels like he could rip Charlie apart.

That is, until he checks his postbox in the foyer.

The envelope doesn’t look too harmful, just a simple cream envelope with his address in Chester’s handwriting, delivered with two bills (telephone, electricity). It shows no threat, so Louis opens it as he’s leaving the building.
He’s still standing on the front steps when he receives the news of his father’s death.

And then he starts crying again.

Once he gets to the office, he clocks in before running to the toilets and pulling out his phone. He dials the number of the farm, chewing on his thumbnail as he waits for someone to answer.

As soon as his call is picked up, he blurts out: ‘Is it true?’

There’s a long, crackly sigh over the line. ‘I’m so sorry pet.’ Rosie says, and Louis nods, blinking as tears slip down his cheeks.

‘Okay.’ He says to her, closing the lid of the loo and sitting down, resting his head in his hands. ‘I’ll come down as soon as I can.’

‘No, don’t do that Louis. Not when your life is finally working out,’ Rosie rushes. Louis wants to laugh at that.

He shakes his head and runs his fingers through his hair. ‘It’s what he would have wanted. I’ll resign today and be there in a two weeks.’

‘Louis,’ Rosie tries again.

‘No Rose, I’ve already made up my mind. I’ll pack up my stuff and be there as soon as I can.’

Rosie sighs, and Louis can imagine her shaking her head at him, just like when they were teenagers. ‘We’ll hold off the funeral until you can make it.’
‘Send my love to the others.’

Rosie laughs softly. ‘Look after yourself, Louis. See you soon.’

For the first time that day, Louis smiles.

When he gets home, he’s in dire need of the bottle of vodka hiding in the freezer.

That need intensifies when he walks in and Charlie’s on the couch, his palms wrapped around his mug.

‘Charlie.’ He grits, and Charlie looks at him. There are bags under his wide eyes, and his light hair is mussed. The pile of his belongings that Louis had left is folded into neat little piles and pushed against the wall. He’s wearing Louis’ jumper and he looks swallowed by it, the sleeves too long and bunched around his thin wrists.

‘Lou-’ he starts, leaning forward to rest his mug on the coffee table. Louis notes that his wine glass is gone and the table looks polished, the remote perched next to the television guide.

‘Why are you here?’ Louis asks, telling himself to keep his ground and not give in again. Charlie’s chin quilts and he looks down at his fingers.

Louis can’t look at him without forgiving him, so he strides into the kitchen and ignores the sound of Charlie following him. He crouches down in front of the freezer and digs back until his fingers are wrapping around the neck of his KU:L and he stands up.

He sets the bottle down on the worktop, pulling open the cupboard and skimming the contents for a tumbler.
‘I’m sorry, Lou. It didn’t mean anything.’ Charlie whimpers behind him and Louis stills, clenching his jaw and squaring his shoulders.

He rests his fingers around the bottle. It’s so cold that it burns his fingertips. ‘Who was he?’

Charlie sobs and Louis grits his teeth. ‘Nobody, Lou,’

‘Who was he?’ Louis tries again, his fingers clenching.

Charlie sobs again and Louis can hear his socks shuffle on the tile. ‘A guy from work.’

Louis is suddenly fuming. ‘How long?’

‘Lou-’

‘How long Charlie?’ Louis shouts.

Charlie sobs wetly before he gulps. Louis listens to the sound his throat makes as he swallows. ‘Since June,’ he whimpers.

Louis feels tears prick, burning his skin as they leak out the corners of his eyes. ‘Get out Charlie.’

‘Lou, please-‘

‘Get out!’ Louis screams, gripping onto the tumbler and whirling around to launch it at the wall behind Charlie.

It shatters with a loud crack of glitter. He’s trying to hold back tears as he pants, eyes dark as he stares at Charlie, digging into him. Charlie buries his face in his hands, shielding his bloodshot eyes as he sobs into the sleeves of Louis’ jumper.
Louis is going to throw up.

He bolts from the kitchen, pushing past Charlie before he barrels into the bathroom, locking the door behind him and sinking down into a crumpled heap, back against the door.

He doesn’t let himself cry, just pulls at his hair and trembles as he listens to Charlie crying in the kitchen. He grinds his teeth together, listening to it. It feels like hours before he leaves, the front door clicking quietly.

Louis uncurls himself with creaks and shaky hands before he pulls open the door, walking on wobbly legs back to the kitchen. The vodka is sweating and the mess of shattered glass is cleaned up. He uncaps the bottle and sinks down against the cupboards, letting himself sob.

Charlie’s taken all of his things from Louis’ flat by the end of the week.

Louis comes home on the Friday to find the jumper Charlie had been wearing neatly folded on his pillow. He takes a deep breath in when he sees it.

He works mechanically through his last week of work, answering the phones with a lot more joy and pep in his voice than in his chest. His boss doesn’t treat him any different, but his colleagues throw him a farewell party with a chocolate cake. Louis gets drunk and cries in the men’s toilets.

The boys organize their own little party in Zayn’s flat on the night that he finishes packing. Niall splurges on expensive sparkling wine and Liam brings dinner in a casserole dish. Louis can’t even cry because he’s so happy.

‘No!’ Louis shouts when Zayn brings a wrapped present out from his bedroom. He’s laughing too hard as he shakes his head wildly.

‘Shut up, Louis. You’re leaving us, so we’re allowed to give you presents.’ Zayn scolds, setting the
present down in front of him as Niall goes to dig around in the shopping bag he’d brought. Liam pulls a little wrapped box out the inner pocket of his work jacket.

‘Open mine first.’ Zayn tells him, and Louis sighs and shakes his head, taking a last sip of wine and reaching for Zayn’s present.

He tears through the red wrapping paper and frowns at the cardboard, blue plastic wrapped around it with a little Amazon delivery sticker in the corner. ‘Scissors?’ he asks, and Liam gets up, padding into Zayn’s kitchen to bring him a pair.

Louis cuts at the plastic and unfolds the cardboard. He slaps Zayn’s shoulder and starts laughing. He turns over the children’s cookbook to read the back while eyeing the Jamie Oliver cookbook underneath it as Niall laughs along.

‘Thought you’d need ‘em.’ Zayn offers with a shrug. Louis sets both cookbooks down on the coffee table and wraps his arms around Zayn’s neck.

‘Thanks, you shit.’ Louis giggles drunkenly into his neck, and Zayn pats his back and laughs at him, before he’s shoving Liam’s present into his hands.

Louis unwraps the gold paper more carefully, peeling off the Sellotape before he’s opening the oblong, black box. There’s a beautiful gold fountain pen resting on velvet, and Louis gasps.

He launches himself at Liam, planting a wet kiss onto his stubble-covered cheek before smushing their faces together and squeezing him tight around his waist. Liam laughs, loud from his belly, and Louis grins. ‘Thank you, darling.’

‘It was nothing, Lou.’ Liam laughs before he’s peeling Louis from his side and Niall is pressing a deep red envelope into his chest.

‘Is it money?’ Louis asks, one eyebrow cocked.

Niall sits back down in the armchair and grins. ‘Better.’
Louis raises his eyebrows and tears open the envelope. He pulls out the folded paper, smoothing it out on his thighs. He skims the text before his eyes catch on the sentence: *Congratulations on your membership to Helix Studios* and he gasps.

‘Thought it might come in handy when you’re feeling lonely,’ Niall says with a wink.

Louis laughs until he can’t breathe.

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**September (238 days)**

Once all his boxes are packed into the back of a moving van, Louis stands in his empty flat and looks around.

He feels stupidly nostalgic, thinking back to when he was just twenty and moving in. How he hadn’t known anyone and all he had was a suitcase and a bed. Zayn rests his hand on his back, right between his shoulder blades, and Louis sighs.

Zayn had helped him into it, getting him his job, introducing him to Liam and Niall. He was the first kind person he’d met and he’s been Louis’ best friend for all six years. Louis turns around to wrap Zayn in a hug, wrapping his arms around his slim waist and pulling Zayn into his chest.

Zayn rubs over his back and laughs dryly into the cotton of his tee-shirt. ‘Don’t squeeze me so tight, you dick. You’ll make my headache worse.’

Louis laughs, his own temples thumping with his hangover. ‘I’ll miss you, Zayn.’

Zayn snuggles into his neck, snuffling. Louis loves the soft side of Zayn that he sees when no-one else does, soap scented and sleepy, just looking for warmth to nuzzle into. ‘I’ll miss you more, you prat. Now get going, before you make me cry.’
Louis slaps him on the back and nods, pulling back. Zayn gives him a soft smile, still dressed in his pyjamas, eyes still puffy and his face slightly pale. Zayn ruffles his hair and hands him his coat before he pulls Louis closer and presses a soft kiss to the frown lines on his forehead. Louis loves him so much.

‘Stay safe Lou, I’ll be down to visit in no time.’

Louis nods and blinks away his stupid tears. He refuses to let Zayn see him cry again.

Zayn hugs him a final time before he guides Louis into his car, kissing his cheek before Louis buckles himself in and rolls up the window.

Zayn stands on the pavement and waves after him as he drives away.

Louis grew up on the soil of the farm. His return is long overdue and leaves him feeling a bit teary with nostalgia.

It had belonged to his grandparents, who had handed it down to his parents as a wedding gift.

The gravel crunches under his tires, and tidal waves of memories flood through him. It still looks exactly the same.

The house still stands tall, ivy crawling over the mismatched brick, wooden fence old and shaky where it wraps around the front garden. He parks the car in front of the barn, pulling out the keys and taking a moment for himself to remember how to breathe.

The moving van is already there, parked outside the farmhouse with the backdoors open. Louis smiles when he sees Cook chatting to a mover. He looks just like Louis remembers him.
Juliet walks out the back door and looks towards the movers before her eyes settle on Louis’ car. She waves to him, grinning brightly considering the circumstances, and Louis raises his hand to wave back.

He pushes open his door and steps out, the chill already kissing his fingertips. He pulls his coat firmly around his shoulders. This is something he never missed about the farm; the weather temperatures that take him months to get used to.

‘Louis!’ Juliet greets, before she’s hurrying down the steps towards him. She shoots into his chest and wraps her bony arms around his neck.

Louis laughs and wraps his arms around her thin middle, inhaling her floral scent. She pulls back to look at him, grinning and squeezing his upper arms.

‘You’ve grown up so much.’ she coos, and Louis smiles. She doesn’t look much different, perhaps a few more wrinkles at the corners of her lips and her eyes, but other than that she’s still the same woman that Louis had his first crush on.

Cook comes up behind her, giving her shoulder a nudge so he can pull Louis into a bear hug. ‘Louis! You’ve grown so big.’

Louis laughs into Cook’s chest, his arms barely linking around his large belly. ‘Good to see you Cook.’

‘Come on, let’ get you inside your new house.’

Louis lets the two of them inside through the kitchen door just as Honey and Fudge come nipping at his ankles.
At the front of the farm is the guesthouse, a brick building of three floors and white windows with a virus of ivy to its face. Just behind the guesthouse is where Louis grew up, and behind that are staff quarters.

It’s not an overly large farm, just large enough to be easily funded by a guesthouse that only sees about twelve customers each month.

The stables are at the back with the staff housing, as is the barn and all the separate pens and hutches. The front of the farm is what customers of the guest house see first, so that’s always kept pristine and picturesque, while behind is generally more of a mess, a little more farm than cottage.

It’s nothing special, nothing out of a film, but it’s what Louis has grown up with and what he knows as his home.

Louis unpacks the boxes over the space of two days, burning wood in the fireplace for the entire time as he trudges around the house in a warm jumper and bobble socks.

He cries a lot more than he’s willing to admit when he unpacks his clothing, vivid images of Charlie in each article burnt into his memory. And as soon as he notices it, he can’t stop and he’s seeing Charlie in everything.

So perhaps he does drink three bottles of red wine in the space of two days and spend the days shuffling through his house wrapped in a fluffy blanket, but only he really needs to know that. Him, Honey and Fudge.

The service is on a Wednesday, and Zayn, Niall and Liam all surprise him. Arabella doesn’t say
anything for the first few hours.

It’s a dark day. The skies rumble and cry with Louis, flooding the field. The reverend from the local church blesses his father, and Louis stutters his way through his eulogy. Everyone tells him they’re sorry.

Louis gets plastered afterward, ignoring the guidance of his friends as he opts to lock himself in his bedroom for the duration of the wake with a bottle of gin.

When he wakes up, Niall, Liam and Zayn are curled up on the couches in the living room and he has a headache. Arabella’s asleep in her old bedroom, door closed. Zayn’s got Honey sleeping on his chest and Fudge is snoring in Niall’s lap. He wakes them up with a Jamie Oliver recipe for a full English and an apology.

They cuddle around him as he tries to stop crying.

Arabella comes down around lunch and laughs at them, even though her eyes are red too.

Louis had pulled on his wellingtons and zipped up his jacket before he’s pulling open his kitchen door.

He trudges through the mud, the wind whipping at his fringe, and he clenches his fists in his pockets as he approaches the guesthouse. He holds onto the wall when he gets to the back door of the guesthouse, pulling off his wellies and settling them next to the door before he pulls open the door into the kitchen.

It’s warm inside, loud with the radio singing in the corner and Cook laughing over it as Henrietta stirs pasta. Louis shrugs off his coat and hangs it up on the hook, pushing the sleeves of his jumper up to his elbows.
‘Louis!’ Cook bellows, and Henrietta looks up from her pot and smiles. ‘What brings you to this neck of the woods?’

‘Just dropping by to see Chester.’ Louis says with a grin, coming up behind Henrietta and looking into the pot. ‘Mind if I steal one, love?’ he asks her.

Henrietta rolls her eyes but picks a fork off the hook and dips it into the pot, scooping penne onto two of the prongs.

She holds it out to Louis, who takes it and blows out cool air before he bites in. ‘Thanks babe,’ he says with a wink, and Henrietta mumbles something under her breath before turning away from him. Louis can see the smile on her lips.

Rosie comes in through the swing door, laundry basket in her arms, and she beams when she sees Louis. ‘Hello muffin, how are you?’ she asks as she walks through the kitchen, to the laundry nook.

‘I’m brilliant, and yourself dear Rosaline?’ Louis says with a grin as he pulls open the fridge and pulls out the milk bottle.

‘Can’t complain, can’t complain.’ Rosie laughs airily as Louis sips from the bottle.

Cook whacks him on the back of the head and wrestles the milk bottle from his hands. Louis pouts and wipes at his mouth with the back of his hand. ‘Well, I guess I’ll be off to see Chester now, then.’

‘Have fun!’ Cook shouts after him as Louis bumps through the swing door and into the passageway. He peeks through the glass into the dining room, seeing occupants at two of the five tables, both elderly couples. Louis smiles and feels his heart clench.

He ignores it as he walks to end of the passageway, poking his head into the empty front room to blow Juliet a kiss where she’s doodling in the guest book, before he knocks on Chester’s office door and pushes it open when he hears Chester’s call of: ‘Come in!’

‘Hey Chester, you wanted to see me?’ he greets as he steps inside.
Chester shakes his head when he looks down at Louis' fluffy socks. ‘Have a seat, Louis.’

Louis grins at him as he climbs into one of the leather chairs, leaning back into it and smiling at Chester. ‘So what is this about?’

Chester sighs and looks down at his notebook in front of him, running his fingers through his snowy hair. ‘I’m not going to beat around the bush here, Louis.’

Louis nods. ‘Go on.’

Chester takes a deep breath and looks down at his hands. ‘I’m afraid you can’t inherit the farm.’

Louis frowns before he leans forward in his chair, smile slipping off his face completely. ‘I beg your pardon?’ he balks.

‘I’m sorry Louis, but you can’t inherit the farm while you are not married.’ Chester says with a sad smile, and Louis wants to rip out his hair as confusion turns into annoyance.

‘I don’t understand Chester. I grew up on this farm. I practically lived in the kitchen. This place is my home!’ Louis exclaims, feeling disbelief cloud over him. ‘But none of that matters and you can’t let me inherit it because I’m not married?’

Chester sighs and rubs at his temples. He looks like Louis’ old headmaster. ‘I’m sorry Louis, but you have to be married.’ Chester says, and he’s already wrapping the leather strip back around his notebook, and Louis panics.

‘I’m engaged.’ He blurts out, before he can think better of it.
‘I’m getting married.’ Is the first thing that Louis says when he calls Zayn.

‘Congratulations?’ Zayn replies slowly, and Louis huffs.

‘You could be a little excited for me, you know,’ he snaps.

Zayn laughs on the other end. ‘Well, you know I would be Lou, if I had known anything about a secret affair. Who is he?’

Louis bites his lip. ‘I don’t know yet.’

Zayn barks with laughter, and there’s something disgustingly comforting about it. ‘See, that is why I did not congratulate you, you idiot.’

‘Zayn,’ Louis whines, dragging it out. ‘Help me.’

‘Do you want me to set you up with somebody again?’ he asks.

Louis scowls and slams the telephone down.

With his hands gripping to the metal handle of the full bucket, Louis walks towards his kitchen door, eyes on the ground, watching as mud splashes up onto his wellies. He startles when another pair of feet appear next to his.

‘Louis!’ Cook greets, slapping him hard on the back. Some milk splashes out of the bucket and into the mud. ‘Chester’s just told me you’re engaged!’
Louis forces a smile as his pulse races and his palms start to sweat with nerves. He gulps and tries to look bashful. ‘Yeah,’ he affirms softly, looking back down to his muddy toes.

‘Well?’ Cook asks, and Louis looks up with raised eyebrows. ‘Who is the lucky man and why have you never mentioned him?’

Louis swallows and clenches his fingers around the handle. ‘Um, he lived in my building. But, um, sorry Cook, I’ve got some banana bread in the oven.’

Cook ruffles his hair and Louis’ pretty sure he’s gone white. ‘Off you go, Lou. But he is going to come to the farm, right? We need to meet this boy.’

Louis grimaces but covers it with a shaky smile as he scurries to the back door, pushing it open quickly and rushing inside, not even sparing a thought about the mud tracks he’s left on the floor. He sets the pail of milk on the worktop before sitting down at the table and resting his head in his hands.

The problem with having a fake fiancé, Louis has realised, is that everyone is very greedy for details about everything, and more so about when this mysterious fiancé is going to come and visit. He’s mostly been able to pacify the questions with the promise that they’ll understand why he’s so crazy about him when they meet him, but it’s a bit difficult to get away without telling them the name of his own fiancé.

Juliet sighs, stirring her coffee before tapping her spoon on her mug and resting it on the table beside her. ‘Come on Louis, just give us something. We’re dying here.’

Louis takes a tight gulp of his tea before looking around the room, eyes landing on six expectant faces. His eyes flick from Brandon to Rosie, to Henrietta then Cook, sweeping over Chester, before flicking back to Juliet. ‘He’s, um, he’s brilliant.’ He tells her, swinging his legs where he’s sitting on the worktop in the kitchen. Cook swats him with his wooden spoon when his fingers creep too close to the cheese for his liking. ‘He’s got lovely…brown hair. And very nice eyes.’
‘Yeah, but what’s he like?’ Cook asks, and that has Rosie looking up, beating at the cream in her plastic bowl.

‘We need to meet the man who’s stolen our little Louis’ heart. Now come on, how did you meet?’ she says with a laugh, and Louis considers swiping some of Cook’s cheese just so he’ll be shooed out.

‘I already told Cook, he lived in my building. He was on my floor, and um,’ he looks down at his mug, his mind gripping at straws. ‘… and there was a fire alarm so we all had to rush out. We had to gather on the pavement outside, and it was a very chilly night. I’d seen him and he’d only been wearing a tee shirt and he had his arms around himself, shivering in the cold. So of course I’d gone up to him and offered him my jacket. And when he smiled at me, I knew that he was the one and that I was going to spend the rest of my life with him.’ He looks up from his mug nervously, eyeing everyone from under his fringe.

They all coo, and Louis sags in relief that no-one seems to realise that he’d picked that right out of a romance novel.

Louis’ just about to close his tab, porn paused and come cooling on his tummy, when a flashing ad beside the video finally catches his attention. He rolls his eyes at it, doubting that he will ever, in his life, come across reason to purchase a Russian bride.

It’s only after he’s wiped at his stomach with a wet face cloth and he’s climbed back into bed, laptop still open on the incognito tab, that Louis’ mind finally clicks.

It’s a neat website. At the top is a picture of two obvious models holding hands on a white couch, smiling fake for the camera. Louis skims his eyes across all the links, hovering over the ‘Testimonials’ button before opening it in a new tab and then finally clicking the search button.
The search button leads him to a page of small tick-boxes. Louis frowns at them but starts filling out his preferences.

He finds that he doesn’t actually have much preference, other than male, aged eighteen to twenty five, and then finally checking the box for homosexual.

He’s then redirected to a loading page, and while he waits, he flicks over to the testimonials page.

They all have very sappy, cavity-inducing stories, and Louis has never been much of a romantic, but he does find himself smiling at some of the stories and couple pictures.

By the times he’s read over about six of them, he flicks back to the results page.

There’s not too many, only twenty-seven, but Louis has some hope that his future husband will be one of them.

He opens each profile in a new tab, reading over each bio and clicking through every gallery, and by the eleventh profile, he’s honestly seen enough bad photoshopping and read enough bullshit about long walks on the beach.

But it’s the twelfth profile that changes it all.

Harry Styles aged nineteen, bisexual. His bio is silly and Louis feels himself cringe for the boy, but he’s gorgeous and has a deep dimple in his cheek that Louis wants to eat ice cream out of.

Louis keeps Harry’s tab open as he skims over the other profiles but none of them measure up to the boy smiling into the camera with messy hair. Louis feels a bit sick as he scratches around for his credit card before he’s pressing the green ‘Buy’ button.

Louis goes to bed having ordered a nineteen year-old husband.
He gets a confirmation email in the morning, as well as an email from his bank, and he grimaces at the price, seemingly worse by daylight.

It’s with great shame that he has to ask Zayn for train money, buying a one-way ticket for three weeks’ time in the name of Harry Styles.

October (208 days)

Harry arrives on a morning where the sun is actually shining, but it’s weather that Louis despises because even though the sun is shining, the weather is cold and sharp. The heaters are on in the barn and the horses are wearing their winter coats.

Louis’ awfully nervous. He’d told the others that Harry was coming, but he hadn’t given them a date in case something drastic happens, like Harry turning out to be a balding old man with liver spots instead of sweet dimples and denchers rather than cherry lips. He watches from the window in the kitchen, scrubbing the dishes clean.

His tummy flutters and he thinks he might be sick as a taxi slows at the foot of the driveway. He wipes his hands on a dishcloth and switches on the kettle before he tries to calm himself down as he pulls on his coat and pulls open the kitchen door, tucking his fists into his pockets as he makes his way down the driveway.

His heart is beating in his throat as he nears the taxi. He thinks he may faint as the back door opens and the first boot sets down on the land. Harry (presumably) steps out fully then, wearing just a tatty jersey and a beanie and Louis’ fingers burrow deeper in his pockets in sympathy. As he walks down the driveway and gets closer to him, he notices some details about him, such as ridiculously lovely legs, bright pink cheeks, and big, bright eyes, blinking up at the clear sky with somewhat confusion.
The nerves and underlying anger and annoyance combination bubble in his stomach. He reaches for his wallet, thumbing it open as he approaches the car, paying the driver with a whimper coming from his wallet.

He offers an anxious smile to Harry, and a nervous, croaked out, ‘Hi,’ but Harry looks right back down at his worn-away boots and Louis feels a twinge of annoyance. He tries to ignore it.

He’s very pretty and he only has one suitcase in his hands that Louis carries up the driveway for him when he doesn’t get any protest. Louis listens to him follow him wordlessly.

Louis stops outside the kitchen door, reaching for the handle, and Harry must not realise, because he walks straight into his back and makes a little oof sound, before he’s mumbling ‘Oops,’ so quiet Louis’ not sure he heard it.

Louis holds the kitchen door open for him, letting his eyes skim his slumped shoulders, before he’s closing the door after him. He sets his suitcase down, resting against the fridge. Fudge waddles in lazily, and Louis crouches down to give his neck a quick scratch. He wags his tail lazily as he chews his food. ‘Have a seat.’ He suggests to Harry, ushering him into a rickety chair before he turns to the kettle, steam puffing out the spout, while inwardly thanking whatever force made sure that Harry isn’t an elderly man with grey hair and that Harry actually looks better than the photographs on his profile.

‘Tea?’ Louis offers, noticing how white Harry’s hands are where they’re clasped over the tabletop, trembling from cold.

Harry gives a slight shake of his head, keeping his eyes on his own hands. Louis feels the bite of annoyance again. ‘Hot chocolate?’ Louis offers instead.

Harry looks up and the tip of his nose is red, as well as the apples of his cheeks. He tucks his lower lip between his teeth before he nods his head quickly and looks back down at his hands, digging his thumbs into the chips in the wood of the kitchen table. Honey comes in then, trotting towards the water bowl but stopping when she notices Harry. Louis listens to the click of her paws on the floor as she sniffs at Harry’s ankles beneath the table.

Louis makes himself coffee with two sugars, no milk, and Harry his hot chocolate, three teaspoons of mixture and a dash of vanilla essence. Harry offers no conversation and Louis might forget that he’s right behind him if it weren’t for his soft breathing and the sporadic nervous tap of his boot
against the leg of the chair. He grits his teeth as he stirs Harry’s hot chocolate, deciding against putting in marshmallows for him. He already knows this isn’t going to work. How is he going to act in love when his fiancé won’t even talk to him or look at him for longer than ten seconds? He feels his stomach prick with anger and irritation.

He sets the mug down in front of him. Harry looks up before he’s quickly reaching for the mug as if it might grow legs and run away. He curls his fingers around it and the steam puffs up. Louis takes a sip of his boiling coffee, clenching his jaw.

‘What’s your name?’ he asks him, wanting to hear his voice.

Harry looks up at him with wide eyes, and he looks so terrified. Louis wants to throw his mug at the kitchen door. Or maybe pull out his hair. Harry just blinks slowly, and he looks like a helpless woodland creature.

Harry looks back down at his mug and irritation pricks at Louis’ fingertips and he can feel the rage in his skull.

‘I’m Louis.’ He tries, a final time.

Harry doesn’t even look up, just takes a little slurp of his hot chocolate and Louis snaps. He thinks about the message from Charlie in his inbox as he slams his mug down next to the basin. Harry looks up and flinches, eyebrows raised.

‘Look Harry,’ he grits. ‘you obviously don’t want to be here anymore than I want you here, but we’re both here now and this isn’t going to work if you’re not even going to talk to me or look at me! This is your home now and you need to help me out unless you want me to take my money back and send you off. You need to accept that.’

Harry’s trembling but he nods quickly. Louis takes a deep breath to calm his furious pulse. Harry looks back down at his mug, and Louis makes up his mind that he doesn’t like Harry. He gulps down the last of his scalding coffee and sets his empty mug in the basin as he waits for Harry to finish.

As soon as Harry’s done, Louis takes his mug from him and sets it in the sink. ‘I’ll show you to your room.’
Harry gets up and follows him wordlessly, Louis picking up his suitcase easily and carrying it up the stairs.

It’s a small house of brick walls and wooden floors, very tightly packed and cosy. It’s simple to navigate, so Louis doesn’t bother with giving Harry a tour and instead just takes him to his bedroom, bumping the door open with his hip before setting Harry’s suitcase down on the freshly made-up bed.

‘Bathroom is just next-door and I’m just across the way. There’s a coat, some more blankets, and some hangers in the wardrobe.’ Harry steps in and looks around the small room. He traces his elegant fingers along the dresser, and Louis sets his jaw when he notices the framed photo of his parents he forgot to remove. ‘I’ll give you some time to settle in. I’ll probably be in the living room or in the kitchen, so come down when you’re ready and we can go meet everyone.’

Harry sits down on the single bed, nodding to himself and looking around again.

Louis sighs before he turns to leave.

‘Louis?’ Harry asks, and his voice is small and Louis wants to bask in it. He turns back to face him, expression blank. Harry’s got his fingers knitted together his eyes wide and scared. ‘Are you going to have sex with me?’

Louis frowns and feels a prick of disappointment that Harry thinks so little of him. He doesn’t know how this is going to last. He shakes his head and leaves.

Harry comes down some hours later, and Louis’ just curled up on the couch with a new John Grisham and fresh-made butternut soup, Honey and Fudge both snoring on the couch next to him. Harry knocks lightly on the door and Louis looks up. He’s not wearing his boots and his sleeves are balled up in his hands. His eyes are red.

‘There’s soup on the stove, you can find the bowls in the cupboard.’ He tells him absently, eyes down on his book. Harry lingers until Louis looks up again.
Harry gulps and Louis can hear it from where he’s sitting. ‘Sorry about earlier.’

Louis waves him off and looks back to his book. Harry comes back shortly with a bowl in his hands that he sets on the coffee table, slinking down onto the floor and crossing his legs. Louis frowns at him before shaking his head and trying to block out the sound of him slurping his soup softly. Fudge even pulls himself off the couch to go and curl up in Harry’s lap, and Louis feels the spike of betrayal.

Once Harry’s finished, he picks up his bowl and lingers for a bit before he picks up Louis’ where it’s resting next to him. Louis can hear him in the kitchen. When he comes back, he has a mug in his hands and he climbs onto the window seat. He curls his feet under himself and Louis watches from the corner of his eye, almost scolding him, just to be bitter.

He looks up from his book and out to the window, seeing the sun just above the belt of the hills, and Louis folds his page over and reaches into his pocket. He rests his book down on the couch and pinches the ring from his jeans. He stands up and keeps his eyes on his own feet as he approaches where Harry’s looking out into the front garden dreamily.

‘Harry.’ He says softly, to get his attention. Harry looks at him with sudden wide eyes. ‘Give me your hand.’ Harry complies. Louis presses the ring into his palm, and he tries not to notice how Harry’s expression falls. He looks like a kicked puppy and Louis’ tummy clenches. He tries to ignore it, thinking about Charlie to make himself angry again.

‘What’s wrong?’ he asks as Harry looks down at the ring in his palm.

‘Nothing.’ Harry says with a quick shake of his head. He picks up the ring and slides it down his finger. It really does look beautiful on his slender fingers, the silver pale against the slight gold of his skin and the small diamond almost sparking enough to match his eyes.

Louis needs to look away from him, because the image makes his tummy pull and his heart beat out of rhythm.

‘It’s beautiful.’ Harry says, almost to himself, and Louis looks at him out of the corner of his eye. Sure as daylight, there are tears in his eyes.

Louis wants to say something stupid like ‘you’re beautiful.’ but he thinks better and squashes that down and replaces it with, ‘Come on, you have to meet everybody.’
When he pushes open the heavy kitchen door, nobody looks up from their workstations. It’s only after Louis belts out: ‘This is Harry,’ that anyone notices his presence.

That gets all the staff to swarm to them, completely abandoning their dinner preparations. Louis had hurriedly told Harry all the important details, like how they met, on the quick walk to the guesthouse. Louis lets go of Harry’s hand and stands back, letting everybody crowd around him.

‘Harry,’ he starts, firm, to get his attention. ‘This is Cook and Henrietta; they’re the chefs, and this is Rosie. She’s housekeeping.’

Harry nods and looks a bit frightened, as Cook starts shouting, a happy smile on his jolly features, and Henrietta’s reaching for him with tears in her eyes. Rosie’s grinning.

He leans back against the industrial refrigerator, leaving Harry to answer the quick questions thrown at him. It’s a bit startling to see how easily he speaks to them, a bit tense at first, but then Cook’s slapping his back so hard that he stumbles and starts to giggle, and then a radiant smile pinches at his cheeks and Louis’ a bit floored. Deep dimples pierce into his cherubic cheeks.

Juliet comes in when she hears the commotion and she squeals, pulling Harry into a big hug. She scurries off afterward to fetch Chester, and Louis clears his throat to quickly pull back Harry’s attention. ‘Juliet works the front desk and Chester runs the place, so don’t get on his bad side.’

Harry nods and has that frightened look again, before Rosie’s demanding his attention back and Louis’ smiling before he can catch himself, watching how Harry stutters to answer Rosie’s quick-fire questions.

Chester comes in beaming, pushing his glasses up his nose and covering his mouth with his hand. He smiles and shakes his head before offering Harry a hand. Harry smiles and introduces himself with a shy smile. He’s got a blush on his cheeks. Louis’ torn between being a bit awed at the creature before him and fuming over the fact that it’s only him Harry seems to hate.

He zones out a bit, watching Harry. It’s the first opportunity he gets to properly look at him, skim
his eyes up from his tattered boots and then up his gangly legs. He’s wrapped in the coat Louis had left in his wardrobe, an emerald green beast of a thing that had belonged to his grandfather. It had always been his favourite, and he’d been a bit wary of giving it over to someone he’d never met. He’s still a bit wary, since he now knows that Harry seems to despise him, but he looks adorable in it, so.

It’s rather priceless when Brandon comes in from feeding Lavender and the pigs, and he just stops in the doorway where he’s pulling off his wellingtons when he sees Harry. Louis watches as he runs his fingers through his fringe before adjusting his beanie and his coat. The best moment, though, is when Cook calls; ‘Hey Brandy, come meet Louis’ fiancé.’ and his face falls. His eyes seek out Louis before landing on him where he’s leaning against the fridge, and Louis just shrugs apologetically as Harry offers his hand for Brandon to shake.

Louis lets himself fall out of the conversation, focusing on watching Harry’s mouth as he talks, the way his lips form the words and the way his cheeks colour when he blushes, or how he scratches behind his ear nervously. He’s truly lovely, and Louis can feel himself smiling stupidly before he can remember not to. Harry’s brilliant to look at, and it has Louis wishing that they could work together, maybe.

He’s startled out of daydreams by Rosie shouting his name, waving her hand across in front of his face. He feels his cheeks instantly colour.

‘Give us a kiss then, you lovebirds.’ Cook says with a little wink, and then Louis notices how blood red Harry’s cheeks are and how his eyes are on his toes, seemingly analysing the amount of mud he’d managed to get on his boots in such a short amount of time.

‘Um,’ Louis says, pushing off the fridge before scratching at the back of his neck, raising his eyebrows at Harry, who looks down at the floor. He steps closer, anyway.

‘Come on you sissy, give us a kiss.’ Henrietta calls from where she’s taken seat at a stool to peel potatoes.

Louis shrugs before he rests his hand on Harry’s hip through all his thick layers. Harry’s fingers wrap around his bicep and Louis feels how much Harry is shaking. His eyes are ridiculously wide as Louis leans in and kisses him gently. He doesn’t think Harry even manages to close his eyes.

When he pulls away, the kitchen boos, even Brandon. ‘That wasn’t a real kiss, Louis. Be a man.’ Rosie shouts as she cups her hands around her mouth. Louis notices Brandon eyeing her and wonders when Juliet’s son became such a hormonal mess.
Louis looks back at Harry, and his cheeks have flushed brighter, if it was even possible. He raises his eyebrows as some sort of apology before he’s pulling him back in with a hand on his jaw, looping his arm around his narrow waist, and kissing his mouth open, working their lips together.

Harry’s kiss is clumsy and startled, a bit panicked. Louis feels how Harry almost freezes up when Louis edges his tongue past his lips, but all in all, he isn’t half bad. Louis thinks it’s his soft lips that make it that much better, and the way he grasps onto his biceps as if it’s all he has.

When they pull apart, Harry’s eyes flick down to the floor and his blush seems to have crept down what of his neck that Louis can see.

Louis tangles their fingers, perhaps a bit forcefully, and tells everyone that they’re going to go so that Harry can settle in a bit and so that they can get some rest, pointedly ignoring Brandon’s whisper-shouted comment about getting no rest at all.

That night, Louis climbs into bed after spreading an extra blanket out over his duvet. Fudge has already crawled underneath the duvet, while Honey stays at the foot of the bed, chewing on her paws. Louis strokes down her spine before bending to kiss the top of her head.

He pretends he can’t hear Harry crying from across the passage.

Harry comes downstairs the next morning in flannel pyjamas. Louis’ in the kitchen, leaning against the worktop and listening to the weather on the radio as he waits for his toast to finish.

Harry scratches at the back of his neck before he’s brushing his hair from his eyes. ‘Morning,’ he mumbles drowsily, and Louis nods, looking down at his coffee in his hands.
Harry scratches at his stomach, pulling up the hem of his shirt, and Louis takes a sip of coffee that burns his throat. He woke up to another message from Charlie.

Harry picks an apple out of the fruit bowl and pulls open the crockery cupboard. He shakes his head at himself before pulling open the mug cupboard instead. The toaster pops.

Louis scrapes butter over his toast as Harry makes himself tea. Louis sits down at the table and watches as Harry drowns his tea with milk.

Harry sets his mug down on the table and sits down across from Louis. He bunches his sleeve in his fist and wipes at his eye, starting an aborted yawn.

‘We need to go over a few things.’ Louis starts, watching as Harry picks up his apple and starts to shine it on his sleeve, nodding to himself. ‘In the day, our jobs are to look after the animals and just help out wherever needed. Chester’s in charge of the guesthouse.

‘I’ve told everyone that we’re smitten with each other, so it’s important we act it around them. Even when I’m not around, you need to carry on pretending, okay?’ Harry nods his head and Louis nods with him, looking down at the black swirl of his coffee and trying to remember what else he wanted to talk about. ‘You can hang around staff quarters or the kitchen at the guest house whenever you want, as long as you don’t disrupt any guests or distract anyone from their job. I’ll make dinner in the evenings and you can eat it if you want, or else you can bribe Cook to make you something, it doesn’t matter.’

Harry nods and takes a sip of his tea. His fingers are long and pale where they curl around the warmth of the navy mug. His engagement ring glints in the weak light of the kitchen.

‘Also, I’ll need to lend you some warm clothing until we can get you some stuff from town. It’s freezing here, and I’m afraid that jumpers made with more holes than fabric aren’t going to work. I’ll also need to scour the barn for some wellies for you, because your boots aren’t going to live much longer if you’re wearing them in the mud.’

Harry nods his head and sinks his teeth into his apple. Louis crunches his toast and they eat in silence until Honey comes in and whines for his crusts.
There’s a pair of size ten wellingtons in the shed. They’re black, and dotted with bright daisies. They belonged to Arabella; size ten so that she could wear bobble socks with them. Louis wipes them down with a scrap cloth hanging over the broken lawnmower, getting rid of the spider webs.

Harry had asked to take the dogs for a walk, and Louis had frowned at him a bit before he’d pointed him in the direction of their leads. Harry had come to check with him if they were alright, and Fudge had looked utterly terrified wearing a doggie-jersey and his harness, lead clipped on behind his neck.

Louis digs through the coat cupboard first, pulling out an orange and blue anorak and a thin brown coat. He digs around to find a matching pair of buckle-up boots, size eleven. Harry will have to make do.

He pulls one of the boxes at the top of the cupboard down, sliding his scissors along the line of tape to peel back the flaps and dig through the box of Arabella’s old clothing. He picks out some of her larger jumpers, absurd knitted things with long sleeves and weird patterns.

He piles everything up and carries it upstairs, laying them out on Harry’s neatly made bed before going through his own cupboard and pulling out three jerseys and a scarf for Harry. He ponders for a bit before deciding to give Harry a pair of ski socks and a woolly hat that he found in one of his drawers, flaps over the ears and bobble on the top.

He sets the pile next to his wellingtons and eyes the raggedy stuffed rabbit poking out from under Harry’s duvet.

Louis refuses to give it much other thought as he goes back downstairs to find something to make for lunch.

Harry comes back almost an hour later, both Fudge and Honey’s doggie-jerseys in his hand and Honey and Fudge both collapsing on the carpet in the living room as soon as Harry has their harnesses off. His cheeks are pink and Louis looks away and cuts another slice of milk bread.
When Harry comes back downstairs, his cheeks are still pink and he’s wearing a pale brown jersey that Louis had given him. ‘Thank you.’ Harry says softly before he’s plucking a glass off the drying rack and filling it from the tap.

Louis shrugs and stirs the onions.

Louis decides against telling anyone other than Zayn that Harry’s a mail order bride, opting instead to let everyone else buy into fantasy. It’s safer that way.

But it does of course mean that Liam, Niall and Arabella all call him angrily after he sends them each a message, demanding to know how he managed to fall in love so soon after Charlie.

Louis wakes up to an empty bed, rubbing his eyes as he wonders where his furry hot-water-bottles disappeared.

He patters downstairs and looks at the clock, finding that he’s slept two hours later than usual. He also finds eggy bread on the worktop, covered by a clear plastic bowl. Harry’s written his name on a torn-off piece of the shopping list pad stuck on the fridge.

Honey and Fudge are curled up in their beds in front of the radiator in the lounge, bellies full.

Louis pops the eggy bread into the microwave and refuses to admit how brilliant it tastes.
When Harry comes back around noon, he’s smiling. And he tracks four muddy footprints into the kitchen before they stop where his muddied gumboots are resting against the pots cupboard.

Louis grits his teeth before cleaning them up. He can hear Harry playing with the dogs in the living room.

Once the floor is clean, he pulls on his coat and hurries toward the stables. He saddles up Toffee, nuzzling Caramel between her dark eyes in apology and feeding her a green apple, her favourite.

Toffee gallops fast through the field for him, and he takes her down to the river until he doesn’t feel so bitter.

Louis knocks on Harry’s door lightly, and Harry looks up and smiles at him. He’s got the copy of *Animal Farm* from the bookcase downstairs in his hands.

‘Any laundry?’ Louis asks, shifting the laundry basket on his hip.

Harry nods before unfolding his legs and popping off the bed to reach for the wicker basket in the corner of the room. He hands it to Louis with a small smile that Louis tries to ignore.

He’s about to walk back down the passage when: ‘Louis?’

Louis turns around and looks back through the doorway to where Harry’s standing in front of the chest of drawers, fingers lingering on the framed photograph of Louis’ parents. ‘Are these your parents?’ he asks softly, his index finger pressing at the glass of it.

‘S’not important.’ Louis grits before turning on his heel.
‘Louis?’ Harry asks softly, right behind him. Louis jolts a bit where he’s looking over a bedding catalogue.

Turning around in his chair and pressing his fingertips to his temples, he raises his eyebrows. ‘Yeah?’

Harry’s eyes are down on his own feet, clad in star-patterned socks. ‘Could I maybe use the phone to ring my family?’ he rushes out quickly.

The telephone is cheap, so Louis nods easily. ‘Yeah, sure, whatever.’ He says with a wave of his hand, and he just catches the beginnings of Harry’s grin before he turns back around in his chair.

Harry says a quick thank you before he’s scurrying out of the kitchen and Louis massages his fingertips against the pain in his forehead, closing his eyes, as he tries not to focus on it. It stretches right from his left eyebrow to his temples, and he squeezes his eyes shut to ease the pain.

He can hear Harry’s watery prattling from the study. Louis tries to dim it out as he compares prices on double-bed duvet covers.

Everyone likes Harry a lot, and sometimes Louis can see why. Harry’s very sweet, very pretty. But whenever he’s around Louis, it’s as if he’s crawling back into his metaphorical shell.

It gets under his skin, because he can’t understand why he seems to be the only person Harry puts no effort into. Hell, even Fudge and Honey are starting to like Harry more than him. It gets under his skin.

But he steels himself and decides that, fine, if Harry wants to walk his dogs every other day and help Cook in the kitchen and walk to fetch Brandon from school, all while he says as little to Louis as possible, that’s his decision. Harry’s still going to have to marry him anyway.
Louis’ sitting on his bed, phone in his hands. He has seven unread messages from Charlie.

He can hear the patter of nails against wood and then Harry’s footsteps. He weighs his phone in his hands.

‘Louis?’ Harry says from his doorway. He’s got Fudge and Honey’s leads in his hands while they both nip at his ankles, jumpy from the excitement of getting walked.

Louis locks his phone and tries to ignore the headache that tries to creep between his eyebrows. He frowns. ‘Mm?’

Harry pulls on Fudge’s lead slightly when he licks the toe of his boot. He’s got a soft laugh in his throat, and Louis is bitter for many reasons, and one of them is probably that he doesn’t get to taste those soft giggles on his tongue, or get to curl his hands around the backs of Harry’s supple thighs.

‘Do want to come on a walk with us?’ Harry asks nervously, winding their leads once around his hand.

Louis looks down at where Fudge and Honey are staring up at Harry adoringly. He unlocks his phone and looks down to see notification of a new message from Niall. He shakes his head quickly. ‘Nah, but you go off and have fun without me.’

When he looks up from his phone, Harry is frowning, but he nods and turns on his heels, Honey and Fudge following without thought.

The front door slams softly after Harry.
When Harry comes back forty minutes later, he unhooks the dogs and hangs their harnesses on the coat hooks beside the front door. Louis is in the lounge with his new book on Greek Mythology, having just been couriered over the morning previous.

He doesn’t look up when Fudge comes to jump onto the couch, or when Harry comes into the lounge. But something feels different. The air feels heavy around him. He looks up and sees Harry frowning at him, his arms crossed over his chest. He looks a bit like a perturbed kitten. Louis keeps the thought to himself.

'I think I may be upset with you.' Harry says, and Louis closes his book, his thumb saving his place.

'I beg your pardon?' he asks, his eyebrows furrowed.

'I think I am upset with you because I feel like I’m trying and you aren’t even bothering to.'

Louis squints at Harry, and then to where Fudge is sleeping on the couch, snoring, chin hooked over his foot. He doesn’t know what to say to that, and Harry seems to realise.

Harry stands up and huffs. 'I'll be with the sheep.'

Louis sighs and drops his head into his hands after he’s left.

Louis finds him in the barn, leaning back against the gate to the sheep's pen. Harry wipes at his cheeks when he looks up and sees Louis.

Louis doesn’t say anything, just slides down to sit next to Harry. Neither of them make any attempt at filling the silence, but Louis sees the way his chin wobbles from the corner of his eye.

'T'm sorry.' He sighs, leaning his elbows onto his knees.
'No,' Harry starts, voice soft, ‘don’t be sorry. I’m just being silly.’ He says with a sniffle, wiping his nose on the sleeve of his brown jumper. Louis thinks he really will need a few more items of clothing.

'No Harry, I’ve been a dick to you ever since you arrived and you don’t deserve any of it.'

Harry gives a wet little hiccup and wipes at his eyes.

'It’s really fine Louis, I’m thankful to be here.'

'I still could have been nicer,' he tells him, and Harry shrugs.

'It’s fine, Louis. I get it. I know you’re stressed and having a little boy jump into the picture as your fiancé is quite a lot to get used to.'

Louis shrugs and looks straight ahead, to where Petulia, Dax and Violet are scratching around in their hutches.

'Please tell me why you're mad at me so I can make it better.' Louis breathes, watching Petulia gobble and crunch down on dried carrot.

Harry shakes his head and looks down at his hand, at his ring. 'I've always wanted to get married, have kids. You know, big house with two dogs and two children filling any silence with laughter. And, I mean, when you're young you have so much creativity that you create such brilliant dreams, and then you like them too much to move on from them, so I think I’m always going to dream of a white wedding in a field of flowers, and a house with children running through the hallways, and having my boyfriend get down on one knee for me, and ask me if I’ll be his forever.' He takes a deep breath, and Louis can see how much he's crying. 'It’s stupid, I know, but sometimes I really just dream about stupid things, like having my dad walk me down the aisle or have a funny story of how we met to tell people. I don't know, don't listen to me.' Harry says with a shake of his head, and he wipes his eyes with his sleeve.

'Give me your ring.' Louis says, and Harry hiccups.
He turns to look at Louis with horror in his eyes as Louis watches as new waves of tears roll down his cheeks. 'What?' he croaks.

'Give me your ring.' Louis repeats, and he watches as Harry’s chin quilts as he slips the thin silver band off his finger, holding it in his palm for a second too long before handing it back to Louis.

Louis pulls himself up with a hand on the gate before he offers a hand to Harry, who sniffs before he lets Louis pull him up.

Louis clears his throat, looking at Harry quickly before he addresses the animals. 'Ladies and gentlemen, I have an announcement to make.'

He slowly drops down onto one knee, uncurling his fingers from his palm to reveal the ring to Harry, who laughs so that his eyes scrunch and he brings his hands to cover his mouth, absolutely giddy.

'Will you, Harry-' he starts, but Harry interjects, sniffing again.

'Edward, my middle name is Edward.'

Louis nods and starts again, 'Will you, Harry Edward Styles, do me the honour of giving me your hand in marriage?'

Harry nods, giggling behind his hands. Louis reaches for his hand, Harry wiping the spit off his palm onto his thigh before offering Louis his hand. Louis holds his hand by his wrist as he slips the ring on, fit perfectly to his spidery fingers.

Louis then pulls himself up and opens his arms, giving Harry a small smile and gesturing him in with his chin, before Harry steps toward him and smiles into his neck, his lips pulled into a smile.
Louis’ got the weather report on the next morning when Harry comes in, blanket wrapped around his shoulders. He peeks his head into the living room for a few short seconds before he shuffles into the kitchen, coming back into the living room with a tub of yogurt.

Louis smiles at him, and it feels far too familiar considering that they’re only been actual friends for a few hours. Harry smiles back sleepily as he peels back the foil and lets his eyes flick to the television. Louis sips his tea and scratches Honey behind her ears.

Honey’s foot thumps against the couch as Louis scratches her just right, and Harry giggles softly at it. Louis looks up at him, grinning.

Harry’s focussed on the television and Louis steals glances at him, before he clears his throat. ‘You know, you’ve been here over a week and I still haven’t introduced you to the animals properly.’

Harry smiles around his spoon.

‘This is Lavender.’ Louis introduces, smiling as he strokes down her back.

Harry steps closer and rests his hand on her side. ‘Hi Lavender.’

‘Rory got her pregnant before he passed away,’ Louis says, a bit mournfully. ‘She’s due in a month.’

Harry strokes down her neck before sliding his hand under her chin, leaning in and looking into her shiny eyes. ‘You’re beautiful.’ He tells her, sounding like he’s talking to a child.

‘Don’t compliment her too much or else her head will get big, won’t it sweetheart?’ he teases, scratching gently at her soft fur.

‘I never understood why cartoon cows are always white and black. I’ve never seen a spotted cow.
Why do you think that is Lavender?’ Harry asks softly. Lavender blinks slowly.

Louis laughs at him softly before he’s moving on. ‘Here are Petulia, Dax and Violet.’ He tells Harry, crouching down to look into the rabbit hutch. Petulia’s sleeping in the corner while Violet’s chewing at their pellets, Dax burrowing into the sawdust in his separate hutch.

‘They’re so small!’ Harry coos, pressing his hand up against the wire.

Louis smiles at the awe on Harry’s face, unhinging the door to Dax’s hutch slowly so not to startle him. ‘They’re dwarf rabbits. You can hold Dax, if you want. He’s a big sweetie pie.’

Harry nods and Louis reaches in for him. Dax jumps away from him at first before Louis’ hands close around his body, drawing him out of the corner and into his chest. Harry’s got stars in his eyes as Louis passes Dax to him. He cradles him to his chest, his hands swarming Dax’s small body, his elegant fingers scratching at his soft fur.

‘He’s so cute.’ Harry says softly, itching between Dax’s ears.

Louis reaches out to stroke over Dax, holding the tip of his finger to his mouth. Harry giggles softly, and Louis thinks that maybe this’ll work.

Louis raps his knuckles against the wood of Harry’s door, leaning into the doorway.

Harry looks up from where he’s hunched over a piece of lined paper, pen pinched between the fingers of his right hand while his left hand is rubbing circles into the ear of his stuffed rabbit. He hums and raises his eyebrows in question.

‘We need to start wedding planning.’ Louis starts, stepping into the room. Harry shuffles on the bed to make space for Louis to sit at the foot. ‘There’s not much of a rush, but I just thought that we could maybe start. You know, choose a time, place, that sort of thing…’
He trails off, looking up at Harry and finding him grinning. ‘Yeah, okay,’ he agrees.

‘I was thinking we could have it here, out in the fields, or else in the town church.’ Louis suggests, trying to gauge Harry’s reaction.

‘Can we have it in the church? And then have the reception in the field maybe? I’ve got religious family, and my grandmother will want to come, and she’s very traditional,’ Harry asks, nervous frown on his face. ‘The fact that I’m marrying a man is already enough to propel her toward her grave,’ Louis holds up his hand to stop him, giving him an encouraging smile.

‘It’s alright Harry, anything you want. This is your wedding too.’

Harry nods and cuddles his stuffed rabbit into his chest, burying his nose into the fluff between its long ears. It’s very raggedy, but Louis can see it’s well loved. Before he can think it through, he’s leaning forward and pinching at its left ear, rubbing at the surprisingly soft fabric.

‘Who’s this?’ Louis asks softly, smiling.

‘Rodger,’ Harry answers, rubbing his thumb over its fluff-filled belly.

Louis gives its ear a last stroke before pulling back and shaking out his fringe. ‘So, what do you think about spring?’

‘Yeah, spring sounds good. I like that.’

Harry sits in the window seat with his fingers wrapped tight around his mug. He’s just got off the phone with his dad, slumping down, wrapped in a soft blanket wordlessly. Louis adds another quarter of a blitz stick into the fire.

‘Why did you do this?’ Louis asks, staring at the fire so not to look at Harry’s sad eyes.
'My family really needed money or else we’d lose the house. I didn’t even have to think before I was making my profile.'

Louis frowns. ‘And they let you?’

Harry shakes his head quickly, swallowing his sip. ‘They don’t know, really. Told them I’d fallen in love and that I was sorry for not telling them. Then I told them I was leaving to live with you because I couldn’t stand not to be with you. I sent them the money a few days after I arrived, saying that you didn’t know that I hadn’t told them and you were sorry for any pain you caused.

‘I think maybe they would have felt less betrayed if they’d known the truth, but they would have never let me go through with it.’

Louis wants to tell Harry about how honourable he is, or that he’s one of the most beautiful creatures he’s ever seen in his life, but instead he packs another log onto the fire and watches it burn.

’Why did you buy me?’ Harry asks then, and Louis makes the mistake of looking up, catching his eye. He drops his head quickly, studying his fingers.

’I grew up on this farm, and after my father passed, he left it to me. But I couldn't inherit it unless I was married, so…'

’That's discrimination.’ Harry says thoughtfully, taking a slow sip of his hot chocolate.

Louis shrugs.

He can feel Harry look at him as he crosses his legs, nudging at the fire with the poker, trying to make orange sparks erupt.

’You know, Louis,’ Harry says after a bit, his voice slow. 'I'm really glad you aren't a sixty year old pervert.'
Louis lets out a bark of surprised laughter at that, turning to face Harry completely. It’s funny, because he’d had the exact same thought about Harry. ‘Why? Is that what you were expecting?’

'Somewhat.' Harry giggles, looking down into his mug. 'All I was given was a name, a date, and an address, as well as the information that my parents can keep their house.'

Louis smiles at him, and Harry smiles back.

‘Louis, I don’t mean to offend you,’ Harry starts, and Louis looks up and at Harry. He’s got his legs crossed with Honey on her back in his lap; eyes closed in pure ecstasy as Harry scratches her chest. ‘But I think the dogs need a bath. Honey’s got some fleas…’

Louis nods and scratches Fudge where he’s curled up next to him. ‘Are you a dirty little sausage Fudgie?’ he teases. Fudge creaks his eyes open and wags his tail with three lazy thumps against the couch cushion. ‘You want a bath?’

Fudge licks his ankle and Louis giggles. ‘Yeah, alright. You go run them a bath, okay? I’ll bring them up in a second.’

Harry smiles and slowly rolls Honey out of his lap, setting her down onto the carpet before he’s pushing himself up. Louis listens to the floor creak above him before the pipes start to whine as Harry runs them a bath.

He dog-ears his page before slowly setting Fudge down on the floor, getting a dirty look in return. He pats his thighs and whistles for them to follow him.

Fudge and Honey trot after him lazily, running up the stairs ahead of him and towards where Harry calls them from the bathroom. The dogs run towards Harry’s voice while Louis pulls open the airing cupboard, pulling out two old towels.

When he steps into the bathroom, Harry’s just wearing a thin tee shirt and his jogging bottoms and he’s got both dogs in the bath. Fudge’s eyes are wide and pleading and Honey’s got her paws up on
the lip of the bath. Louis laughs when he sees them.

‘God, I haven’t seen them looking so sad since Liam left after the funeral.’ Louis says as he sets the towels onto the worktop and he slips down into a crouch in front of the basin cabinet, pulling it open and sifting around for the flea shampoo and a plastic cup.

He hands both to Harry before coming to kneel next to him, touching his fingers to Honey’s wet paw. She looks at him with big, sad eyes.

Harry uncaps the shampoo and dribbles the strong smelling liquid into the palm of his hand. It’s an awful olive green colour and he pulls a face that reminds Louis of a little boy before he’s reaching to lather the shampoo into Honey’s fur. Honey stands still through it, just shivering in the water with her tail tucked between her legs, and Louis pulls out his phone to take a picture of each of them. He sends one to Arabella before tucking his phone back into his back pocket.

Harry moves onto Fudge, who just sits down in the water and closes his eyes, letting Harry get the job done as Louis folds his arms on the edge of the bath.

‘Christ, when did you last wash these dogs? They’re filthy.’ Harry scolds, dipping his hands into the foamy water to get rid of the leftover shampoo.

Louis frowns, reaching out to scrape his nails down Fudge’s back. ‘They’re daschunds, you don’t need to wash them a lot. They have short fur,’ he defends.

Harry makes a disbelieving sound in his throat as he thumbs over Honey’s forehead, waiting until he can wash out the shampoo. ‘These dogs walk around in mud and who knows what else. You can’t just not wash them because their fur is short.’

Louis rolls his eyes but can’t help smiling as he reaches forward to tickle under Honey’s chin.

Louis helps Harry rinse them off, using cupfuls of warm water to wash the foam off their fur. After Harry has pulled out the plug and used the showerhead to spray at the bath, Louis plucks each dog out of the tub and dries them off thoroughly.

He hands a bundled up Honey to Harry before picking up Fudge and carrying him downstairs. He sets him down in his bed, pressing the back of his hand to the radiator to make sure it’s warm.
enough. Fudge looks up at him with betrayal in his eyes and he stays still until Louis turns his back.

Louis shakes his head as he watches Fudge rub his face against the carpet before rolling around, trying to rub off the strong smell.

Harry holds Honey in his arms and sinks down to sit next to her bed, holding her to his chest and rubbing the towel against her wet fur.

Louis barks with laughter when she wriggles out of his arms to join Fudge.

Louis closes the kitchen door behind him, a chill running down his spine as he reads the envelopes in his hands. He sets them down on the kitchen worktop before he runs his hands under the tap to get rid of the dirt under his fingernails.

He sets on the kettle and takes out two mugs and the hot chocolate mixture. Once the water has boiled, he fills each mug before he pulls the fridge open and takes out the bottle of milk, pressing his nail into the foil top and peeling it open before he dribbles a bit into each mug. He stirs them before pulling open his sweet cupboard, digging around for his bag of mini marshmallows.

He counts out six into each mug before he hooks his fingers into the handles and carries them to where Harry’s on the phone with his mum.

He catches the tail end of what Harry’s saying, feeling his cheeks warm at Harry’s: ‘Yeah mum, he’s so amazing, you’re going to love him. I’m sorry you haven’t met him yet, but I know you’re going to adore him.’

Louis sets his hot chocolate down on the desk in front of him and Harry grins at him, mouthing thank you before he’s laughing at something his mum says.
Louis’ curled up on the couch, the blanket he’d thrown over Fudge covering his legs, as he flicks through the channels. Harry shuffles in, Honey cradled to his chest. She’d pinched a nerve when trying to squeeze through the garden gate.

Louis’ about to change the channel when Harry stops him. ‘I love The Holiday! Can we watch it please?’

Louis sighs but nods, setting the remote down beside him as Harry slips into the window seat, setting Honey down against a spread pillow.

Harry snuggles in and Louis spares him a glance every so often. The film’s about ten minutes in, so it’s easy to pick up. It’s not too bad, and it’s sweet when Harry giggles.

‘There are a lot of things I would do to Jude Law, given the opportunity,’ Harry sighs, dazedly.

Louis coughs and raises an eyebrow pointedly. Harry flushes pink. ‘I mean, if I weren’t engaged. That is.’

Louis smirks and crosses his arms over his chest, setting his attention back on the television screen.

Harry’s gone out to fetch Brandon from school, and Fudge and Honey are fast asleep. Louis had fed all the animals and it’s too cold for much else. He’s awfully bored.

He takes a seat at the bench of the piano, pushing up the lid and grazing his fingers over the cold keys. He looks down at his hands as he sets his fingers over starting keys.

He had started to play piano when he was six. He’d been over at his best-friend-of-the-time’s house, and his music teacher had come over for his lesson. Louis had sat in the corner and amused himself with the plastic pop-up crate of tambourines and shakers.
Louis’ mum had got a call later in the evening, when Louis and Arabella were out playing in the field, to tell her that her son had an amazing musical ear. Louis had been enrolled in piano lessons in the morning.

The only problem was that Louis had been a little shit as a child, and he’d had no interest in commitment, perseverance, or piano.

So as is, all Louis has in his repertoire is *Heart and Soul*, *Chopsticks*, and a few piano covers he’d spent his teenage years perfecting.

Louis rests his fingers against the ivory of the keys, testing their weight, before he presses down and falls into the easily perfected tune of a song Louis can’t even remember the original of. He thinks The Fray maybe, or Damien Rice.

He stutters along slightly, but he’s still partially amazed that he remembers as much as he does.

He almost jumps out of his skin when Harry asks: ‘You play?’

Louis clutches at his chest, feeling his heart thump beneath his skin. When he turns around to stare at Harry, he’s leaning in the kitchen doorway, glass of water in his hand. He’s smiling, and his body is tilted with his hips forward and Louis feels this spike of desire to spread him out and trace out the lines and angles of him.

‘Not really, no,’ he answers. Harry raises his glass and as he takes a sip of water. His throat bobs and the weak sunlight streaming in from the kitchen has just enough power that his ring glints, and Louis feels his stomach flop. ‘Why, do you?’

Harry laughs, so that his eyes are pinched at the corners and his lips are stretched as if he wants to show his perfect teeth off. ‘No, m’awful with anything to do with music. My sister did teach me to play *Heart and Soul* when I was little, so there is that.’

Louis grins at him, and it’s not meant to be so easy when he could have easily admitted to hating Harry a week and a half prior. ‘You’re in luck because that happens to be one of the only things in my repertoire. Now come sit.’
Harry returns his grin, downing the rest of his water and coming to sit to Louis’ right, setting his empty glass on the top of the piano. ‘M’playing higher, right?’ Harry asks, shifting his fingers around. He presses down with his middle finger before he looks up at Louis with his eyebrows raised.

Louis nods and presses his fingers down to start, and Harry stutters a bit as he tries to slot in with him. Harry is quite awful, and he messes up every second key, but he giggles as he plays and it has Louis giggling too, both of their fingers falling messily and clumsily against the keys so that they’re just making a mess of noise.

Harry stops first, laughing too hard to play anymore. His fingers nudge Louis’ and he starts laughing properly then, too, as Harry grips for his own tummy and Louis leans back on the bench. When Harry follows, the bench totters and Harry shifts his weight forward quickly to stop them falling back, so that his elbows land heavily on the keys and Louis’ laughing even harder.

By the time they manage to calm down, they’ve managed to wake up Fudge, who stands beside Louis’ feet with his tail wagging excitedly. Louis reaches down to scratch under his chin as Harry muffles the last of his dying giggles.

‘Brilliant.’ Harry mumbles, and Louis can hear the smile in his voice.

Louis thinks the first time he acknowledges how badly he wants to kiss Harry is when he's watching him through the kitchen window, trudging through the long grass with a metal bucket in his hands, dressed warmly in one of Arabella’s jumpers that Louis had given him and a pair of large overalls found in a box in the attic that hang off of him.

He’d noticed that Harry was pretty from the second he stepped out of the taxi, and of course he’s had his fair share of fleeting thoughts about him, but as he watches Harry walk through the mud then onto the mud-splattered driveway, Louis’ thoughts are completely tender and innocent.

Louis has a stupid moment where he imagines Harry coming back from milking Lavender, and he can almost see the smile Harry would have. And he sees Harry stare at the pail of milk for a while, unsure of what to do, and Louis can so clearly imagine him kissing Harry softly, because sometimes he’s so silly.
And his heart thumps a bit as he watches Harry finish trudging towards the kitchen door, lifting his hand in a wave when he sees him through the window.

‘How about I cook tonight?’ Harry offers, out of the blue.

Louis looks up from where he’s jotting out budgets in the study, cocking an eyebrow. ‘S’my cooking not good enough for you, Styles?’

Harry blushes and gets the look of a kicked puppy. ‘No! Of course not! I just thought I would do you a favour and cook you a nice meal, as thanks or something. For being so nice.’

Louis rolls his eyes but laughs softly. ‘Yeah, go for it.’

Harry beams at him before turning on his heel.

Later, Louis refuses to admit that it’s the best chicken he’s ever tasted. Even though Harry gives him a knowing little smile.

‘What’re you doing?’ Louis asks Harry when he walks into the kitchen the next night, seeing Harry hunched over the worktop. Harry looks back at him, his expression stuck somewhere between a smile and a frown.

‘Can’t decide on what I want to make for supper tonight.’ He supplies, and Louis nods before he’s resting one palm on the worktop and stepping into one of his wellies.
He pulls it up to under his knee before edging his toes into the other. ‘How about you have a break and come feed the animals with me?’

Harry looks up from where he’s paging through Louis’ Jamie Oliver and he frowns before he nods, tucking the ribbons between the pages to save his place. ‘Do I need to wear my wellies?’

Louis’ eyes shoot down to Harry’s feet. He’s wearing his buckle ups, so he should be fine. ‘Nah, you’re good as is.’

‘Okie dokie.’ Harry chirps, running his fingers through his fringe and pushing it back under his beanie as Louis hands him his brown coat from the hook behind the door. Harry gives him a nod as thank you before pulling it on over his burgundy top.

He follows along wordlessly as Louis goes through his feeding routine. Horses, cows, rabbits, sheep, pigs and chickens. Harry’s leaning against the field gate when Louis comes back from feeding the chickens, one leg crossed in front of the other and hands in his pockets.

‘Fancy a walk?’ he asks, and Louis shrugs. Harry grins before he’s opening the gate and stepping onto the lush grass. Louis follows after him.

They’re mostly quiet until they reach the centre of the field, where Harry flops down onto his back, right in front of Louis. Louis balks for a whole two seconds before he’s laughing at Harry, hands in his pockets and Harry kicks his legs out and stretches his arms, splayed out like a starfish.

‘Y’Alright there?’ Louis jokes, kicking his toe at Harry’s calf. Harry grins.

‘Join me.’ Harry giggles, wriggling around on the grass. Louis rolls his eyes because he’s engaged to a six year old child.

He drops down onto the grass gingerly, spreading out next to Harry so that Harry’s outstretched fingers bump at his shoulders.

‘Calming, isn’t it?’ Harry sighs, looking up at the grey sky.
Louis nods, eyeing the soft looking clouds just away. There’s a storm coming.

Harry makes a sound in his throat, like a suppressed giggle. ‘Yesterday I convinced Brandon to let me drive the tractor, ’

Louis’ smiling at his story already. ‘Yeah?’

‘I had no idea how to stop it, so he had to run after me until I crashed into the fence.’

Louis laughs, his body heaving with it. Harry laughs with him, his legs curling in toward his chest.

They stay there until the rain comes.

Louis’ halfway through his shower, his sopping clothing hanging over the edge of the tub, when the water goes bone-chillingly cold.

Louis swears, rinsing out his conditioner at lightning speed so he can switch off the water and step out the tub and onto the bath mat, pulling his fluffy towel off the radiator beside the bath.

He flicks at the light switch in his bedroom and nothing happens, and he sighs because the electricity’s gone out again.

The storm isn’t too bad so far, just rumbles of thunder and flashes of lightning, rain pelting down onto the roof. The wind hasn’t started yet, so that’s good.

He gets dressed into a warm, woollen jumper and jogging bottoms, pulling his socks up to mid-calf and towelling his hair dry before hanging his towel over the door.

When he gets downstairs, he can hear Harry making a ruckus in the kitchen. It’s darker downstairs
than in his bedroom and when he sees Harry, he sees more shadow than not.

‘Where do you keep your bloody candles?’ Harry sounds frustrated and Louis wipes at water still clinging above his eyebrow.

Louis scoffs. ‘What normal person keeps their candles in the kitchen? They’re in the dining room.’

Harry mutters something as Louis walks through the connecting door into the dining room. The room’s dark and Louis can’t see much, relying only on the small amounts of light still left, paired with his memory of the room and the flash of lightning.

He struggles with the door of the end table before it gives and creaks open. Harry’s right behind him, Louis can feel the heat coming off him. He hands three candles back to Harry before his fingers nudge at a set of tea candles. He hugs four candles to his chest and pinches the tea candles between his fingers.

‘Matches?’ Harry asks as he follows Louis back into the kitchen.

Louis pulls open the medicine cabinet and shakes the box of matches there to make sure there’s still some inside. He sets them down on the worktop and strikes the first one, lighting up the largest candle that Harry sets down. He lights them one by one and Harry starts lighting the tea candles off the flames of others.

‘Go put these in the lounge, will you? I’ll find food and some form of entertainment.’

Harry nods and curls his fingers around two of the larger ones as Louis scratches the back of his neck. He pulls open the sweet cupboard and digs before settling on salt & vinegar crisps and angel cakes

He picks up a candle to light the stairs as he climbs them, setting a glow over the passage before he’s pushing open the guestroom door. The rain shoots at the glass, loud enough that Louis’ worried it will break.

He has to scratch around at the top of the cupboard until he finds the Monopoly set, pulling that down and not even caring if it has all required pieces before he’s creaking back down the stairs.
Harry’s set all the candles up in the lounge and he’s got the angel cakes open, a look of dull shame colouring him when Louis notices that he was feeding them to Honey and Fudge.

Louis chooses not to say anything before setting the box down in front of Harry. Harry looks down at the box before looking up at him, and he grins. ‘Set it up, will you?’ he requests, going back to the kitchen so dig through the drawers to find the hooves he’d bought for them some time back.

‘Those smell awful.’ Harry comments, looking up from where he’s sorting money. Louis shrugs and sets one in front of each dog, scratching down Honey’s back before going to sit cross-legged next to Harry.

‘I’m the dog,’ Harry tells him, eyebrows raised as if to tell Louis not to argue.

‘But I’m always the dog,’ Louis teases, and Harry pouts. Louis giggles. ‘Don’t worry, just joking. I’m always the car.’

The slight frown stays on Harry’s mouth until Louis presses the silver dog into his palm, setting his own car on start and reaching for the dice.

Playing Monopoly with Harry is a lot more fun that playing with his sister, because whenever Harry gets a card, he always lies to get money, but he’s about as bad at lying as Fudge when Louis asks who pissed on the carpet. He’s also awfully obvious when stealing money from the bank, but Louis lets him carry on because it’s adorable how he thinks Louis doesn’t notice.

Harry still goes bankrupt an hour in, eyes wide and lower lip between his teeth as he tries to think of his next move. ‘Wine?’ Louis offers, and Harry nods quickly, eyeing the board.

Louis pretends not to notice that he’s missing money when he comes back, or that Harry’s out of bankruptcy.

The game gets boring toward the two hour mark, and Louis flops down against the carpet with an angel cake shoved into his mouth, sighing. The room smells a sickly sweet mess of vanilla, chocolate and flora from the mixed scents of the candles, burning for long enough for the scent to start to bug him and make his head ache.
The wind howls and the thunder rumbles loud enough that Louis’ briefly worried about the house crumbling until he thinks of the solid brick walls and strong foundation. He’s awfully happy that the only guest staying at the moment is a young man on a business trip who’d seemed nice enough when Louis had run into him after milking Lavender.

Harry has a sip of wine and even in the gold-tinted light from the candles and the abundance of shadow; he can see how his lips are stained from it.

‘Haz? What did you want to be when you were little?’ Louis asks, folding his arms behind his head. Harry sets his wine glass down with a soft click.

He hums and frowns in concentration before he’s lying down next to Louis, propped up on his side. His lips are burgundy up close. Louis thinks it may be the fact that they’ve gone through one and a half bottles that makes him not shy to watch Harry’s mouth move as he replies, ‘A rock star, I think.’

‘You would’ve been a good rock star, I reckon.’ Louis drawls. Harry giggles and rolls onto his tummy, pressing his cheek against his folded arms and resting his forehead on the carpet, head tilted so that Louis can see his eyes and the top of his nose before his shoulder blocks it. ‘You’ve got the looks for it.’

He blinks slowly, an elegant sweep of his thick eyelashes. ‘What did you want to be?’

Louis looks up at the ceiling. The candles are giving him a headache. Harry’s too close and he wants to touch him. Harry wriggles so that the meaty upper curve of his thigh nudges against Louis’; making Louis think maybe Harry wants to touch him too.

Louis thinks about it for a few seconds before he starts to giggle. ‘An actor or a scientist, I think.’

‘Wow, different ends of the spectrum.’ Harry comments, kicking his legs back and forth. Louis watches his toes curl in his fluffy socks.

He hums in agreement. ‘Figured I could be the next Leonardo DiCaprio or Hawking.’

‘Hawking’s a physicist though,’ Harry teases and Louis scoffs, reaching to swat at his back where he can reach, the blow landing on the curve of his spine, dulled by his jumper.
‘Alright then, Mister Know-it-all. The next Newton then.’

Harry closes his eyes and shifts around so that Louis can see the happy curve of his lips. ‘What happened?’ he asks, before he’s blinking his eyes back at Louis for his answer.

‘Hated high school and didn’t go to university. Also realised it was hard to pay bills from being an extra in a shitty series, so,’ he sighs.

‘I’m sorry Lou.’ Harry whispers, and Louis feels a twist in his stomach that makes him want to throw up. The nickname rolls off Harry’s tongue so easily and Louis wants to fit his hands under Harry’s shirt and maybe kiss him a bit, see if Harry tastes as sweet even with wine bittering the taste of his tongue.

‘S’not a problem. I think getting to live here and not having to really do anything beats both of those,’ he says with a dry chuckle, and Harry smiles again.

‘Yeah,’ Harry agrees, his eyes slipping closed. He looks sleepy and soft in the candlelight. ‘Living here is pretty great.’

Louis smiles at that. Fudge gives a soft snore, tired out from the excitement of doing nothing all day. Harry stretches with a little contented sigh, his toes knocking against the coffee table and he squirms around until his body is angled more towards Louis.

Harry smiles at him dopyly, and Louis finds himself smiling back before his eyes flick down to where Harry runs his tongue over his full lower lip. It’s a simple action, but it has Louis licking his own lips, his eyes glued to Harry’s slightly parted pink mouth.

When he looks back up, Harry’s eyes flick away from his lips, wide and sparkly. Harry edges closer to him, his chin hooking over his forearm so that he’s so close to Louis, his lips close enough that Louis could just lean in and kiss him, if he wanted. And he wants.

Harry’s eyes flutter closed and Louis is going to kiss him, he’s about to kiss him. The room lights up with lightning. He can see the sweep of Harry’s eyelashes against his cherub cheeks right before his own eyes slip closed. He’s about to kiss him, so close that he can feel Harry’s soft outbreath against his lips, but thunder rumbles through the skies as wind screeches and Honey barks, loud and shocked.
Harry jolts from fright and Louis startles backward. He laughs nervously and pushes himself up to sit, looking down at where Harry’s buried his face into the carpet.

He runs his fingers through his hair and tries to avoid the disappointment.

Harry’s comes downstairs wearing Louis’ maroon jumper for the third time in one week and Louis frowns.

‘Do you think that maybe you’d like to go to town and get you some new clothing?’ he asks, sipping his morning coffee.

Harry rubs the heel of his palm into his eye and nods slowly, before his mouth is stretching open wide in a yawn. His tongue edges out and it’s ridiculously pink. ‘That would be brilliant, actually.’ Harry yawns. ‘Although, I am getting rather attached to these sweaters of yours,’

Louis laughs softly before he has another spoonful of muesli, washing down with a sip of coffee. Harry slips into the chair next to him and rests his head on his palm. ‘Couldn’t sleep last night,’ he says softly, his eyes blinking closed slowly. Louis edges his coffee cup towards him and Harry smiles and looks down at it lazily before he reaches for it. He takes a big sip before he pulls a face, scrunching his nose up. ‘That’s disgusting.’

Louis laughs and steals his mug back to have another sip. Harry flicks his tongue out and it almost reaches his chin and Louis feels a bit hot around his ears. He changes topic and looks down at his muesli. ‘Why couldn’t you sleep?’

Harry sighs and his elbow slips forward so that his chin is resting on his forearm. ‘I dunno. Was just,’ he pauses as he traces his fingers over the table. ‘thinking too much. It’s like my brain didn’t want me to sleep because it had too much it wanted to…ponder over.’

Louis nods and watches as Harry draws the outline of a heart onto the table, lazy and loose. The table’s going to give Harry a splinter one day. ‘You need to eat something before we leave.’ Louis tells him, mouth full.
Harry slowly tilts his head to the side before levelling his gaze. He gives him a sleepy nod and pushes his chair back. Louis sets his bowl in the sink before giving Harry’s hair a quick scratch. Harry hums sleepily before Louis’ patting his shoulder.

He looks through his cupboard upstairs, pulling out a warm, navy jumper and then lacing up his brown boots. He wraps an oatmeal scarf around his neck and runs his fingers through his dirty hair, too lazy to shower. He plucks his black coat from behind his door.

When he gets back downstairs, Harry’s rubbing at his eyes, blinking quickly. ‘Tea?’ Louis offers, flicking on the kettle. Harry hums and has his last spoonful of yogurt.

Louis drums his fingers against the worktop as he waits for the water to boil, while Harry gets to feeding the dogs, filling one bowl with water and the other kibble. He calls them in and claps on his thighs, but Louis knows that neither of them are moving from their beds in front of the radiator.

As soon as Harry’s sipped away his milky tea, Louis fills both mugs with tap water and sets them in the basin before he leads Harry to the front door. Harry pulls on the emerald coat, buttoning up all four buttons before taking the wool beanie from the key-cum-glove dish, pulling it down to his ears and tucking so that little wisps of his fringe still poke out, right above his eyes.

It’s not a long walk into town, about twenty minutes walking on the grassy shoulder of the road. It’s a cold day, but it’s still very beautiful, and they walk silently as Louis takes in the sight of the dew-fresh downs. Harry tilts his chin up and lets the cold sunlight scatter over his face as he smiles into the gentle morning.

It’s a Sunday morning, so it’s not very busy, but Louis knows it will fill a bit more after church and all the churchgoers file into the four different cafes for their breakfast.

There are two second hand shops in town, and Louis has to stop himself from reaching back to takes Harry’s gloved hand and lead him through the wind of streets to get to the first one. But Harry seems to manage just fine a step behind him, and Louis feels a bit silly.

The first shop is owned by a woman named Esmeralda who checks into the guesthouse with her husband for a weekend every two months. She’s middle aged with kind eyes and a sweet voice, paired up with a cheeky mind. She sometimes sneaks Louis a pair of gloves that he hasn’t paid for.
He rests his hand in the curve of Harry’s spine, hard to distinguish through his layers, and leads him toward the worktop where Esmeralda sheepishly sets a very tattered copy of *Fifty Shades of Grey* open on its face.

‘Good morning Louis,’ she chirps, trying to subtly sweep her book behind the basket full of embroidery thread and wool. ‘and who might this be?’

Louis smiles and curls his arm around Harry’s waist completely, his fingers coming to rest over where his hip must be hiding under the bulk of the coat. ‘This is my Harry,’ he tells her first, seeing her eyes light up, before he finishes with: ‘We’re getting married in the spring.’

Esmeralda shrieks and runs out from behind the worktop to pull Louis into a hug. Louis goes easily, laughing as she squeals out congratulations before pulling back and turning to Harry. She holds him at arm’s length and skims her eyes down him before back up to his face where Harry’s trying to not look so amused. She breaks into a smile before pulling Harry into a hug. Harry looks at Louis over her shoulder and Louis gets that kick somewhere in his chest again.

Esmeralda’s got a big smile on her face when she lets go of Harry, resting her hands on her hips. ‘Let’s see the ring then.’

Harry nods and pinches the middle finger of his glove, pulling the wool off and bunching it up in his palm before he offers his hand to her. She holds his left hand by the wrist, leaning in to look at where the engagement ring sits prettily between his knuckles.

‘It’s beautiful.’ she purrs, and Harry laughs.

As the two of them gush about rings and Esmeralda starts scolding Harry for not having solid wedding plans yet, Louis browses through the small shop, hanging an array of clothing over his arm for Harry to try on.

Harry comes up to him and rests his hand on his back, looking over his shoulder to where he’s thumbing through shirts. ‘Do I need a shirt?’ he asks softly, and Louis can almost hear how he’s pinching up his forehead and his lips are turning down at the sides in slight confusion.

‘Thought it might come in handy.’ Louis tells him as he pulls a black shirt off the rack, then a white. ‘By the way,’ Louis whispers, turning to face Harry and handing over the pile of clothing hanging on his arm. ‘thanks for playing it up so well. Think Esmeralda really believes it.’
Harry’s still frowning, but he nods slowly. ‘Yeah,’ he agrees softly, before he’s walking from Louis to Esmeralda to ask if he can try some things on. Esmeralda points him to the back corner of the shop where a flimsy changing booth of canvas and metal-frame is set up.

Harry comes out to show Louis everything, so Louis switches between retelling ‘The Story of How They Met’ to Esmeralda, and checking over Harry to make sure everything fits and looks warm, going so far as to stick his hand up under one jersey and rest it against the warm skin of Harry’s lower back.

He buys Harry four jerseys, a coat, leather boots, a shirt and jeans, as well as buying two new pairs of gloves for them both and a striped scarf. As Esmeralda’s sliding him back his card, he notices her watching just past his shoulder, and he turns slowly to follow her gaze.

Harry’s got a copy of The Little Prince in his hands and a luminescent smile on his face.

‘Slip it into your bag when you leave, my engagement present.’ she whispers with a smile pulling her lips, and Louis nods.

He does just as she says when he herds Harry out, tucking the paperback in underneath the white jersey.

Louis guesses that church must be finished when they come out because all the cafes are full, so they wait by the pastry display case in Carlucci’s for a table. The waiter apologizes as he seats them at a small table against the window.

Harry shimmies his coat off his shoulder and hangs it over the back of the chair before pulling his gloves off and stuffing them into the pockets. Louis reaches for his hand then, bringing it closer so he can look at the ring.

It was his mother’s, and Louis thinks it may have even been his father’s mothers before that. The round diamond glints and Louis presses his thumb over it.
‘It looks beautiful on you.’ He tells Harry when he looks up. Harry’s got a blush sitting high on his cheeks.

Louis keeps his hand resting over Harry’s when they order, telling himself that it’s to get word spread if anyone sees them and refusing to admit to himself how easy and natural it feels, holding Harry’s hand.

Louis wakes up at five am, sweating. His pants are wet and sticky.

He’s scrabbling for his mobile phone on his bedside, speed dialling Zayn before his one-track mind can go back to the events in his dream.

He closes his eyes as he waits for Zayn to answer, and he sees flashes of bare skin, handprints, wet lips. His eyes shoot open as Zayn picks up.

‘You better have a fucking good reason.’ Zayn grumbles, voice thick and clogged with sleep.

Louis swallows. ‘I’ve got feelings for Harry.’

‘Did you really just wake me up at to tell me you want to fuck your fiancé?’ Zayn groans, disbelieving.

Louis bites at his knuckle. ‘I reckon. Kinda?’

‘You’re so fucking stupid.’ Zayn yawns, before he puts down the phone.
Harry gets out of bed before Louis, who spends three hours buried under his duvet as he tries to come to terms with newly recognized feelings.

When he gets downstairs he’s ambushed by Harry, his arms wrapping tightly around his neck and his soft cheek pressing against his neck. There’s something hard poking between his shoulder blades.

Harry draws back and Louis wants his body back against him, wants to feel the weight and warmth of him in his arms, against his chest. He’s got the copy of *The Little Prince* in his hands.

‘Thank you so much Lou!’ Harry squeals, and Louis scratches at the back of his neck.

He doesn’t tell Harry it was Esmeralda, just smiles and says, ‘It was nothing, darling.’

His cheeks colour slightly from the pet name, and the shock of how easily it had tacked to the end of his sentence, but Harry turns a pretty pink and Louis thinks he likes it, may have to call him darling more often.

Harry comes back downstairs after he showers, dressed in his flannel M&S pyjamas that Louis had picked out when his old ones had looked far too worn. He looks sweet and sleepy, and Louis wants to kiss him.

His hair’s mostly wet, curled in little flicks at the ends. His cheeks are a bit pink and he looks fresh and soft. He’s frowning slightly as he comes to sit down next to Louis lightly.

The top button of his pyjama shirt is undone, and he slowly pushes his shirt off his shoulder, tilting his head to the side and baring his neck to Louis. ‘Do I smell funny to you?’ he asks, his fingers clenching onto the flannel for grip as Louis blinks at him, and the bare skin exposed to him. He wonders if he’s dreaming.
He rests his hand on Harry’s bare shoulder, skin sinfully soft beneath his fingertips, and leans in to breathe Harry in. He smells of soap and Vanilla Chai body wash. Louis takes a deep breath to inhale more, his eyes squeezed closed as his nails press against the thin skin over Harry’s shoulder.

He smells scrumptious, breath-taking. When Louis leans back, away from him, Harry’s eyes are closed, his eyelashes fanned out against his rose cheeks.

‘You smell lovely, there’s nothing wrong.’ Louis tells him, craving the taste of Harry’s scent on the back of his tongue.

Harry nods silently before he resettles on the couch, his knee bumping against Louis’ lightly as he focuses on *George Gently*.

‘Henrietta’s been here since my parents inherited the farm.’ Louis tells Harry, carding his fingers through his hair.

They’d been trying to watch a film, somewhere along the line they’d both fallen asleep, Harry slipping down to rest his head in Louis’ lap as Louis’ head tilted back. When they’d woken up, neither of them had said anything, so they’d stayed. And Louis couldn’t resist playing with Harry’s hair.

Harry hums as a conformation that he’s heard. Louis twirls a lock of hair three times around his ring finger. ‘Chester used to work in the kitchen for a bit, I think, until my parents made him manager so they wouldn’t have to do it. Somebody else was hired to run the kitchen with Henrietta, but it wasn’t right.’

Harry nods his head, and they’re both still awfully sleepy even though they’ve both been sleeping since three in the afternoon and the sun is long-time down. They should both go up to bed, but Louis makes no move to leave, pulling lightly on Harry’s hair.

‘Cook came when I was four, taking over with Henrietta. Juliet came when I was ten. She was nineteen, pregnant, and had been kicked out by her parents. Mine took her in and she worked as a housecleaner for a bit before giving birth to Brandon, then she was put at the front desk.’
Harry reaches up to rub his eye, and Louis looks down as he scrunches his nose and sniffs. He’s getting sick. Louis grazes his nails along his scalp. ‘So now Brandon just fixes everything that breaks and feeds the animals when I’m lazy and mows the grass in summer. And Rosie only came when I was seventeen. She was eighteen,’ he says, thinking about the summer she’d arrived. ‘We’d had a short-lived fling that was fun, but had helped me realize I was gay.’

‘Is it awkward?’ Harry asks, his eyes fluttering closed slowly.

‘Not anymore, we’re both adults.’

Harry hums and reaches up to scratch Fudge where he’s snoring on Louis’ other side. ‘You said you have a sister?’

Louis rests his hand over Fudge’s belly next to Harry’s. ‘Yeah, Arabella. She’s four years younger than me. Just a bit older than you actually. And you’ve got Lilly, right?’

Harry nods and curls his body towards Louis slightly, jostling Honey where she was napping beside his knees as he bends them and turns them towards her. ‘Three years older than me.’

Louis brushes the hair off Harry’s forehead, away from his eyes. ‘Do you miss her?’

Harry snorts and wipes at his nose. He’s congested. ‘All the time. But that’s normal. I missed her even when I was back home and she was away at university.’

‘And your parents? Do you miss them?’ Louis asks softly, his touch gentle as he coaxes answers out of Harry by playing with his soft hair.

Harry blinks his eyes open and looks up at the ceiling, where the television’s casting coloured light onto the alabaster. ‘Of course. Every day. I was always a mummy’s boy and a daddy’s boy, so it’s horrible being away from them. But it’s part of growing up, right?’

‘Yeah, being a mail order bride is a crucial step in becoming an adult; I’m pretty sad I missed it.’ Louis teases, and Harry slaps at his chest softly.
'I hate you.' He mumbles, shifting completely to face Louis’ stomach, eyes delicately closed and knees bent up and towards his chest. Honey grumbles as she resettles in the space between his and Harry’s thighs. He nuzzles his forehead against Louis’ stomach and breathes out through his mouth. ‘You never told me about your parents.’

Louis takes a deep breath and teases his fingers at the nape of Harry’s neck. ‘My mum was diagnosed with Lymphoma when I was eleven,’ he starts. Harry nuzzles his nose in just beneath his belly button as his fingers curl around his where they’re rested against Fudge’s tummy. ‘She passed away last year.’

‘I’m sorry Louis.’ Harry says, and Louis shakes his head. It’s no one’s fault.

‘My dad died of a heart attack. Arabella thinks he died of a broken heart, and sometimes I believe her.’

Harry rests his other hand on Louis’ hip and presses his lips to Louis’ stomach through his long-sleeve. Louis twists his fingers into the soft hair behind Harry’s ear and let’s his eyes flutter closed.

Louis swings his legs where he’s perched on the worktop in the staff kitchen. They haven’t got any guests, only one coming in at noon, so Louis had come to staff quarters to bother Cook on his off time. But he’d ended up getting lucky and convincing Cook to make him an omelette.

‘Where is the missus then?’ Cook asks, stirring the mushrooms in his frying pan.

Louis rolls his eyes. ‘Not too sure. He mentioned something cryptic about teaching Dolly some tricks,’

Cook laughs, loud and from his core. ‘Can piglets even do tricks?’

Louis shrugs.
‘You know, I never see you two together,’ Cook starts and Louis gulps. ‘When was the last time you took that boy of yours on a date?’

‘We went shopping in town just last week, Cook,’ Louis defends.

Cook rolls his eyes. ‘It’s a wonder you even have a fiancé. Where’s the romance, the fire. Harry seems the type who’d like that sort of stuff. Roses, champagne, candles. You know, stuff out of movies.’

Louis raises an eyebrow, ‘Something you wanna tell me, Cookie?’

Cook shakes his head and sighs. He sounds like he’s given up. ‘I’m just saying, I’ve spent enough time with Harry this past month to know that he maybe wants a bit…more.’

‘Harry’s told you this?’

Cook pauses. ‘Not in so many words, no.’ Louis smirks then. ‘But he did once mention you’re always too busy to spend time together.’

Louis looks down at his fingers, twisting them together as he lets Cook’s words reverberate in his mind. He nods slowly and looks back up to find Cook watching him. ‘Alright then, Mister Love Doctor, what do you suggest I do?’

‘Louis!’ he hears Harry shout from the kitchen.

He closes his email and gets up, forming his question about how things went with Dolly and teaching her tricks when Harry interrupts his thought pattern with, ‘Can you bring me a towel?’

Louis frowns before nudging open the kitchen door, coming face to face with Harry standing on the
back-doorstep, covered in mud, head to toe.

Harry smiles sheepishly and shrugs. There’s a smear of mud right under his eye, and one across his cheek. ‘Dolly didn’t want to learn any tricks.’

‘I’ve packed us a picnic.’ He tells Harry, setting the basket down on the table.

Harry looks up from the newspaper, brows furrowed and mouth full as he chews his toast.

‘M’already eating.’ He says with a frown, but he’s already standing and wiping his hands as he reaches for the picnic basket, trying to peek inside. Louis presses his palm flat on the flap.

‘Uh uh darling, the weather is meant to be sunny and I want to take you on a picnic. Cook says I’m not spoiling you enough.’

Harry smiles at him shyly before he sits down to finish his crusts, and Louis wishes that he could reach across the table and kiss the shy smile off Harry’s lips.

‘And just because the weather’s going to be nice, does not mean that you can wear your stupid jeans and a tee shirt. I will only let you leave once you’re wearing some thermals and a jacket, alright?’ Louis lectures, reaching for a glass from the corner cupboard and filling it with water before taking a big gulp.

Harry rolls his eyes. ‘Fine, mum.’

Louis winks at him
‘I am not climbing on that brute.’ Is the first thing Harry says when Louis pulls him towards the barn, the doors already opened and Toffee and Caramel already saddled, with special thanks to Brandon.

‘Come on Harry, Caramel’s a big softie. And you aren’t the one who has to carry the basket.’ Louis reminds him as he gets the stepladder from Caramel’s stable. He places it beneath her stomach and checks her bit before he pats her saddle, running his fingers through her butterscotch mane.

‘Come on Harry, she’s not going to hurt you. We can just walk and maybe trot, if you feel up to it.’

‘Can’t I walk next to you instead?’ Harry asks, eyeing Caramel as she flicks her tail. ‘I don’t trust her; she bites me when I feed her.’

Louis laughs, checking Toffee and getting a less friendly welcome from her.

‘Come on Harry, climb onto Caramel before I make you ride Toffee.’ He teases, petting Toffee’s mane.

Harry’s eyes widen and he shuffles toward Caramel.

‘Uh uh,’ Louis says, picking the helmet from the hook on Caramel’s door, and Harry groans.

‘Do I have to?’ he whines, and Louis grins, walking closer to him. Harry sags and lets Louis slip the helmet on over his ruffled hair, gripping to each buckle before clipping the clasp closed beneath his chin. Harry grumbles moodily.

‘Now you can get on.’ Louis says with a sweet smile, and he can only imagine what Harry’s saying about him in his head.

Harry grips onto Caramel’s saddle where Louis shows him, his own fingers curling around Harry’s to show him how before Harry is hoisting one leg up and Louis’ helping him swing his thigh over until he’s seated on Caramel’s back. Louis becomes painfully aware of where one of his hands is resting on the warm leather of the saddle and the other is stretched across Harry’s back and resting
at the top of his thigh.

Louis pulls back with a small cough, feeling his cheeks flame slightly.

He swings himself onto Toffee’s back easily, taking hold of her reins and bending at the waist to pluck at the picnic basket resting on the stool. He rests it in front of him, clipping it to Toffee’s saddle before he guides her to walk towards Caramel, where Harry’s gripping her reins with white knuckles and he appears to be shaking.

‘Don’t worry Haz, she’s not going to throw you off.’ He soothes, guiding Toffee right up next to Caramel. They butt noses, Toffee’s fringe flicking back and Harry gives a shaky gasp when Caramel shakes her head, startling him.

Louis reaches out to rest his hand on Harry’s thigh, just above his knee, and Harry’s eyes dart to him. His face has gone pale and his fingers twitch.

‘I mean, I know I won’t die – not with you with me – but it’s still scary.’

Louis coos and Harry’s chin wobbles. Louis squeezes his knee, wanting nothing less than for Harry to start crying on his attempt at a date. ‘How about this, I’ll clip Caramel to Toffee and you can just sit and hold on while I guide us?’

Harry nods quickly and Louis takes hold of Caramel’s rein, pulling it towards him and hooking it to Toffee before leaning over Toffee to stroke down Caramel’s mane.

He clicks with the back of his tongue and Harry takes a shuddery breath as Toffee starts walking, and then Caramel following a second later. Louis tries not to find it as adorable as he does when Harry grips tight onto Caramel’s saddle and quick little breaths come from his parted lips.

‘Come on Harry, its not that bad is it?’ Louis asks, leading Toffee down the dirt road from the barn to the field. Harry shakes his head quickly, but his fingers are still white-knuckled to Caramel’s saddle, and Louis thinks he’s doing very well for his first time.

(He refuses to let his mind go to the darker thoughts about how lovely Harry’s thighs look spread so wide or how he seems to be a natural rider, his fear stepping in the way. He definitely refuses to think about how lovely Harry looks with his cheeks pink and lips parted as he bounces slightly on
Harry’s shaking when Louis helps him off of Caramel, his fingers biting into his arms and his legs twitching before his feet touch the ground.

‘Was it too bad?’ Louis asks, and Harry shakes his head, his cheeks pink. ‘See, I told you.’

Harry shrugs and Louis steps closer to him, unclipping the helmet and pulling it off Harry’s head. He has a red line across his forehead from it, and his hair has gone flat. Louis leans toward him and runs his thumb over the red indentation, rubbing over it softly until it starts to fade slightly. Harry blinks slowly, his lips parting slightly.

When Louis turns around to take off his own helmet, he can hear Harry shaking out his hair, and he copies, running his fingers through his fringe and brushing it back to his right.

‘Is this spot okay?’ Louis asks, already unrolling the blanket.

Harry nods, looking around at the open field. Louis sets out the blanket, placing the picnic basket in one corner and his helmet in another, before he sits down. He pats the space beside him and Harry smiles before he slips down, long legs crossed.

Louis opens the picnic basket then, reaching inside to set the different Tupperware out onto the picnic blanket. Harry examines each one, peeling off the lid to the raspberries as Louis finishes unpacking. When he looks up, Harry has a raspberry on each fingertip.

He sucks them off slowly, looking around at the open field with wide eyes as Louis twists open one of the pink lemonades, his throat suddenly gone dry. Harry plucks one of the small white flowers from the grass where it bends over the edge of the blanket.

Cook had packed them an array of fruit as a meal, tiramisu to share as dessert. Harry digs into fairy cake as Louis picks at the blueberries.
The sun is warm and bright and Louis melts down onto the blanket, lying on his back and feeling the kiss of sunlight on his cheeks. Harry laughs at him softly before following, his elbow nudging at Louis’. 

Louis’ close to falling asleep in the soft glow of the sun when,

‘Lou, is this a date?’

Louis gulps before he blinks his eyes open, turning his chin to look at where Harry’s eyeing him, propped up on his elbow. He looks nervous almost, a bit scared, his lower lip caught between his teeth.

‘Do you want it to be?’ Louis croaks, holding his hand up over his eyes to shield them from the sunlight.

He watches Harry’s throat as he swallows. ‘I think so,’ Harry says softly, and Louis’ mind flickers off as his body takes over, moving forward in smooth motion as he reaches for Harry’s cheek and pulls him forward, pressing their lips together.

It’s a long slow kiss that has Louis’ fingers twitching to grip harder at Harry’s jaw and Harry reaching for his hip, his hands almost shaking.

As soon as the kiss ends, Louis kisses him again, harder. He kisses Harry’s mouth open slowly, edging him further back, leaning half-over him as he tastes the sugar on Harry’s lips. Harry makes a soft sound in his throat and it brings Louis back, makes him stutter and pull back.

Harry’s eyes are wide, his lips swollen at the corners, and Louis should feel guilty for kissing him like that.

He should, but he doesn’t. Instead, he leans back in, his hand sliding down Harry’s side to grip onto his slight waist as he leans in and kisses him again. Harry kisses his nervous breaths into his mouth, his hands crawling up to his back, seemingly holding on for dear life to Louis’ jumper, pulling at the fabric as Louis kisses him slowly and easily.
Harry’s ridiculously clumsy, and he seems to think that he’s meant to stick his tongue down Louis’ throat, so Louis just reaches up and holds his jaw open with his thumbs pressed underneath his ears as he takes all control of the kiss and rolls Harry onto his back, their legs tangling as he teases his tongue into Harry’s mouth.

Harry’s hands are shaking where they cling to his back, his thighs trembling when Louis slots a thigh between his. He makes soft sounds that Louis swallows greedily, shifting his weight over Harry’s body so he can lick deeper in his mouth, curling his fingers into his hair and pulling lightly so that Harry’s body arches up into him and he gives Louis a small whimper to nourish himself with.

Harry’s body gives a sharp shudder that has Louis rolling on top of him completely, his fingers reaching back to wrap around Harry’s wrists, forcing his arms down next to him, bent at the elbows and pressed into the blanket beside his head. He shifts so that his thigh is pressing right between Harry’s legs, and Harry gives a soft little whine, accompanied by his hips twitching up, and Louis grinds his hips so that his own crotch rubs against Harry’s upper thigh as he grinds his thigh into Harry’s bulge.

He bucks his hips, his thigh dragging tightly against Harry’s groin and before Louis knows what’s happening, Harry’s mewling into his mouth, his body twitching as his hips jerk, and then he sags back down into the blanket.

Louis pulls back, looking down at Harry’s glassy eyes and parted lips. ‘Oh my god.’ Harry whimpers, bringing his hands to his face so he can press the heels of his palms into his eyes, and Louis rolls off him but keeps his hand on his jaw, just stroking softly beneath his ear as Harry takes deep breaths until Louis can’t notice his heartbeat thundering at his chest where his arm is stretched over.

Harry keeps his hands over his eyes even after his breathing has evened out, and Louis drags his eyes from his pinked cheeks down his slowly rising, slowly falling chest, and down to the tell-tale wet spot at the front of his jeans.

‘I’m so embarrassed.’ Harry mews, and Louis coos as he rolls Harry onto his side, wrapping his arm around his waist. ‘I’ve just thought about kissing you so much and then it happened and oh my god, I cannot believe I did that.’

Louis laughs, and Harry gives a shaky outbreath. ‘Harry,’ Louis says with a shake of his head, reaching to wrap his hand around Harry’s bony wrist and pulling his hands away from his face. ‘That was undoubtedly one of the hottest things I’ve ever experienced.’
Harry smiles weakly before squeezing his eyes shut. Louis huffs out a breath and reaches out his hand. He settles it over the wet spot on Harry’s jeans, feeling his cock twitch beneath his palm and earns a gasp from Harry. ‘I mean, it’s pretty flattering.’

Harry laughs and Louis pulls him closer, right into his side, so that Harry can tuck his chin into his neck and Louis wraps his leg around Harry’s, tangling them up on the blanket as the sun washes down over them.

It’s not drastically different when they get home.

Harry helps Toffee and Caramel back into the stables like he would under normal circumstances, but on the short walk back home, he reaches for Louis’ hand. Louis slots their fingers together and Harry steps closer into him, smiling down at their feet.

The only other difference is that when Louis’ making dinner and right before they go to bed, Harry gives him a quick kiss, which has Louis holding onto his wrist and kissing him again, slower and deeper, on both occasions. It leaves Harry’s cheeks pink and his eyes starry.

It also means that Louis comes spectacularly hard when he wanks off after Harry’s door is closed.

November (177 days)

After the roaring success of their first date, Louis starts thinking up ideas for a second, now knowing that success is highly likely.

Every year, around the middle of autumn, the fair is set up on the village green. It’s a travelling
company that the Town Council hires each year for their rides. The local school gets involved in setting up stalls, and rides are set up in the open spaces. He’s never really bought into it, and far too many years of service at the dunking booth during his school years pretty much put him off the fair for life.

But the more he thinks about the sugary food and the flashing lights and the rides, the more he thinks Harry will love it.

Louis leans against the door as he watches Harry.

He’s sat down in the hay, legs crossed so that the rip in his knee looks ready to rip wider as he cups a chick in his palms, cooing at it as it tweets back. He’s smiling so wide that Louis wonders if it can be seen from space.

‘Harry?’

Harry startles, apparently so lost in his own world that he hadn’t even noticed Louis. When he turns to face Louis, chick held protectively against his chest, he smiles.

‘Hey Lou,’ he greets easily, his thumb smoothing over the soft feathers of the chick.

‘Would you like to go on another date with me?’ Louis asks around the lump in his throat, and Harry’s grin widens as he dips his chin to look down at the tweeting chick.

‘I think she wants me to say yes.’ He says, and Louis’ heart thumps as he watches him.

‘I do too,’ he jokes, ignoring how his palms are sweating.

Harry looks up then, eyes blinking slowly. ‘Then yes, Louis, I would love to.’
The days leading up to their next date are brilliant.

Louis feels like a schoolboy with a crush again, sneaking kisses with Harry behind the barn and leaning against the fence of the field, Harry cupping his jaw as Louis kisses him against the fridge.

It’s great because Harry seems to crave Louis just as much as he craves him, always wanting Louis’ hand in his or to have their lips pressed together.

Cook’s awfully smug about it, because now that Harry and Louis are kissing around them and walking around with their fingers interlocked, he seems to think it’s all due to his date idea. Which technically it is, but Louis doesn’t want him to know that.

As is, Louis’ got Harry up on the kitchen worktop, his hands on the swell of his hips as he sucks on his plump lower lip, Harry’s nails digging sharply into his biceps. Harry’s very inexperienced, Louis could tell before Harry even told him he was a virgin, and Louis knows he tends to get a bit overwhelmed, tends to grip too tight and get hard fast, but he doesn’t mind.

Harry pants into his mouth, hard and fast, and after Harry had told him about his recurring asthma, there’s some worry prickling at him that leads to him drawing back, smoothing his thumbs in little circles into Harry’s soft hips where they’ve sneaked under his shirt.

He looks flawless, his eyes wide and his cheeks pink, his lips parted and bitten to a lovely red. Louis rests their foreheads together, eyes skittering closed as Harry’s fingers twitch where they’re twisted into his shirt. Harry nudges their noses together gently and Louis has laughter somewhere in his throat.

‘You’re lovely.’ He tells Harry, swiping his thumb down to his chin, the tip of it just pressing onto his lip.

Harry laughs breathlessly. ‘Shut up.’

Louis gives him one last kiss, dropping his hands to squeeze at his spread thighs, before he’s
turning back to his cookbook, politely ignoring the bulge between Harry’s legs.

They hold hands easily as they wander through the different attractions; Harry bundled in one of Louis’ jackets and a pair of his gloves, his hair tucked under a beanie. He’s got Louis’ cream scarf wrapped around his neck, and he looks so awfully cute that Louis feels he needs to lean in every few minutes and kiss him, run his thumb over the soft flesh of his pink cheeks.

The sun always sets early in winter, and the bright lights make Harry’s eyes twinkle as they pass all the stalls.

‘Oh Louis! Look!’ Harry squeals, squeezing his fingers as he points to a large stuffed teddy bear tagged up to the front of a milk bottle stall. Louis lets Harry pull him closer as he bounces towards the counter. ‘Oh Louis, please can we play a round. Please?’ he begs, and Louis doesn’t think he’ll ever be able to say no to Harry’s doe eyes.

Louis rolls his eyes but pays for three hoops. Louis had always been good at sport in school, so he isn’t surprised when he gets two hoops around the neck of a milk bottle, and Harry practically vibrates excitedly when the high-school student uses scissors to cut the plastic tag holding the bear to the pole.

The girl hands Harry his teddy bear and he grins so wide that Louis could probably count all his teeth, and he just sews their fingers back together, ridiculously mad for the boy.

‘How long have you two been together?’ she asks, leaning over the counter.

Louis smiles and pulls Harry into his chest, kissing his forehead. ‘Couple of months.’ He tells her, and Harry huffs before he’s reaching to pull off his glove and shoving his hand towards her.

Louis has to bite the inside of his cheek to control the stupid smile that always wants to spill over his face when Harry shows people his ring.

‘It’s beautiful.’ she says to Harry, and Harry just smiles and looks up at Louis and pecks him quick.
Harry tucks his large teddy bear under his arm as Louis swings their hands. ‘So, what do you wanna do next?’

Harry’s forehead wrinkles as he thinks, his head tilting to the side. Louis wants to kiss him, so he does, cupping his rosy cheek in his palm. Harry grins when he draws back.

‘Spinning teacups?’ Harry suggests, his teddy bear pressing against Louis’ chest.

Louis leans in and kisses him again, quick and sugary, and nods. ‘Whatever you want.’

Harry leans over the safety bar, his teddy bear, Reginald, pressed up against his tummy. ‘I never used to like heights.’ He giggles nervously, their little seat swinging as they shift higher.

‘You’re the one who wanted to go on the Big Wheel,’ Louis reminds him, and Harry shifts into his side.

‘I know,’ he sighs, turning his face so that the cold tip of his nose nuzzles against his cheek. ‘I don’t mind them with you.’

Louis scoffs but kisses his forehead. ‘You’re something straight out of a romance novel.’

‘Don’t be mean to me,’ Harry pouts, leaning more into Louis. Louis rolls his eyes and lifts his arm to settle it over Harry’s shoulders. Their cart swings back and forth slowly.

Louis kisses the top of his head, letting Harry snuggle in as they share warmth. When they reach the top, he looks down at the fair around them, the twinkling lights and the streams of people, all dressed warm for the new winter. Harry’s fingers curl around the safety bar as he leans over it.

‘Let’s go on the merry-go-round when we get down?’ Harry asks, and Louis nudges him with his
‘We’ve only just got to the top and you’re already thinking about after?’ Louis scoffs, shaking Harry’s shoulder.

Harry rolls his eyes and nudges him before he’s reaching for Louis’ jaw, gloved fingers gripping tightly as he kisses him, only a little bit clumsy.

They kiss lazily until the end of the cycle and their cart stutters to a halt with a slight creak and the bar’s lifted. The teenager manning the ride gives them a knowing look. Harry’s lips are bright pink, wet and pouted, and Louis doubts he looks any better.

Harry links their fingers together and pulls Louis away from the Big Wheel, towards the merry-go-round.

They wait in line behind a lot of younger children, Harry leaning against the railing and watching the ride as it finishes its cycle. ‘It’s so pretty,’ Harry gawps, eyeing at the mirrored centre.

‘You’re so pretty.’ Louis quips, earning an eye roll from Harry, accompanied by a weak shove.

‘What do you want to ride on?’ Louis asks once they’re allowed on, resting his hand on the cold surface of a pumpkin, just as two little girls run inside.

‘The ponies are the best,’ Harry tells him with a giddy smile, skipping ahead of him before halting beside a carousel horse. Louis shrugs and hoists himself onto the horse next to the one Harry’s chosen with great ease.

Harry puffs out his lower lip as he attempts to climb on while holding his bear under his arm, his boot on the little step. Louis gives an over-exaggerated sigh before reaching toward him, palm outstretched. ‘You want me to take Reginald?’

Harry gives it a moment’s thought before shrugging and stretching to hand Louis the bear before he attempts the second time, one hand on the saddle and the other on the swirly pole. He pulls himself into the seat and beams at Louis, seemingly proud of his achievement.
The ride lets out a low whir before the jewellery-box-music starts, the lights flashing as the ride begins to turn slowly. Louis gets a bit of a shock when he notices that the ponies move up and down their poles, making him reach out and hold onto said pole.

Harry giggles happily, both gloved hands gripping to the gold pole as his horse tilts with the ride. Louis finds himself laughing too.

Once the ride has slowed down to a stop, Louis slips off the saddle and pets the horse’s mane, Reginald tucked under his arm, as Harry comes to his side and links their arms as they step off the merry-go-round.

Louis tucks his hand into his pockets, Harry following suit, so that they walk aimlessly, connected at the elbow. Harry sidles a bit closer, his elbow nudging at Louis’ side, so that if he wanted, he could rest his head on Louis’ shoulder.

It’s getting later and darker and colder and Harry curls in toward Louis, fitting himself against his side as they stroll through the food stalls. Harry visibly perks up when he spots a young man making candyfloss, pulling Louis along and stopping at the table.

‘Can I please have some, Louis?’ Harry asks him, his eyes big and pleading. He’s been learning from Honey.

Louis chuckles and reaches for his wallet as Harry squeals and starts talking to the man, rubbing his palms together as Louis tries to keep hold of Reginald.

‘Can I have a pink one, please?’ Harry asks, his eyes brighter than any of the lights before Louis wraps his arm around his waist and nuzzles his nose into the soft skin between Harry’s hairline and his scarf, his fingers flexing on Harry’s narrow waist.

Harry gives the man a chirpy thank you! before Louis’ pulling him away. ‘Can you hold it for me?’ Harry asks him, holding his candyfloss out to him so that Louis can pinch the end of the plastic stick between his fingers, having to let go of Harry to do so.

Harry pulls off a glove, stretching out his fingers as he stuffs the glove into his pocket. Louis wants to press his lips to the diamond on his finger. Harry takes his candyfloss back with a grin, holding it still as he pinches at the soft sugar of it, opening his mouth wide and setting it on his tongue.
Louis wraps his arm back around his waist as Harry pinches off a big piece, holding it in front of his lips. ‘Open!’ he giggles.

Louis does as told, letting Harry force the spun sugar onto the centre of his tongue. Louis lets it dissolve, closing his lips around it and pulling Harry’s body a step in front of him so that he can kiss him softly. They’ve both got sugary flecks on their mouths.

Louis thinks it must be getting very late as they stroll back towards the game stalls, Harry absorbed by his candyfloss. Even though he’s fighting off a yawn, he doesn’t feel ready to leave.

Harry bites off a good-sized chunk, chewing it slowly. Louis spots a photo-booth just ahead of them, pulling Harry towards it hurriedly. ‘Lou?’ Harry giggles confusedly, stumbling to keep up with him before Louis’ pulling open the curtain and herding Harry inside. Harry drops his candyfloss stick down onto the floor as Louis shoves him.

Harry’s laughing as he falls down onto the bench heavily, Louis squeezing in next to him, Reginald set down on his thighs and leaning toward Harry. Louis digs around for his wallet, feeding the booth two coins before pressing the red button.

Harry’s laughing hard, his cheeks pink and his eyes bright and Louis pulls a face as the camera flashes. The next countdown starts on the screen and Harry looks at him before he’s pulling a goofy grin and Louis copies, tilting his head towards Harry. The next countdown starts and Louis looks over at Harry, sees him smiling wide, leaning more into Louis’ side. Louis feels his heart thump, his world slowing down. Louis’ still staring at him when the camera goes off.

Harry looks back at him after, checking to see what he’s doing. His giddy laughter stops, right before he lets out a breathy giggle, from deep in his throat. Louis looks down at Harry’s lips, bright pink with sugar, before back up at his wide eyes. The camera goes off again, and that sets it off.

Harry reaches for him, hands on his jaw and pulling him towards him. Louis kisses him hungrily, his hand falling to his thigh as the other presses to the metal behind them. Reginald slips down onto the floor, onto their feet. Harry makes a soft sound into his mouth as Louis sucks on his lower lip. He hears the camera go off somewhere in the back of his mind.

He crowds Harry into the corner of the booth, leaning over his body as he pries Harry’s lips apart, edging the tip of his tongue into his mouth. Harry mewls softly as their tongues touch. It’s like fire. Louis licks into his mouth, licking away the sweetness as Harry’s fingers sneak into his hair, tugging hard enough that Louis whines into his mouth, digging his fingers into Harry’s thigh as he shifts to get his knee up onto the bench, using his advantage to kiss Harry deeper, tilting his head
back and sucking at his tongue.

Harry moans into his mouth, loud enough that it reverberates down into his chest. He hears the camera click.

He’s seconds away from leaning Harry back and getting his legs up so that he can slot his thigh between them, press his hips against Harry’s leg and kiss him silly, but there’s a knock on the booth that has Louis pulling back.

‘Ignore it.’ Harry groans, pulling Louis back in and kissing him desperately. Louis goes with him, kissing him with just as much fervour, but then the knocking’s a bit louder and Louis pulls back, grinning at Harry.

‘Oops, we’ve been caught.’

Harry’s cheeks flush pink as Louis leans away from him, eyes sticking to his parted lips, wanting to kiss him forever. His eyes dart just to check that he isn’t the only one hard in his jeans. Harry bends down to pick up Reginald as Louis pulls open the curtain, sliding out into the cold air. There’s a very embarrassed looking mother waiting outside, two younger girls standing beside her. Louis flushes as Harry steps out behind him, hiding his face in Reginald’s fur.

Louis pinches at their strip of photographs, reaching back for Harry’s bare hand and linking their fingers together, pulling him away quickly.

‘Fuck!’ he laughs once they’re far enough. Harry nods quickly, holding Reginald by one cream-coloured paw and shaking his head.

‘How did that even happen?’ he asks, sounding almost disbelieving.

Louis shakes his head before pulling Harry closer by his elbow, holding up their strip. He skims his eyes over all six photos before he nods, pointing to the one where he’s staring at Harry. ‘That’s how.’
‘So I was thinking that this weekend we could get started on our invites. Do you think that will work?’ Louis asks, chewing at his thumbnail.

Harry holds his finger up as his eyes skim the rest of his sentence before he looks up. ‘Sorry, I didn’t catch that?’

‘Do you want to start invites this weekend?’ Louis repeats, and Harry grins, nodding quickly. Louis gives Honey a quick scratch as Harry goes back to his book and Louis goes back to his program.

‘Harry?’ Louis calls from where he’s sitting in the study, pushing his glasses up his nose.

There’s some stomping upstairs before Harry shouts back, ‘Yeah?’

‘You busy?’ Louis asks, folding one leg underneath his bum.

‘Not really. Why?’

‘Just come here for a sec.’

He listens to the stairs creak as Harry comes down, hair wild and messy and the sleeves of his jersey pinched between his fingers.

Harry leans against the door of the study before Louis flicks his head towards the chair next to him. Harry sits down gingerly, looking at where Louis’ typing on the screen. ‘M’about to Skype my sister, and then maybe Liam after, thought you might wanna meet them.’

Harry starts to protest, standing up. ‘And by thought I mean that you will meet them.’
Harry sinks back down into the chair bringing his knees up to his chest so his heels rest on the edge of it. ‘But what if they don’t like me?’ he asks, voice small.

‘Don’t be silly,’ Louis chastises as he presses the call button. Harry hides his face behind his knees and Louis grips onto the armrest of the wheelie chair, pulling Harry closer.

Arabella answers on the fourth ring, the screen going black before it’s filled with a fuzzy image of brown hair and a wide smile.

‘Louis!’ she shouts, the speakers crackling.

‘Bella!’ Louis shouts back, eyeing the little square of their video feed and grimacing at his appearance.

Louis watches as Arabella’s eyes flick onto Harry and she grins wider. ‘This him then?’

Louis nods and nudges Harry’s knees so that his feet slip off the chair and he’s exposed to the camera. He flushes and raises his hand in a nervous wave.

‘Hi,’ he croaks, bringing one knee back up to his chest.

‘Hi Harry, I’m Arabella.’ she greets, and Louis looks at Harry, waiting for response.

‘Hi, I’m Harry.’ He says, and Louis snorts while Arabella looks like she’s trying not to laugh. ‘Shit, I mean-‘

Louis cuts him off by squeezing his knee, leaning towards his chair to reach for Harry’s hand. Harry looks down at his lap, cheeks bright.

Harry’s mostly quiet as Louis talks to Arabella, picking at the bobbles on his jogging bottoms as Louis rubs his thumb over his knuckles, leaning so close to him he’s scared his chair might tip over. He notices Arabella looking between them every other minute.
They say their goodbyes when her flatmate comes home, Harry even managing a shy smile and a wave before Louis’ about to end the call.

‘Wait!’ Arabella protests, Louis nodding. ‘Am I still coming over for your birthday next month?’

‘I should hope so.’ Louis jokes before he’s waving her goodbye and ending the call, her video feed dying.

‘She’s very pretty,’ Harry comments, turning to kiss Louis softly. ‘She could be a model, I think. You both look very similar.’

Louis shoves Harry’s shoulder but leans in for another kiss, looping his arm around Harry’s neck as Harry reaches for his waist. ‘You’re so distracting.’ Louis kisses into his mouth, Harry laughing airily in response before he’s pushing him away at his shoulder.

Louis clucks his tongue before he wipes his thumb over Harry’s lips and gives him a last, quick kiss, before he’s turning back to the computer and clicking on Liam’s contact.

Harry’s a bit more relaxed this time, so he doesn’t try to hide when Liam’s grinning face pops up.

‘Tommo!’ he yells, and Louis grins.

He squeezes at Harry’s hand before he replies with a shout of, ‘Payno!’

Then Liam’s gaze settles on Harry and Harry lifts his hand, smiling slightly. ‘Hey, I’m Harry.’

‘Hi Harry, great to meet you!’

Harry nods quickly and grins back at Liam, ‘Same to you,’

Louis leans in and gives Harry a quick kiss, knowing that Liam won’t tease them like his sister. When he turns back, Liam’s got a sickeningly fond smile on his full lips.
‘So Payno, I haven’t seen you in a month and you’re already growing out the beard?’

Liam laughs, loud and warm. ‘You ever tried growing one yourself?’

Louis scoffs, reaching up to his jaw. ‘Nah, I’d rather not look like a lumberjack.’

Liam laughs again, and Louis misses him so much. Harry squeezes his hand and cocks his head. ‘I dunno, I like beards. I think you’d look good with one, ’

‘Really now?’ he asks him, leaning in towards Harry. ‘You wanna get rug burn whenever I kiss you?’

Harry giggles and Louis kisses him, slow and long, almost forgetting that Liam’s there. That is until Liam clears his throat. Harry tenses up, probably also having forgotten Liam, and draws back, wiping at his mouth.

‘Sorry, but I’m not too keen to watch you two have sex on webcam,’ Liam jokes, and Harry lets his fringe flop forward into his eyes as distraction, zoning out for the rest of their conversation.

It’s right as Liam’s about to leave to take Max for a walk when Louis stops him. ‘You lot are still coming over for my birthday, right?’

‘Of course, it wouldn’t be a proper birthday without us there to get you shitfaced, now would it?’

‘Just checking.’ Louis chuckles before Liam’s giving him a salute and he’s gone.

Afterwards, Louis grips onto the armrest of Harry’s chair and spins him to face him, leaning in towards him. ‘See, wasn’t too bad, was it?’

Harry shakes his head, his lower lip between his teeth.
Louis comes up behind Harry, wrapping his arm around his waist and nuzzling into his neck, humming happily.

Harry shivers, shoulder jerking up and head tilting down. ‘Tickles,’ he whines.

Louis holds his hands over his stomach, rubbing at the slight softness through his cotton shirt and pressing closer along his back, trying to share as much warmth as possible.

Louis kisses Harry’s neck, lightly, just under his ear. Harry whines in his throat. ‘Louis, I’m busy,’

Louis plants a slower, open-mouthed kiss just below his ear and tightens his arms around Harry.

‘I’m cold and I wanna snog you,’ Louis kisses over his ear, making Harry shiver. Harry wriggles in his hold, seemingly torn between finding it ticklish or enjoyable as Louis kisses down the line of his neck.

‘S’not my fault you wanted to go off gallivanting on horseback in the cold.’ Harry scoffs, fighting against the urge to tilt his neck and give Louis more space to work on. ‘And you’re the one who said it was my turn to make dinner.’

Louis reaches up to pull on Harry’s collar, hooking two fingers in and baring his shoulder for him to press his lips to before he grazes the thin skin with his teeth.

‘We don’t need to eat.’ Louis tells him.

Harry sighs before he gives in, twisting in his hold to face him and leaning in to press their lips together.
Lavender’s breathing heavy against the hay, having been in labour for the past hour. Brandon’s gone to fetch them all water as Cook wipes the gunk off his hands. Harry’s sitting in the mess of clean hay beside Lavender, the bundled-up newborn in his arms. He looks exhausted and Louis can’t blame him.

‘Can we name her Pixie?’ Harry asks, holding the infant calf to his chest.

Louis wipes the sweat of his forehead with his just-washed hands and smiles down at where Harry’s rubbing his thumb along the little calf’s cheek, looking cosy in Louis’ old parka. Louis should probably clean her off and give her back to her mummy, but Harry looks so precious and Lavender looks exhausted, so he doesn’t think she’ll mind Harry looking after her infant for a bit longer.

‘Anything for you.’ Louis coos, crouching down to get a closer look at the calf, instantly captivated by her large eyes.

Harry looks back at the baby girl, smiling gently. ‘Hello Pixie, I’m Harry.’

Louis spits out his toothpaste, rinses his mouth out with Listerine, and wipes down his face with a damp flannel. He flicks off the light switch, contemplating whether he’s got enough energy for a good wank.

He gets the fright of his life when he looks up and Harry’s sitting cross-legged in the centre of his bed, scratching at Fudge’s soft belly and Honey’s chest. He looks up at Louis, smiling sweetly. Louis’ heart’s still beating a bit fast as he kneels onto the bed, shuffling towards Harry at the centre.

He rests his palm against the mattress, the other cupping at Harry’s jaw before he kisses him unhurriedly. Fudge starts to whine when Harry stops scratching him, whereas Honey just falls asleep, chin hooked over his socked foot.

Harry draws back and carries on scratching Fudge, muttering, ‘Are you a little cockblock, Fudgie?’
Louis snorts and sits back on his haunches, letting himself admire fresh-out-the-shower Harry. Harry looks up, catching Louis staring. ‘Stop staring at me,’ he laughs dryly.

Louis flops forward onto his stomach, head resting beside his thigh. ‘Whatever did I do to earn you in my bed, young Harold?’

Harry doesn’t laugh like expected, just pulls at the sleeve of his thermal and blushing slightly, shaking out his hair and brushing his fringe to the side. ‘That’s just the thing I came to talk to you about, actually…’

‘What thing?’ Louis asks, resting his head in his palms.

‘Well, I was thinking,’ Harry says, blush intensifying, ‘that maybe we could start sleeping together? Like, share a bed?’

Louis has to calm his heart rate when Harry clarifies, the image of Harry spread out and mewling springing to mind. He shakes himself out of it, looking up to see Harry watching him with his lip caught between his teeth.

‘Yeah sure, go get Rodger. You can even bring Reginald and put him in the chair.’ Louis replies coolly, thinking about curling up with Harry.

‘Now? Like I sleep in your bed tonight?’ Harry asks, his eyes a bit wide.

Louis frowns at him. ‘Were you thinking of starting in a week or something? We’re going to bed now, might as well try it out.’

Harry nods, flushing a bit. ‘Oh, right. Sorry,’ he says, laughing softly at himself.

Louis climbs into bed as he waits for Harry to come back, resting his glasses on the bedside as Harry shuffles in. Louis rolls Fudge towards his feet as Harry peels back the duvet and slips in, setting Rodger next to his bedside lamp.
'Can I switch off?' Louis asks, finger poised against the light switch. Harry rolls onto his side to face him and nods. Louis presses down, setting the bedroom into darkness. He can hear Harry’s soft breathing.

He reaches forward for him, feeling Harry jolt in surprise. ‘Hey, it’s just me.’

He can vaguely see Harry’s outline in the darkness, and he rests his arm in the dip of his waist, his palm settling against his lower back before he’s pulling him closer, shifting to the middle of the bed until they’re chest to chest and he can feel the warmth of Harry’s outbreath.

‘Goodnight darling,’ Louis whispers, leaning forward and hoping to kiss his lips, but rather kissing what feels to be the side of his mouth.

Harry laughs softly but repeats the sentiment and relaxes in his hold.

When Louis wakes up, his arms are still wrapped around Harry and Harry’s arms are wrapped around him.

Louis watches Harry playing with Pixie, leaning against the fence of the field as Lavender grazes and Harry frolics with Pixie, looking almost ridiculous in daisy-dotted wellingtons and three jerseys, grey scarf around his neck.

Harry kneels down on the damp grass to press his cheek to the side of Pixie’s face, hands stroking down her sides. When he stands up, he’s got mud patches on his knees; just to match the grass stains covering the rest of his legs.

‘Haz, babe,’ Louis calls to him, Harry looking over at him with his eyebrows raised as Pixie scurries back to Lavender, nosing at her stomach. ‘Don’t you think it’s time we take them inside?’

Harry pouts. ‘But we’re playing,’ he whines. Louis is marrying a six year old.
He sighs and leans forward on his elbows before he offers, ‘Should I bring out the sheep as well then?’

Harry nods excitedly before Louis goes off and attempts to herd the six sheep onto the field.

Harry’s not home when Louis gets back from his walk with the dogs, so he trudges through the damp grass to the guest house, pushing open the kitchen door after toeing off his soaked through plimsolls onto the tiles outside.

As he thought, Harry’s inside bent over the table as he chats with Juliet and Henrietta. Louis comes up behind him, resting a hand on his waist so that Harry whips to face him, cutting off midway through his sentence. Louis slides his hands down the slope of his back, nudging his fingers into his back pockets and leaning in to kiss him hello.

What he’d anticipated to be a short kiss turns longer when Harry wraps his arms around his neck, leaning into his chest and kissing him again. Louis doesn’t mind PDA in the slightest, but he draws a line at snogging in front of the people who he grew up in front of.

He draws back, presses an end kiss to Harry’s soft mouth as Harry smiles dazedly. ‘Hi,’ Harry drawls.

‘Hi darling,’ Louis greets, itching to grip Harry’s bum as his hands rest in his back pockets. ‘I was thinking that tonight, you and I drive down to town and go out for a nice dinner. What do you think?’

‘I’d like that, yeah.’ Harry bites his lip before leaning in and giving Louis a fleeting kiss.

Harry buttons his black shirt up to his neck, tucking it into his jeans and looking at himself in the
mirror before biting his lip and un-tucking it.

‘You look lovely, Haz, now can we get going?’ Louis sighs, rolling Honey around on her back as Harry does some last minute fussing on his hair, pushing it back before forward again. Louis groans. ‘Harry,’ he whines.

‘Okay, I’m done,’ Harry says, pulling on his gloves before plucking his coat from where it’s draped over the foot of the bed frame.

Before Harry can walk out of their bedroom, Louis hooks his fingers into his belt loops, pulling him so that he stumbles ever so slightly and Louis can kiss the corner of his mouth. ‘You always look lovely, no matter what.’

Harry punches his shoulder but follows Louis down the stairs. He hands Harry two dog treats before pulling open the kitchen door.

‘I’ll run and get my car and when I get here, give them each their treat, okay?’

Harry nods before Louis’ stepping out into the wind. He jogs to the staff quarters, digging in his pocket for the garage keys. Once inside, he climbs into his car and reverses down the driveway, drizzle starting to come down on the windscreen as he drives around the front of the farm, idling briefly to admire the front face of the guest house, before turning the corner and crawling the car up the driveway, hooting to get Harry’s attention.

Harry runs out seconds later, his coat buttoned up and his head down as he pulls open the door and slips into the passenger seat.

It only takes a five-minute drive to get from the farm to town, but in those short minutes, the soft drizzle turns into rain. Harry leans against the window, breathing hot air out onto the glass and drawing a small heart into it with his index finger.

He gets bored of it soon enough, and then he squints out the window, up at the tall trees on the land alongside the road. When they pass the dirt road that turns off into the forest, Harry turns in his seat.

‘Where does that road go?’ he asks, voice sweet.
Louis looks across, out Harry’s window. ‘There’s a campsite in the middle of the forest. S’beautiful in winter when it snows,‘

‘Can we go?’

Louis shrugs, smiling as he turns right down the next road. ‘Course, if you want.’

Harry nods in his seat as Louis turns his car down a narrow road and past the larger company buildings before taking a left, towards the town’s centre.

Louis parks the car just down the road from the restaurant, he and Harry bolting out and speeding up towards the shelter of the canopy outside the restaurant’s doors. They’re both giggling when they stutter to a stop, Louis pointing back to lock the car as the waiter leads them to their reserved table.

Their table is right in the front corner of the restaurant, in the nook beside the windows, and Harry slips off his coat and hangs it over the back of his chair as Louis does the same, slipping into his seat as the waitress hands them each a menu.

It’s sickly sweet, and Louis thinks if the him at the beginning of the year, fresh out of a fight with Charlie at a friend’s New Year’s Eve party, had to see him and Harry, holding hands on the table and discussing colour schemes for their wedding, he would not have believed it.

He runs his foot up Harry’s calve through dinner, nudging their toes together so that Harry blushes pink in the dimmed lighting of the small restaurant. He sips at his wine, his lips staining a gorgeous red that Louis wants to nibble at.

Once they’ve both finished their mains, Harry chooses Crème Brule as dessert. Louis wants to lean over the table and kiss him, taste the wine he’s been sipping, but he restrains himself. Nonetheless, he can’t resist feeding Harry spoonfuls of dessert when it arrives, even if just to watch the way his lips wrap around the spoon.

The rain has stopped by the time they’re done eating and Louis’ covered the bill. They walk hand in hand out the restaurant, Louis swinging their hands idly as the start walking down the road. Louis stops when they reach the car, but Harry tugs on his arm.
‘Lou, there’s a fountain!’ he exclaims, pulling Louis after him as he rushes toward it. ‘Do you have any change on you?’

‘Should do,’ Louis mumbles, patting down his pockets before pulling a coin from his breast pocket. He holds it out to Harry, setting it in his palm.

Harry lets go of his hand to run up to the fountain, getting right against its outer-lip before squeezing his eyes closed and flicking the coin into the water with a soft splash.

‘What did you wish for?’ Louis asks him as Harry walks back into his hold, letting Louis hang his arm around his shoulders.

‘If I tell you, it won’t come true,’ Harry simpers, right before slipping back into the passenger seat.

‘Harry!’ Louis calls, stretching his legs out on the couch.

There’s some shuffling from the study. ‘Yeah?’ Harry calls back.

‘Come to the lounge a minute,’ he shouts, looking down at their mock-up invite.

Harry walks into the lounge with a washcloth over his shoulder, wiping his hands on his thighs. Louis holds out the invite to him, leaning off the window seat to stretch closer to him. Harry skims over it, his smile gradually widening as he does, before he’s handing it back to Louis.

‘I love it,’ he affirms, bending to give Louis a quick kiss and turning to go back to the kitchen, but Louis catches his wrist, pulls him back. He gives an extra hard tug that ends with Harry’s knee pressing into the window seat before Louis gives a last tug that makes Harry land over him with a winded *oof.*
Harry makes to stand back up, his knee digging into the cushion beside Louis' thigh, but Louis wraps his arms around him, holding Harry against his chest.

'Louis,' Harry whines, the toes of one foot grazing the floor while the other bends beside Louis' hip. Harry swats at him weakly but starts to laugh, letting Louis kiss him as he wriggles further onto the seat, splayed over Louis' chest. 'M'busy,' Harry whines, letting Louis pepper him with kisses.

When he tries to get up again, Louis tickles at his sides, Harry letting out a squawk of laughter. He wriggles his fingers up, tickling at Harry's ribs so that Harry jolts and lets out loud bouts of laughter. Harry writhes as Louis tickles him, howling hysterically and Louis giggles, pinching at his waist.

Louis tickles at Harry's neck and Harry shrieks, body twisting in his hold and jolting so that before Louis can blink, Harry's slipping off the window seat, Louis thumping down with him. Harry tries to tickle him back, Louis rolling on top of him and batting away his hands as he tickles his underarms.

Harry goes pink on his cheeks, gasping for breath, as he slaps at Louis' hands, laughing desperately. 'Lou,' he wheezes right before he lets out a guffaw. 'Can't breathe.'

Louis slows his fingers before he's smoothing them down Harry's sides and leaning down to kiss him. Harry slaps his shoulder, pouting up at him. 'I hate you,' he tells him, and Louis grins down at him and gives him another quick kiss.

Harry comes back into the kitchen, absolutely covered in mud, from his feet to his upper thighs. He looks Louis dead in the eye. 'Don’t ever listen to pigs.'

Louis’ eyebrows shoot up and he turns the hob down as he pulls the wet cloth from the basin and steps towards Harry. ‘Please do explain, Haz.’

‘I was out feeding the pigs, and Brutus started doing this weird snore-whine thing, and he looked at me with these big eyes, and he looked so lonely, and I knew he wanted me to go and give him a hug and a kiss to make him feel better. So,’ he pauses as Louis takes a grip of his chin, wiping at the splatter of mud on his cheek, swiping the cloth over the bridge of his nose. ‘I opened the gate
and stepped inside, and then as soon as I was ankle deep in mud, he rolled over and bolted out the pen. I had to chase after him!

Louis’ laughing by then, and he pulls Harry in by his chin before pressing their lips together. Harry’s lips are cold from outside and he smiles into the kiss, his lips gone soft for Louis to lick them open, but Louis keeps it chaste and pulls back, making Harry sigh softly in his throat.

Louis pulls open the fridge and pulls out the bottle of milk, twisting off the cap and picking a glass from the drying rack, setting it down in front of Harry and pouring him a glass. Harry smiles as he wraps his fingers around the glass and lifts it to his lips.

It leaves him with a line of white above his upper lip, but Louis refuses to tell him, finding the image too adorable to be licked away.

‘Pigs are very fast,’ Harry says once he’s finished his glass, and Louis’ remembering that his legs are soaked with mud, and that he should probably pop his jeans into the washing machine and force Harry into a well-deserved bubble bath. ‘Are they meant to be that fast?’

Louis smiles to himself as he picks up a piece of penne on his fork, blowing cool breath over it before offering it to Harry, who gobbles it with a soft smile.

‘It’s brilliant.’ He says first, before looking back down at the table and smiling to himself. ‘You’re cooking for me,’ he says a bit later, as if it’s his first time realising.

‘Yes, I am.’ Louis affirms, sliding the mushrooms into the pot and sitting the lid over the top. ‘Now leave me alone, I’m making you pasta.’

Harry changes before supper of course, but after they’ve both eaten and Harry has put both of their bowls into a sink of soapy water (not before giving them to Honey and Fudge to lick out first), Louis pulls Harry to his chest and kisses him softly.

‘M’gonna run you a nice bubble bath, get you nice and clean.’ He murmurs softly, leaning back
against the kitchen table. Harry smiles and nuzzles into his neck.

‘Add some candles and you can join me.’ Harry says back, and Louis’ hands still momentarily on his hips.

He looks down at Harry, eyebrows raised slightly. ‘You sure?’ he asks gently, offering Harry a chance to take back what he’s just said.

Harry nods slowly and bites into his lower lip. It doesn’t seem like much, but Louis knows how Harry is, and allowing Louis to see him naked, even if only submerged in bubbles, is a big deal.

Louis leads Harry upstairs, switching on the taps of the claw-tub and checking the temperature with his wrist before he slips in the faded-gold plug. He leaves Harry to sit on the toilet seat, letting him relax and stay-put as he goes in search of candles.

When he comes back, cradling a collection of nine mismatched candles, most half-burnt from their usage during the storm, in his arms and a lighter between his teeth, Harry is bent over the tub, sleeves pushed up to his elbows, as he stirs bubbles through the running water.

‘It doesn’t work as well if you pour them in after.’ He says matter-of-factly, before he’s dribbling another long stream of bubble bath into the water. He twists the cap back on and focuses on circulating the water so that white foam floats on top as Louis lights the candles, placing them on all flat surfaces in the bathroom before Harry switches off the tap, the bubbles just shy of the brim.

Louis stands up straight and Harry copies, his eyes flicking to the bath nervously, and Louis reaches for his hand. ‘You still sure?’ he asks.

Harry nods and smiles, pulling Louis in to kiss him.

‘So, how do you want to do this?’ Harry asks after, his cheeks tinted bright pink.

‘Well,’ Louis drags, his eyes flitting over the bathtub, and he smiles at the thought of climbing in. ‘we could each sit on one side, and if we do then you’re definitely getting the side with the tap,’
Harry interrupts him with an indignant, ‘Hey!’

‘Or I could climb in first and close my eyes before you climb in and sit back against me.’

‘Promise no peeking?’ Harry asks.

‘Cross my heart and hope to die,’ he says, drawing his finger across his chest before his palm rests over his heart and he smiles, before he’s pinching at the hem of his jersey and pulling it over his head. Harry steps back but Louis notices how his eyes drag down over his stomach, and his tongue darts out to lick over his lower lip.

It reboots Louis’ sense of confidence as he hooks his fingers into his jogging bottoms and his underwear and pulls them down. He steps out of them before he toes off his bobble socks, watching how Harry seems to be torn between covering his eyes and openly staring.

‘You’re perfect,’ Harry says in a rush, once Louis’ standing naked and ready to climb into the bathtub, and Louis feels his body glow and his cheeks flush.

‘You flatter me, darling. Now come on, get in. I’ll close my eyes.’ He tells him, lowering himself into the warm water until the bubbles come up to his chest.

He closes his eyes for Harry, listening as he gets undressed slowly, before hearing the sound of the wicker of the hamper being opened and he grins.

‘Lou?’ Harry asks, and Louis has to remind himself not to open his eyes.

‘Yeah?’

‘Can you maybe spread your knees a little, so I have somewhere to sit?’

Louis’ heart flutters at how embarrassed Harry sounds, and he bends his legs at the knee and spreads them so that his knees poke out from the foam.
‘Thank you.’ Harry murmurs, before Louis can feel him step into the tub.

He goes against his promise for a second or two, opening his eyes just to drag them up the line of his long legs and down his spine before the round of his bum, watching as he slowly sits down.

The water rises more with Harry’s body, to the point where foam brushes at Louis’ chin and the water spills out onto the tiles when Harry finally lets himself lean back against Louis’ chest.

‘Oops,’ he giggles, ‘didn’t think that through.’

Louis hooks his chin over Harry’s shoulder, and Harry turns his head to kiss him, letting Louis slowly kiss his mouth open so that breath swaps between their lungs. Louis wraps his arms around Harry’s waist, rubbing his thumb over the silky smooth skin of his tummy. He feels Harry still a bit when his length gets sandwiched between them, but he relaxes back into him seconds later.

Harry dips lower down, taking Louis with him, so that both their legs are bent to fit and their heads rest on the lip, foam cloying to their hair as they relax into the warmth, Harry fitting just right in Louis’ arms.

‘Hey Harry?’ Louis says some time later, pressing his lips to Harry’s temple. Harry hums and turns his head to face Louis, neck still rested on Louis’ shoulder as his eyes blink open. ‘I may or may not have peeked.’

Harry splashes foam into his face that starts a full-on foam fight and they end up having to spend half an hour cleaning up the water that spills out of the tub, but Louis thinks it’s worth it.

‘I’m just going to go play with Pixie for a bit, I’ll be back soon.’ Harry tells him, peeping his head into the dining room where Louis’ setting up a rough draft of seating arrangements.

Louis shakes his head, turning in his chair to look back where Harry is wrapping his scarf around his neck. ‘I swear to god, you are going to end up cheating on me with a cow.’
Harry giggles before blowing him a kiss.

Louis links up their fingers as they stroll back home, cheeks warm against the cold. Harry’s a bit giggly from the wine Rosie had kept pouring, no one being ready to leave the late night gathering in the kitchen.

Harry lets Louis pull off his coat for him after he’s herded him in through the kitchen door before he’s helping him out of his rain-damp wellingtons, setting them against the cupboard before he pulls off his own.

The house is cold as Louis hangs his coat back onto its hanger, hooking it over the coat-cupboard’s handle. Harry shuffles into the lounge, flicking on the television and clicking down the volume until it’s just a soft background noise.

‘Will you please light a fire?’ he asks, dropping down onto the couch floppily.

Louis rubs his hands together. ‘Of course, darling.’ He replies, earning a smile from Harry before he twists his hair around his finger, tilting his chin to watch the practically muted program. Fudge stretches out, yawning wide so that his pink tongue reaches out, while Honey just blinks lazily, one paw hooked over the edge of her doggie bed as Fudge waddles closer.

‘You’re a shit guard dog, you know that?’ Louis asks him, smooshing his face between his palms so that his soft fur wrinkles along his forehead.

‘Leave the boy alone,’ Harry scolds him before he swings his feet off the couch and pats his thighs, whistling softly so that Fudge turns to face him before waddling lazily toward his ankles. Harry bends down to pick him up, setting him on his lap and leaning in to press a kiss to the tip of his nose. ‘Who’s a good boy, Fudgie? Are you a good boy?’

Louis stacks the fire around a square of blitz, rolling up newspaper and slotting it in the gaps before he strikes the match and holds it to the paper’s edge. After the flame has spread and slowly starts to simmer, he puffs out a breath to make it flicker with light. Harry surprises him as he hooks his chin
over his shoulder, one arm around his waist.

‘Looks good.’ Harry comments, his lips just grazing Louis’ neck. Louis nods before reaching back for him, fingers carding through his hair before he’s pulling Harry’s head forward, turning to face him before he kisses him.

Louis slips his hand from his hair to his jaw, his arm bent uncomfortably so that he can stretch his fingers against Harry’s throat, thumb and forefinger poised just under his ears so that he can hold Harry’s mouth open. Harry moans softly, his fingers grazing over Louis’ stomach in slow circles before Louis’ pulling back.

Harry’s already dazed, his lips wet and his eyes wide. He goes without protest when Louis shuffles and dislodges his hand on his stomach, coming awfully close to the grid of the fire as he presses his hand to Harry’s shoulder, pushing him down to lie flat on the carpet.

Louis kneels his legs open, kneeling between his thighs as he hovers over him. Harry sucks his lower lip into his mouth as he reaches for Louis, hooking his arm around his neck, his palm flat over his shoulder blade. Louis drops to his forearms, spreading his knees so that Harry’s thighs spread wider for him to slot between as he dips his chin and kisses him. Harry twists his fingers into Louis’ hair, pulling softly as Louis licks into his mouth. Louis lowers his body against Harry’s; their chests flush as he strokes his hand down Harry’s side. His fingers edge at the hem of his shirt, brushing it up before his fingers stroke over his soft, bare skin. Harry smiles into the kiss as Louis squeezes at his hip, rubbing his thumb over where his bone juts out.

Louis shifts above Harry, their crotches lining up. He’s not hard yet, but it feels like Harry has a semi and Louis grinds down against him, biting into his lower lip and holding him down with his hand on his hip as he ruts against him slowly.

Harry gasps into his mouth, his hips trying to buck up against his weight and Louis grins as he nips at his lip, flicking their tongues together. Harry’s definitely got a lot better at kissing in their last few weeks together.

Louis slides his hand on his hip over Harry’s bare tummy, pressed between them. Harry shivers as Louis sucks his tongue into his mouth, rubbing his hand up between his nipples and back down, over his belly button.

He shuffles between Harry’s legs, knees spreading wider so that’s Harry’s thighs rest on them as he strokes at his tummy and grinds his hips down into Harry’s.
He slides his hand lower, his thumb grazing at the button on Harry’s jeans, before he’s palming lightly at Harry’s cock through the denim. Harry gasps into his mouth, his thighs tensing up.

Louis pulls back and raises his eyebrows at him. ‘Can I?’

Harry nods quickly, his cheeks blushed. His head falls back against the carpet when Louis presses the heel of his palm into Harry’s groin, drawing it in small circles that make Harry gasp. He presses a kiss to Harry’s throat, just over his Adam’s apple, and Harry moans, his hips jolting up.

Louis grazes his teeth along his neck, biting softly as he rubs at Harry. He thumbs at the button, biting into the soft flesh where shoulder meets throat as he pops it open, easing the zip down slowly. Harry’s chest rises and falls fast against his, his eyes squeezing shut as Louis wedges his hand inside his skin-tight jeans, cupping his cock through his underwear. Harry lets out a shaky breath, his body drawn tight as Louis slowly presses his hand down harder.

Harry lets out a high mew, his hips stuttering up against Louis’ palm. Louis can feel wetness, feels Harry’s cock throb through the thin material. Louis presses his thumb to the tender skin just above his waistband, making Harry whimper as his fingers scrabble at the carpet. Louis kisses his neck before he pulls his hand out, earning a whine from Harry, his eyes shooting open and widening to give Louis a pleading look.

Louis kisses the dip of his throat, right above where his collar hides the rest of him, as he hooks his fingers into Harry’s jeans and leans back. He tugs them down, Harry gasping before he throws his arm over his eyes, cheeks flushing red.

They haven’t done anything past where Harry came in his pants the first time they kissed, and even though Harry’s been trying to get comfortable with being naked around Louis, it’s a whole other thing to look down and see his cock, lying against his stomach where his shirt’s bunched up around his waist, wet at the tip and flushed.

When he looks back at Harry, his cheeks are hot and he’s got his teeth sunk into his lower lip. He reaches for his wrist, pulling his arm away so that Harry has to look at him. His eyes are wide and dark like the night sky. Louis rests his hand back on his hip, just to the right of where his cock’s resting.

His eyes flick back down, eyeing at Harry’s length. Harry whines and his cock twitches. Louis’ own gives a jolt in his trousers.
Louis curls his fingers around him slowly, his thumb lining up with the spine as he savours the heat of him in his palm. Harry gasps and shudders.

He strokes his hand up loosely, and Harry groans, writhing against the carpet for more. Louis tightens his hold and leans back on his haunches, deciding he wants this to be all about Harry, wants to see him shiver as he comes.

He spits into his palm before gripping him tight, rubbing his thumb over his head so that Harry’s back arches and his eyes squeeze shut. Louis circles his thumb around his slit, Harry moaning weakly as he blurs out more slick.

His thighs tremble where they’re spread over Louis’, one hand pulling on his hair as Louis links his fingers with the other, squeezing tight before he strokes back up against his head. Harry shivers, his body jolting and his back arching.

‘It’s okay darling, you can do it,’ Louis coos and Harry nods, his eyes falling shut as he comes, dribbling over Louis’ fingers and forming a pool on his tummy, some landing on his shirt.

Louis strokes him through, squeezing tight to wring out the last of it, before Harry stops shaking. Louis wipes his hand off on Harry’s waist before slipping up, pushing his shirt higher over his chest, bunched up around his neck.

He wants to lick his fingers, see what Harry tastes like, but he doesn’t know what Harry would think of that, so instead he lets himself flop down next to Harry, cuddling him into his side and kissing the top of his head.

Harry makes no move to pull up his jeans and tuck himself away, or pull down his shirt and clean up his tummy. He rests his palm in the centre of Louis’ chest, titling into his side slightly. Some of his come dribbles down slightly with the movement.

Louis unbuttons his jeans as quick as he can, shoving his hand into his underwear and wrapping his fingers around himself as Harry whines softly.

‘I showed you mine,’ he chastises, voice slow and lazy, and Louis rolls his eyes before trying to one-handedly pull his cock out.
He’s a lot neater about it, flicking his wrist as Harry cuddles in closer, eyes glued to where Louis wanks himself quickly. He comes into the palm of his hand, some of it still managing to mess on his shirt.

He frowns at the contents of his hand, looking around for a tissue, before his eyes settle on Harry’s bare stomach and he smears his come onto his belly.

Harry gawps at him before Louis kisses him.

Harry wakes Louis with a soft kiss to his cheek as he trails his fingers through the gap between the buttons of Louis’ pyjama shirt, grazing over his cool skin. Louis blinks awake, grumbling in his throat as peers at Harry, head rested upon wrist upon Louis’ stomach as he idly traces his fingers over his skin under the layer of his flannels.

Louis yawns and squeezes his eyes shut, arching up so his spine cricks somewhere in the middle before snapping his neck left and right so it cricks and loosens. Harry’s smiling when he looks back at him, small and shy, blinking slowly.

‘Morning beautiful,’ Louis says sleepily, Harry’s cheeks flushing slightly in the apples.

‘Morning Lou,’ Harry replies, shifting up to hover above Louis, breathing hot breath over his lips. Louis smiles up at him, eyes tired when they meet the vivid of Harry’s mint, large and sparkly. Harry leans on his elbow to plant a sweet kiss to Louis’ lips, soft and delicate and Louis pulls his arm out from under Harry’s warm body to rest it on the back of his hip, light.

Harry draws back, Louis sneaking his hand to press the centre of Harry’s hips, resting in the small of his back and rubbing his thumb over his skin while Harry sighs. Louis tilts his chin up to kiss him again, Harry leaning more weight over his body as his jaw slackens and Louis kisses him with lazy lips, too hungry to mind the sour taste of Harry’s mouth.

Harry draws back with his soft smile and sleepy eyes. Louis sits up to watch him move, watching as he peels the duvet from his body, swinging his legs over the side and sitting up. Louis blindly
reaches to his bedside table, eyes remaining on the planes of Harry’s back as he rolls it out. He grasps the frame of his glasses, pushing them up the bridge of his nose as Harry stands up, skin soft and smooth.

Louis’ eyes devour him, scraping over the slight muscle of his back, where his shoulder blades bump from his skin. His ribs make soft waves at his sides, familiar to the touch of Louis’ fingers, before they fade back into his skin where his spine draws a line down his back. Two dimples indent into his creamy skin before his back is blossoming into the small curve of his arse, pert and round, covered by his underwear. He’s got to the point where he’s trying not to mind Louis seeing him naked anymore, and Louis feels like his birthday may have come early.

Harry goes to brush his teeth while Louis rubs at his eyes. It’s raining, pattering against the roof, and he never wants to leave his bed. Harry comes back in and clucks his tongue at him. Louis just wants to bundle him up in his arms and sleep forever.

Harry climbs back onto the bed, kneeling towards Louis before sinking down with his elbows to the mattress, beside his waist. He shuffles about a bit until he’s comfortable, his slender fingers fingering the pearly, plastic buttons of his pyjama shirt as he smiles lazily.

Louis scrubs through his hair before Harry leans up to kiss him. He shifts about, kneeling over Louis’ shin with one knee pressed into the mattress between Louis’ own, before he sits down, body light and warm against his legs through the duvet. Harry presses a kiss to the bottom of Louis’ throat as he undoes his first button.

‘Is there anything we need to do today?’ Harry asks, undoing the next button of Louis’ shirt and kissing the unveiled skin. Louis runs his hand down his back.

‘Is there ever anything we need to do?’ Louis jokes, feeling the shift in Harry’s muscles as Harry undoes the next button, just above his navel.

Harry hums and kisses the soft skin. ‘We need to post out invitations?’ he suggests before he grazes his teeth over Louis’ torso.

‘We can do that later then,’ he sighs, his eyes slipping closed. ‘What else did you have in mind?’

‘I wanted to bake you a cake.’ Harry giggles, rubbing his cheek against Louis’ tummy.
Louis runs his hand up the back of Harry’s neck, into his hair. ‘Any reason why?’

‘Not really, other than a thank you for being so amazing,’

Louis feels himself blush before he gives Harry a soft scratch, Harry humming softly in his throat. ‘Okay, we can do that.’

Harry breathes out softly, nosing back up Louis’ chest.

His fingers are still sticky with cake batter and the house smells sweet as Louis kisses that spot on his neck, his fingers just pressing into his hips lightly through his top. Harry smiles and twirls Louis’ soft hair between his fingertips. Louis grazes his teeth over his skin and Harry sighs, sticky fingers pressing to his neck while the timer on the oven beeps.

Louis lets go of his hips, leaving him sitting on the flour-splattered worktop with his legs splayed open and a dopey grin on his face. Louis pulls the door open and pulls out the cake tin, oven mitts warm over his hands. Harry watches, swinging his legs to and fro as Louis sets the tin on the worktop, bottom-side up. He gives it a light pat before he pulls off his oven mitts and returns to Harry, his fingers reaching for his waist.

Louis drags a hand up to his waist, pinching just under his ribs. Harry reaches for his other hand, twining their fingers together so the sticky bits of his fingertips press to Louis’ own. Louis leans up to kiss his lips, tasting the sweet batter, Harry having licked the bowl. Louis presses soft kisses to his pillowy lips, one after the other until the cake should be cool.

Harry blinks lazily when he pulls away, Louis leaving him to turn the cake the right way round and reaching for the bowl of icing, scoops missing that look suspiciously shaped like Harry’s small fingers. Harry hops off the worktop and stands behind him, propping up to stand on his toes to get an unobstructed view as Louis ices the cake carefully.

Once he’s done, he gives Harry the bowl to lick out, getting a bright beam in return.
Harry’s hair is damp when he climbs into bed, his skin still soft from his shower. Louis slips in right after, reaching out to pull Harry to his chest, skin pressing together as he settles his arm around Harry’s waist, their bare legs slotting together as Louis draws shapes onto Harry’s belly with his index finger until Harry’s breathing evens out and he’s asleep.

Louis wakes up with Honey in his arms instead of Harry.

He still kisses the top of her head anyway, pulling himself from bed and shuffling into the en suite to brush away the sour taste on his tongue.

He’d toed off a sock sometime in the night, so he lifts the duvet and gets the evil eye from Fudge, before he pinches for his ski sock at the foot of the bed and pulls it on.

Once downstairs, he scrubs through his hair as he thinks about breakfast. The water in the kettle’s still warm, so Harry can’t have left much long before, and Louis decides on making a fry-up for his boy when he returns.

He’s just setting out the bacon and eggs when the kitchen door slams closed. The smile slips off Louis’ face when he sees him. Harry’s got mud all over his legs, up to his knees, and he’s got tears in his eyes.

‘Lou, something’s wrong with Pixie.’

The vet tells Louis that there’s nothing they can do for her, and that the best thing would be to put
her down. Louis nods and instantly dread curls in his stomach at the thought of telling Harry.

Harry's got Pixie cradled to his chest, much like when she was first born, and Louis can hear him singing softly to the poorly calf, stroking down her back as he rubs his cheek against the fur between her ears.

'Haz,' Louis starts, and his own eyes feel wet.

Harry just has to look at him before the hopeful smile leaves his face and his eyes squeeze shut, tears leaking down his pale cheeks.

'We have to put her down, darling, it's best for her.'

Harry sucks in a sharp breath and his shoulders start to shake as he wraps his arms around Pixie's gaunt stomach and kisses her between her twitching ears.

He shakes his head quickly as he holds onto her tightly, and Louis pulls open the gate of the pen, sinking to his knees in front of Harry.

He reaches out to rest his gloved hand over Harry’s mittened one.

Harry nods and gulps, wiping at his cheeks, and Louis leans in and kisses him, squeezing his hand.

He gets up to call the vet once Harry has calmed down, who comes in with Cook and Brandon, both of them lifting Pixie’s exhausted body and carrying her out of the barn.

They carry her into the shed, and Harry turns to bury his face in Louis neck as the vet follows after them with her briefcase.
Louis holds him, squeezing his eyes closed and pressing his lips to the top of his head as they cry together, in the middle of the driveway, as they clutch to each other for warmth.

Harry wipes his eyes and blinks quickly sniffling softly as though he thinks Louis won’t notice. Louis rolls his eyes before pulling Harry into his chest.

Then Harry starts to properly sob, his shoulders shaking with it as Louis soothes a hand down his back, nuzzling his nose into Harry’s hair.

‘It’s alright Harry, it’s better this way.’ He mumbles into his ear, and Harry nods into his chest, but Louis can still feel his tears through all his layers. ‘She’s better off like this; she can now spend her life in cow heaven with minty grass and chocolate milk streams.’

‘I think you’re thinking of Willy Wonka.’ Harry tells him, sniffling and wiping his eyes with his sleeves.

Louis just strokes up his back as Harry gives him a watery smile, blinking his red eyes, the tip of his nose twitching. Louis should not be so entranced.

‘Do you think, maybe, I could sit with Lavender a bit?’ Harry asks shyly, bunching the sleeves of Louis’ jersey in his fists.

Louis smiles and leans to press a kiss to Harry’s forehead. ‘Of course darling, anything for you.’

Louis’ not sure, but he can swear Lavender’s eyes look even shinier than normal, and her mouth is tilted down in a frown. He watches as Harry climbs into her pen, sitting down slowly on the hay beside her.

He just stands in the doorway of the barn, watching as Harry runs his hand down her side. He turns to give them some privacy, pulling the large doors closed so that Harry startles at the sound and turns to watch him, his nose already running again.
Louis gives him a last smile before he walks back to where the vet had been, just an hour earlier.

When he comes back to check on them an hour later, Harry is curled around Lavender, fast asleep.

Harry eats dinner quietly when he comes back, his eyes puffy and swollen. Louis kisses him on his forehead, on each cheek, on the tip of his nose, then on his lips, soothing circles into his hips with his thumbs.

Harry gives him a weak smile before he tells him he’s going to bed.

But at least when Louis goes to bed, some hours later, Harry’s curled up on his side of their bed, drowning in the duvet, not sleeping in the guest room like Louis had feared.

Harry insists they have a ceremony, so the customers in the guesthouse are alerted that breakfast will be served late so that the staff can all trudge through the field and then through the scattering of trees before up the hill, to where Louis and Harry had their first date.

Harry’s dressed warmly in black, wrapped in his black scarf with his beanie holding back his dirty hair and warming his ears as he trudges three paces ahead of everyone else. In his hands, he’s carrying a crucifix made up of two pieces of wood Brandon had hacked off from Pixie’s pen and that Harry had nailed together clumsily, using some of the white house paint found in the shed to write ‘Pixie’ in swirling letters.

He cries when he says his goodbye, planting the crucifix into the soil. Louis holds him against his chest and rubs down his back, swallowing down his own tears.
It starts pouring with rain as they walk back, and Louis thinks it’s awfully symbolic as Harry walks with his face buried into his neck.

Harry sneaks out to visit Lavender at least once a day, to see how she’s doing; Louis’ very proud of his boy, all in all. He’s very strong about it, but whenever he needs a hug, he knows he can just fit himself into Louis’ arms.

Harry sniffles and wipes at his eyes when Louis walks into their bedroom, plastering on a fake smile and wedging his thumb into his place in his now completely tattered *The Little Prince* copy.

December (147 days)

Louis climbs onto the bed, right beside Harry. Harry leans up, expecting a kiss, but Louis pulls him into his side instead, sliding down the bed so that he can wrap his arms around him, pressing his face into his chest as Harry winds around him, clinging tightly.

Louis holds him like that until he starts feeling dozy, just rubbing up and down the curve of Harry’s spine as he cries softly into his top. Louis’ eyes are just slipping closed when Harry sniffs, pulling away and wiping at his runny nose with his sleeve.

He presses his lips to Louis’ cheek softly before sagging down against him, head on his shoulder. Louis looks down at him, kissing the frown on his forehead and slipping his hand underneath his jersey at the back, resting his palm against his skin.

‘Thank you, Louis,’ Harry sighs, looking up at him. His eyelashes are clumped together and his eyes are red and the green is so bright and his nose is red and his voice is gummy, but he’s so utterly beautiful and Louis’ tummy does a flip.
Louis leans down to kiss him, and before he can think about it, he’s breathing ‘I love you,’ onto Harry’s lips.

Harry pulls back, his fingers going to wrap around Louis’ wrists. Louis looks at him, his own eyes widening when he realizes what he’s just said.

‘Really?’ Harry asks, his voice wobbling a bit.

Louis swallows thickly and his fingers twitch against Harry’s hips where they’ve slid down to pet beneath the lip of his jumper. He looks down to where Harry’s legs are tangled with his, both their feet wrapped in matching bobble socks, and he nods slowly, as realization hits like a freight train.

‘Yeah, I love you Harry,’ he grins, leaning in to kiss him again.

Harry wraps his arms around his neck, almost climbing on top of him as he kisses him. ‘I love you too, god, I love you,’ he breathes, his elbow pressing down on Louis’ chest.

Louis just holds him tighter and kisses him until they’re both pink in the face and giddy.

Winter comes in a cold rush, the first snow arriving in the first week of December.

While Louis would normally find snow a menace, because he has to make sure that the barn is always warm and that there’s enough animal feed, now that they cannot graze and there’s also the added effort of having to shovel the driveway, but with Harry around it’s impossible to hate snow.

Harry shakes him awake of the fourth of December, absolutely giddy. ‘Louis! It’s snowing!’ he shouts, jumping out of bed to stand with his nose pressed against the window. Louis groans.

‘Come back to bed,’ he whines, digging the heels of his palms into his eyes.
Harry pulls his arm and Louis groans but follows, letting Harry pull him out of bed and to the window. The front garden’s completely white, even the small table is decked in snow. It clings to the trees and the bushes, lining the fence.

Harry presses his hands against the glass. There are goose bumps down his arms and his nipples are drawn tight from cold. ‘Let’s go make a snowman!’

‘Let’s go back to bed,’ Louis groans, his hand resting in the dip of Harry’s back. Harry gives him a look, crossed between a frown and a pout, and Louis sighs. ‘Alright, let’s go make a snowman.’

‘He doesn’t look very…snowman-y, does he?’ Harry asks, head tilted to the side, eyeing their masterpiece.

Louis squints and tilts his head, avoiding saying what they’re both thinking. ‘He resembles something, but I just can’t quite put my finger on it.’

Harry scoffs and steps forward, rubbing his mitten-clad hands over the head of the snowman, trying to reshape it.

‘Babe,’ Louis calls, ‘stop playing with the head, he’s sensitive.’

It’s a crap joke, but Harry frowns, looking about as threatening as an angry puppy, and crosses his arms over his chest, scrutinizing their work.

He sighs. ‘Shall we just embrace the fact that it looks like a dick and make some balls to match?’

Louis comes up behind him, wrapping his arms around his puffy middle, pressing the cold tip of his nose into Harry’s cheek, right where his dimple appears moments later.
‘I think that’s the best idea you’ve had all day.’

Harry shuffles into the lounge with two of the big mugs in his hand, bending slowly to set them down on the coffee table. Louis raises an eyebrow when he walks out straight after, then straight back in, two forks poking out from his front pocket and pot in his hands.

He sets it down on the coffee table before fiddling with the TV remote, then the DVD, pressing play on season 1 of *Cold Feet*.

Louis slips off the couch to sit next to him, knees bumping as he picks up his mug, blowing over the top to cool it, seven mini marshmallows floating. He has a sip as Harry picks up his fork, twirling it in the pot full of instant noodles.

After Louis’ set the pot on the floor for the dogs to lick out, he leans into Harry slightly, their shoulders brushing. Harry applies more pressure to the contact, leaning against Louis and smiling as he wraps his hands around his mug.

‘Do you think it’s too early to set up the Christmas tree?’ he asks, and Louis rests his hand on his thigh, rubbing his thumb over the knee cap.

‘Just know that you’ll have to pack it away again.’

Harry nods, resting his head on his shoulder, ‘Deal.’

Louis gets the tree, along with the wheelie trunk full of decorations, from the loft the next day.

He sits on the couch as Harry sets it up in the corner of the lounge, slotting the different parts
together before wheeling the trunk closer. He digs around a bit, putting all the tinsel into a pile and all the decorations into another, before reaching for the container with all the lights.

Louis pulls his feet up, pretending to be utterly absorbed in his game of Jelly Splash on his phone while watching Harry from the corner of his eye as he wraps tinsel around the tree. Harry picks up a tray of ceramic ornaments, setting it on the arm of the couch before he hangs each one carefully, following suit with the gold ornaments and the glittery baubles.

Louis will admit that it’s the most exciting Christmas tree he’s had in years, because Harry seems adamant to put the entire contents of the decoration box onto the tree, whereas Louis only ever puts the matching decorations on.

Harry sets up the little wooden nativity at the foot of the tree, taking the three nutcrackers and setting them on the mantle place. He sits down on the carpet to untangle the different strings of lights, separating them into their separate strings, and then into inside and outside.

He winds the lights around the tree, frowning and standing with his hands on his hips before he disappears and Louis looks away from his phone properly, admiring the tree until Harry walks back in with an extension lead.

He plugs all the lights in to check them before picking up the outside ones and standing on the couch. Louis stops playing his game to watch him properly as he pulls open the heavy curtains and starts to wind a string of lights around the window frame, switching them on at their little battery pack after.

He leaves the lounge again, taking the lights with him. Louis listens to the front door open and close.

When Harry comes back in, he’s grinning and the tip of his nose is red while his hands are white and shaking from cold. Louis clucks his tongue at him.

As he gets up to get him a blanket and make him a Cuppa Soup because he’s really marrying an idiot, Harry catches his wrist and pulls him towards the tree. Louis shakes his head as Harry reaches into the trunk for the star, smiling as he gives it to Louis.

‘Put it on the tree,’ he encourages, nudging Louis with a broad grin.
‘No Harry, you’re the one who did all the work, you should put the star on.’

Harry rolls his eyes and shoves Louis towards the tree. ‘You sure?’ Louis asks, fingers clutching onto the shiny gold star that he’s sure has been in his family for decades.

Harry nods and stands back and Louis shrugs before he’s standing on his toes, reaching up to set the star on the top of the tree.

Harry wraps him into a warm hug afterwards, his arms around his neck and his lips against his ear, pulled into a smile. ‘I love you,’ he whispers, giggling, as though it’s a special secret.

‘Love you too, Haz.’

‘I think it’s time the dogs have another bath,’ Harry says with a frown, scratching at Honey’s chest where she’s perched on his thighs. That reminds Louis that he also needs to give Toffee and Caramel a good scrub before it snows again.

It’s raining steadily outside, and Louis’ horribly comfortable where he’s wrapped in a quilt and watching Elf. He groans.

‘Already?’

Harry scoffs, stroking down Honey’s back. ‘It’s been over a month, Lou. Dogs also need to be cleaned,’

Louis pauses the film, groaning as he unwraps himself from his comfortable cocoon. ‘I know darling, s’just not fair that they can lick their bits and then they don’t even have to wash themselves.’

Harry picks Honey up, holding her to his chest as he swats at Louis’ shoulder. ‘Go run their bath,
I’ll bring them up.’

Louis follows orders, running them a shallow warm bath and setting out two towels before Harry comes in, carrying a sleeping Fudge with Honey trotting beside his ankles. Harry sets Fudge in the warm water, earning a death glare, before he picks up Honey and puts her in too.

Bathing them proves to be a lot more difficult this round, because now Louis’ leaning in to kiss Harry every other second, or Harry’s rubbing foam onto Louis’ cheek.

Once they’re all washed and dried, Louis lets them scamper off, probably to rub themselves all over the carpets and then pass out in front of the fire, while he and Harry dry themselves off and Louis washes out the bathtub.

‘You know, it’s also been far too long since we had a bath together,’ Louis hints, trailing his fingers over the gold chain of the plug.

‘I’m too sleepy for a bath, I’ll just drown,’ Harry starts, laughing softly to himself. ‘What if we had a quick shower together?’

‘You cool with that?’ Louis asks, reaching for Harry’s hand, his fingers slightly pruned and his sleeves pushed up to his elbows. Harry nods, his cheeks slightly coloured. ‘Can I look this time?’

Harry nods again before he’s pushing himself to stand with a grip on the edge of the bathtub. He pulls Louis up after, pulling him into his chest and giving him a quick kiss.

Louis pulls off his jumper, dropping it at his feet and giggling when Harry bends to pick it up after, pulling off his own shirt and bunching both of them up before chucking them into the washing basket. Louis pushes his jeans down his legs as Harry steps out of his jogging bottoms, toeing off his socks as Louis switches on the shower head, holding his hand under until the water’s warm enough.

He helps Harry into the tub first, climbing in after as Harry stands under the spray and wets his hair, Louis reaching out to help. Harry grins at him and they shuffle past each other so that Louis can get his own hair wet, reaching for his shampoo and drizzling it into his palm before scrubbing it through his hair, slicking it back. Harry looks up sheepishly when Louis opens his eyes, a pretty blush blooming on his cheeks. Louis looks down the line of his body, foaming his shampoo in his hair and thrusting his hips forward at Harry.
Harry giggles before Louis reaches for him, pulling him towards him so that he can lather some of his shampoo between his palms and rub into his hair. Once Harry’s head is foamy and raspberry scented, Louis wraps an arm around his narrow waist and pulls him a step closer, so their knees bump, and he kisses him.

His skin is soft and slippery against his skin, and Louis presses them ever so much closer, so that their chests press together and he can feel the buds of Harry’s nipples pressing at his skin, their stomachs lined up. Harry’s happy trail brushes against his stomach, and Louis wonders if Harry finds this as erotic as he does, sucking on Harry’s tongue at the thought.

He slips his knee further between Harry’s, the feeling of his wet thighs on either side of his utter heaven as Harry’s arms hook beneath his underarms, his blunt nails digging into his wet back and slipping down.

Louis’ getting hard, his cock filling with life from the feeling of Harry against him, and he angles his hips back slightly to prevent his cock from nudging Harry. Harry pulls back, foam dripping down his temples as he looks down, reaching his arm between them and wrapping his hand around his own length, drawing it up between their stomachs.

He gives Louis a pointed look and Louis frowns before copying, then Harry steps closer, both of them sandwiched between their stomachs. It feels like heaven, and Louis grips at Harry’s hips and holds him still as he kisses him, Harry’s arms reaching to tug at his hair as Louis thrusts forward, his foreskin drawing back so the head of his cock rubs at Harry’s tummy.

Harry’s hips stutter forward as their kiss breaks and they just press their foreheads together, breathing in each other’s air as Louis’ nails dig into the slippery flesh of his hips and he thrusts forward.

‘Lou,’ Harry whines, resting his forehead on his shoulder and tugging at the hair at the nape of his neck. Louis steps back in the slightest to fit a hand between them, his fingers wrapping around both of them so that Harry gasps.

He slowly strokes his hand up over their cocks, letting go and reaching his hand back under the spray that’s hitting his back before reaching back for them, wrapping his hand in a tight fist and jerking them off quickly.

Harry whines as his cock blurs out more pre-come, and Louis can feel his tummy trembling when
his knuckles knock against it, squeezing his fist tighter so that Harry moans.

Harry comes first, teeth biting into his shoulder as his hips fuck into his grip frantically before he comes between them, Louis catching his come and using it to carry on stroking them until Harry keens, pushing his hips back and away from Louis’ stimulation so that Louis’ just fisting himself with Harry’s come to glide it.

He comes with a whimper, reaching out to rest his hand on the tiles afterwards, Harry walking into his grip straight away. He can feel Harry’s heart beating fast against his chest, and he knows his must be faster.

They wash each other off with vanilla & almond shower gel before he’s wrapping Harry in his fluffy white towel and Harry’s kissing him as he wraps his bamboo towel around his waist.

'So for our wedding, do you want a DJ or a band for the reception?' Louis asks, plopping down on the couch next to Harry.

Harry tears his eyes away from *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* and raises his eyebrows, mouth parting. 'Huh?' he asks.

'DJ or a band? I was maybe thinking of getting Zayn to sing, you know, if you wouldn't mind?'

'Is he good?' Harry asks, leaning into his side.

'He's brilliant. Zayn, Niall and Liam are all good, but I don't know if they'd agree. Niall might agree to play guitar but I don't know,'

'Sure then, we can do whatever you want. I trust your opinion.' Harry grins, beaming at him.

Louis leans in to kiss him softly, cupping his jaw. 'Okay then, I'll ask him.'
‘Do you want to come visit Pixie’s grave with me?’ Harry asks him when he gets back from town, standing in the doorway of the study, his bouquet of daisies in his hands, still wrapped in brown paper.

Louis looks at him, daisy-print wellingtons and skin-tight jeans, scarf covering the lower half of his face and his beanie pulled down to his eyebrows. His eyes are wide and he looks like a newborn fawn; skinny legs and curled eyelashes.

Louis closes his email and nods. Harry’s eyes crinkle slightly at the corners and the brown paper rustles as he turns away and stalks into the kitchen.

Louis runs upstairs to pull on a beanie and his gloves, another top and then his coat over. Harry’s waiting in the kitchen, leaning against the worktop with the flowers in his hands and his head down.

‘Ready to go?’ Louis asks him, reaching to touch his elbow.

Harry looks up and nods. Louis thinks he might be smiling. There’s fresh snow on the ground, and Harry seems to think about it a second before he reaches his hand out to Louis for him to take, their fingers linking together.

The gate onto the field’s been snowed shut, so Louis dusts some snow off the fence before he hoists himself over, landing heavily on the other side before Harry hands him the flowers, stepping onto the lower bar of the fence and swinging his leg over. Louis offers him a hand, Harry taking it before he jumps down. He takes his daisies back from Louis before he holds his hand again, walking close to his side as they trudge through the snow.

Harry doesn’t say anything, just holds Louis’ hand tight as they trek up the hill, boots sinking into the snow with each step.

The small crucifix is still in place beside the fence, tilted back slightly with snow covering most of its base. Harry pulls Louis towards it, and Louis follows willingly.
Harry kneels down in the snow, beside the crucifix, unwinding the string from the daisies, peeling back the brown paper. Louis kneels down beside Harry, the cold itching into his joints.

Harry lays the flowers out in front of the crucifix before he bows his head, eyes closed. Louis watches him as he prays, his mouth moving with silent words. Louis looks away.

Harry lets out a shaky breath when he’s done, looking up as he does the Sign of the Cross. Louis reaches for his hand when he looks back at the crucifix, tears swelling and ready to overflow down his cold-bitten cheeks.

‘I know it’s stupid,’ he mumbles, through the scarf, eyes trained to where the Daisy is fading. Louis doesn’t think the crucifix is going to last much longer. ‘I suppose it’s a good thing that she was so young, because if she’d been around longer I would have probably loved her more, and this would’ve been harder.’

Louis rubs his thumb over Harry’s knuckle and pulls him in closer, their bodies pressing together.

‘When I was little, I would always make my sister play Mummies and Daddies with me. I used to play with her baby toys more than she did. I mean, I’ve just always really wanted children,’ Harry pauses to wipe at his eyes. ‘And I suppose since I was there for her birth and stuff, I felt like Pixie was just as much mine as she was Lavender’s. I don’t know, it just really hit me hard, losing her so young. She always seemed so happy, and then she was just so weak, and then she was gone.’

Louis pulls him into his chest as his shoulders start to shake and he lets out soft little breaths as his eyes close and tears swim down slowly before they’re absorbed by the wool of his scarf.

Harry clings on his shoulders, almost climbing into his lap and cuddling in close. Louis rubs down his back and breathes out into his ear, closing his eyes and letting his own tears fall.

They stay until Louis can’t feel his knees or his nose and Harry’s nose gets blocked from crying and they acknowledge that they need to get inside. Louis pulls Harry up, who blinks slowly and waves at Pixie’s grave before turning into Louis’ chest again, breathing in deeply.

Louis bunches his beanie up above his ear, pressing his lips against the shell of it and kissing softly before: ‘Don’t worry darling, I promise you that one day, we’ll have children of our own.’
Harry’s got his lip worried between his teeth when he climbs into bed, snuggling in close to Louis.

Louis blinks slowly, frowning slightly, before he reaches out and pokes at Harry’s front teeth, making Harry giggle. Louis’ reaching back for the light switch when Harry rests his fingers over his wrist, drawing his attention back.

‘Lou?’

Louis turns to face him completely again, resting on his forearm as Harry slithers further underneath the covers. ‘Yeah?’ Louis replies, pulling at the edge of the duvet when it covers Harry’s lips.

‘You won’t be offended that I don’t get you anything for your birthday or Christmas right, because I just don’t really have any-’

Louis laughs at him softly, reaching to pull his fiancé closer to him before he kisses him softly to shut him up. ‘Don’t be silly, darling. I don’t expect anything from you. And I’m turning twenty-seven now, I’m too old for presents,’ he assures Harry, kissing his nose gently.

Harry frowns and nods. ‘I just feel bad, because you deserve the moon and the stars and all I can give you is myself,’ he sighs with a pout.

Louis flicks off his bedside lamp before he reaches for Harry again, arm over his waist and reaching down to rest on his bum, pulling his body forward as Harry rests his hands on his chest. ‘Shut up, Harry.’ Louis sighs, kissing Harry once more, softer, before he pulls back and relaxes onto his side.

He can still see Harry smiling in the dark. He doesn’t remove his hand from where it’s resting on his soft bum.
December’s quick in the sense that one day Harry’s setting up the Christmas tree, while it feels like the next day that they’re having a small Christmas dinner in the guest house after dinner hours, although Louis does tell the four sets of guests they have that they’re welcome to join them.

Every year, the staff goes home from the twenty third of December to the fifth of January to spend the holidays with family, so they always have a little Christmas party before everyone leaves to their respective relatives.

Cook and Henrietta spend the day preparing the food while Juliet decorates the dining room, with the apparently new tradition of Brandon supplying the music.

Louis makes the effort to drag Harry around the front of the house and around the side of the building so that they can walk in through the front door, pausing briefly to admire the Christmas lights Brandon had put up all over the front of the guest house, now each lined with snow.

He takes Harry’s jacket for him after they let themselves in, hanging it up on the coat hanger before shrugging his denim jacket off. He’d managed to let Harry convince him into making them match, him wearing a white and red jumper that looks like something his nan knitted for him when he was six, while Harry wears the forest-green jumper Louis had found in the loft, about four sizes too big on him and making him look cute and cuddly. Louis thinks he definitely got the short end of the stick.

Eartha Kitt croons from the dining room, and Harry pulls off his gloves, tucking them into his coat pocket before he’s pulling Louis towards the already-drunken-sounding laughter in the next room.

Rosie cheers when they walk in, hand in hand, and Harry grins. Louis leads him to their empty seats, pulling back Harry’s chair for him so that he can slip in easily before he sits down beside him, resting his hand on his thigh beneath the table.

‘You two are so cute I’m going to get a cavity,’ Rosie comments, having a swig of her sparkling wine. Louis raises his eyebrows when he sees that Juliet’s allowing Brandon his own glass.

There’s two other people at the table that Louis recognizes as the newlywed couple, Sarah and Richard, who’ve been with them before they have to visit the boy’s family for Christmas. Louis
raises his hand in a wave.

Louis keeps his hand on Harry’s thigh through the meal, slowly creeping higher as the night progresses. Harry’s cheeks flush brighter every time Louis creeps closer to his crotch, and Louis just hides his smirk in a sip of wine.

Harry starts to shift by the time Brandon brings their mains out, Louis’ fingers grazing over his sensitive inner thigh and making him stutter in his conversation to Juliet. Louis takes another sip of wine and watches from his peripheral as Harry does the same.

His hand stays there until dessert, when he waits until Brandon sets soufflé down in front of him before he presses his hand right over Harry’s lap, cupping him, all while telling Henrietta how lovely her desserts look.

Harry makes a little sound in his throat, sounding like a dry squeak, before his hips are shifting against Louis’ hand, seemingly torn between pushing into the touch and backing away. When his hips push forward slightly, Louis presses his palm harder, massaging his fingers against the denim so that he can feel Harry slowly harden in his palm, while he watches him try to breathe normally and eat dessert at the same time.

Harry gives a soft squeak, which he covers with a cough, and Louis thinks he must be pressing against his head. He waits until Harry’s spoon is poised to his lips before he presses down hard and Harry jams his spoon into his mouth, wrapping his lips tight around it.

When it’s time for them to leave, they’ve got through seven bottles of sparkling wine and Harry’s throbbing against the seam of his jeans, Louis’ own cock hard just from watching him react, listening to his smothered sounds, knowing how easily they could be caught.

When they stand up, Harry tugs him to the front room and rips their jackets off the coat hanger, shoving Louis’ into his chest and pulling his on before he’s taking Louis’ hand again and going back through the dining room to cut through the kitchen, briskly walking across the snow to get home.

He throws open the backdoor and pulls Louis in, pressing him against the door as soon as it’s closed, fingers gripping onto the collar of his jacket as he leans in and kisses him, hips pressing forward against Louis’ so he can feel how hard Harry is, feel the heat coming from between his legs.
Louis grips at the lapels of Harry’s coat and pulls back, trying to get it off Harry so that he can run his hands down his back. Once he does, he rests his hands on his bum, squeezing and pulling Harry’s hips forward against his, before he’s pushing off the cupboard and back-stepping Harry across the kitchen so that he’s pressed with his back against the cupboard beside the oven. Harry lets out a little oof, quickly followed by a tipsy giggle.

He kisses Harry back against the cupboard, his fingers running up his sides, underneath the soft of his jersey, bunching it up under his underarms. Harry mewls; Louis’ thumb dragging over his nipple as he slots his thigh between Harry's, Harry sucking his tongue into his mouth.

Louis slides his hands down to Harry’s hips as Harry wraps his arms around his neck, Louis hoisting him up so that Harry has no choice but to wrap his skinny legs around Louis' hips, pulling at his hair as he carries him into the living room.

Louis falls back onto the couch, Harry bouncing down into his lap and nipping his lip in the process, they both just erupt in giggles, Harry breathing into his neck as Louis slides his hands into Harry’s back pockets, pushing his hips forward so that Harry makes a startled yelp that turns into a surprised moan as their crotches grind together, hot and fast.

Harry can only kiss Louis and pull at his hair as Louis controls his body, controlling the movements of his hips so that they rut together, sweat breaking out in the nape of his neck.

Somewhere along the way, the giggles became traded for muffled moans in each other’s mouths, Harry’s boots slipping against the couch cushion as their crotches grind together, zip to zip.

'Oh my god,' Harry squeaks, his hands slipping to Louis' shoulders, gripping onto his jacket and bunching the fabric in his fists as he works his hips faster, to the point where Louis' own cock is starting to feel the burn of it, past the ache.

Harry makes a pitiful noise in his neck, biting into the skin and sucking as Louis jumps his hips up, thrusting in tight circles upwards, licking all the alcohol off Harry’s tongue as they rut together, both breathing heavily.

'Louis, I’m—' Harry whimpers, his hips thrusting sporadically, 'oh god, I’m gonna come. Louis, I’m gonna come.'

Louis nods and squeezes his arse through his jeans, digging his fingers in and bucking his hips up
hard. He nods quickly, his hips not able to stay still as they jerk forward and up, rutting against the warmth in the spread of Harry’s glorious thighs until he's spasming, his hands in Harry’s pockets pulling him down in his lap so he can grind their cocks together, fast and concentrated in short strokes as his cock jolts and he comes, his body shaking as he comes with a long moan of Harry’s name, that propels Harry into orgasm, cock kicking inside his underwear as Louis grinds them together, holding Harry’s trembling body as they rut together until the shocks are gone, and they slump against one another, the air around them hot.

Harry lets out a shuddering breath, just as Fudge jumps up with his paws on the couch and licks Louis’ cheek.

Louis squeals and rolls away from it, Harry boneless and giggling in his arms.

Louis’ woken up the next morning by Harry rolling on top of him, his wide smile being the first thing he sees when he opens his eyes.

‘It’s your birthday tomorrow,’ Harry whispers, their bodies separated by the duvet between them.

Louis blinks and nods groggily as Harry takes hold of his jaw, starting his morning with a long kiss, thighs spread over Louis’ hips, and Louis doesn’t even care about how sour their mouths are.

Harry grinds down against his morning glory before rolling off him, slipping off the bed and into the bathroom, with a simpered soon! thrown after him. Louis groans and tries to go back to sleep.

Louis wakes up on his birthday with the heavy weight of Honey of his chest and a sweet smell wafting into his bedroom. He pushes Honey off of him and hears her snuff in response. He sniffs back, reaching out to wrap his arms around Harry and pull him into his chest so he can cuddle him back to sleep, but he finds himself pulling Fudge into his side instead.
When he opens his eyes, Fudge is looking at him with wide eyes and he blinks quickly, looking very concerned. Louis pulls him up to his face, poking his finger into the soft pudge of his tummy.

‘What’ve you done with my Harry, Fudgie?’

He hears Harry giggle softly and he rolls over, vaguely pulling Fudge onto his chest when he spots Harry in his doorway with a tray. Fudge gives a lazy bark and tail wag. Honey blinks her eyes open and licks her lips lazily when she smells Harry, but her eyes soon droop closed.

Harry sets the tray down on the dresser before coming back to Louis, setting his knee onto the mattress, bending down low so he can kiss Louis good morning.

‘Sit up,’ Harry commands and Louis complies with a groan, Fudge waddling to the foot of the bed to go bug Honey. ‘Lean forward.’ He mumbles, and Louis does so, letting Harry steal his pillows and fluff them before slipping them back behind him.

And only then does he bend down for a proper good morning kiss, letting Louis curl his fingers around his neck and pull him into it.

‘It’s not much.’ Harry says with a slight blush, scratching at the back of his neck. Louis scoffs at him and picks up the knife and fork, diving headfirst into his eggs.

He’s on his second forkful when he looks up to see Harry still standing beside the bed, his lower lip between his teeth as he watches Louis eat. ‘Is it okay?’ he asks nervously, and Louis rolls his eyes.

‘It’s amazing. Now get back into bed before I pull you.’

Harry grins and complies, going around the side to slip under the duvet. Fudge growls slightly when Harry nudges him with his foot and Harry looks genuinely upset for a second until Louis throws Fudge a speck of bacon and he rolls onto his back in delight, licking his lips and wagging his tail.

Harry watches him eat and refuses any of Louis’ offered bites, resting on his elbow with a dreamy look.
Once Louis’ finished, he sets the tray down on the floor and pulls Harry towards him.

He’s wearing far too much for his liking, and part of him wants to unzip his old hostel hoodie from Harry’s chest, bunch his pyjama top up under his underarms and plant butterfly kisses across his chest.

But he settles for kissing him, pulling him half on top of his body.

Harry’s hands tangle in his hair, fingers playing with the strands while they're still soft, not yet styled.

‘I want you.’ Harry kisses into his neck, soft as a secret, his nose nuzzling under his ear before he's kissing up and along the scruff on his jaw.

Louis feels a bit dazed. ‘What?’ he asks Harry softly.

Harry rolls on top of him and hides his face in his chest. ‘I want you.’ He whispers into the fabric before he bites it softly, looking up at Louis from under his eyelashes.

Louis nods and Harry gulps and leans up to kiss him.

They move slowly, kissing for ages until they’re both warm and happy, wrapped completely around each other before Louis’ peeling off Harrys layers, kissing him onto his back and giggling into his neck before Harry pulls him back up with his hands around his neck, kissing him again before he breaks with a giggle.

Louis opens him up slowly, kissing him through it and sucking each moan and whimper, running his hand up Harry’s side as he spreads him open.

He almost forgets about Honey and Fudge until Honey licks the sole of his foot and Louis shrieks with surprised laughter, picking them up one by one and taking them to go sleep on the couch downstairs. When he comes back up, Harrys got his own fingers inside himself, and he stares at Louis with nervous eyes.
Louis strips down quickly, kissing Harry and letting him get used to the feel of them being naked together, bodies slotted together in their angles and limbs, before he pulls Harry’s fingers from himself, dribbling more lube onto his own fingers before checking that Harry can take him.

He kisses Harry softly before he pushes into him with a deep moan, and Harry gasps, his eyes squeezing shut. Harry takes deep breaths, and Louis thinks he may be in paradise, his body fitting with Harry’s like puzzle pieces as he holds still. ‘Hurts, Lou,’ Harry whimpers, his nails scrabbling for purchase in the skin between his shoulder blades.

Louis nods, hovering above Harry before dipping to press a kiss to the frown wrinkles on his forehead, before kissing the tip of his nose, kissing over one eyelid and then the other, before he kisses Harry softly. ‘You’re doing so good, darling,’ he croons, running his hand down Harry’s side and he rocks into him, slowly and gently.

Harry whimpers and Louis slows it down even more, circling his palm around Harry’s length, rubbing his thumb over the soft head so that Harry moans softly as Louis thrusts into him gently, little mews coming from his chest each time Louis drags his hips back and pushes back into him, slow and beautiful.

Harry presses his sweaty face into Louis’ neck as Louis grazes at his spot, his hands slipping against the sheets as he buries his nose into Harry’s damp hair, inhaling him as Harry moans softly, his body shifting back against Louis’.

Harry's eyes squeeze closed and his toes curl where his ankles are hooked around the back of his knees, his toes brushing his calves as he shudders out breaths and Louis kisses him, tasting the sweetness of his tongue as they move together, slow and hot.

He comes when Louis fits a hand between them, taking him in hand and stroking him slowly in time with the graze of his hips, getting Harry’s back to arch and his thighs to tremble as come shoots over his tummy.

He strokes Harry through it, still grinding into him to fuck out the entirety of Harry’s orgasm before he’s just clutching to his biceps weakly, letting Louis do as he pleases.

Harry’s flushed down his neck and his eyes are glassy and his lips are puffy and Louis’ so in love, has never felt such rapture with anyone except Harry. He kisses him hard as he fucks his hips into him, sweat matting his hair to his forehead as his stomach tightens and his toes curl, waves of ecstasy crawling up his spine before he’s coming into the condom, his body jolting with it.
He collapses on top of Harry, hearts beating in sync through thin skin and brittle bones as they try to catch their breath before he rolls off of him. Harry smiles lazily at him, and his eyes are glittering.

Louis presses their sweaty palms together and kisses the corner of his mouth.

Zayn arrives first, just after eleven. Louis takes his bag from him as Harry waddles out of the kitchen, and Zayn takes one look at him before he grins.

‘Hi, I’m Harry,’ Harry greets, holding out his hand after wiping it on his jogging bottoms.

Zayn takes it and shakes it firmly before shaking his head. ‘Zayn.’

Louis gives Harry Zayn’s bag and pulls him into his side, kissing his forehead and murmuring, ‘Go take Zayn’s bag to the guest room, please darling?’

Harry nods and kisses him quickly before he’s slipping his bag onto his shoulder and waddling up the stairs. Zayn scrubs at his stubble and shakes his head, watching after Harry. ‘Don’t mention it,’ Louis warns, poking his chest. ‘I told him it wasn’t noticeable.’

Zayn raises his hands. ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, I was just thinking he has a startling resemblance to the little American you were fucking around your twenty third birthday.’

Louis rolls his eyes but invites him into the kitchen for coffee.

After everyone’s arrived and been introduced, Louis starts making everyone hot chocolate. Liam’s just finished a story about a woman at his office when Louis pours hot water into each mug, reaching back blindly for Harry’s attention.
'Darling, could you get me another spoon please?' he asks, assuming Harry complies by the way a chair scrapes against the floor softly.

Harry comes up behind him to set the spoon beside the little bottle of milk, kissing Louis’ cheek, when Niall clears his throat. ‘Okay, are we all just going to ignore how obviously Harry is limping?’

Zayn snorts and Harry freezes beside him. Louis doesn’t even have to look at him to know he’s blushing.

‘I think that was the general idea Niall, yes.’ Arabella chastises, but she’s still smirking as she sips at her black coffee.

Louis settles his arm around Harry’s waist and kisses his temple as Harry blushes.

Harry’s giggling as he reads the card, his lips stained red with wine.

‘Ooh! Ooh! Um um, um,’ he shouts, bouncing up and down. ‘Long walk to freedom!’ he shouts, and Louis jumps off the couch.

‘Nelson Mandela!’

Harry nods quickly and skims his eyes over the card. ‘Um, black and white, Dalmatians, cigarette.’

‘Cruella de Ville!’ Liam shouts and Harry nods before he’s jumping up and down.

‘Blue hair, yellow skin!’ he shrieks and Louis leans forward.

‘Marge Simpson!’ he shouts, just as Zayn shouts out:
'Time!'

‘That was five.’ Arabella tells Liam, who moves their red token forward three spaces.

‘Well done.’ Louis coos as Harry stumbles down into his lap, giggling as Louis wraps his arm around him and reaching for his wineglass on the coffee table.

Niall shakes the dice between his cupped palms, while Zayn chants, ‘Zero! Zero! Zero!’ until he throws the dice, landing on a one.

Louis kisses at Harry’s neck as they watch the other team play, Harry’s fingers holding his arm in place around his waist as Louis sucks on the sweet skin just below his ear.

When it comes to be their turn, Harry turns to face the room as Niall picks up the dice.

‘You know, I’m exhausted. I think I might go to bed.’

He sees Liam’s eyebrows furrow while Niall’s shoot up.

Harry yawns into his fist before he’s slipping off Louis’ lap, squeezing past Arabella and Nial before Louis can lean back to watch as he climbs up the stairs, hips swaying.

Arabella watches after Harry too, before she’s twisting to look at Louis. ‘I’m glad I’m not sleeping next to them tonight.’

‘Seconded.’ Niall agrees. Zayn frowns, his room being the guest room next to theirs, while Arabella’s in her old room/Harry’s original room across the hall, Niall and Liam on the couches.

Louis rolls his eyes before sighing. ‘Well, there’s not much use in playing now that we’ve lost a teammate…’
Zayn scoffs. ‘It’s fine Louis, go upstairs and fuck your fiancé, you deserve it.’

Louis’ gone with a quick goodnight thrown after him.

When Louis wakes up on Christmas, the first thing he sees is Harry staring at him, chin rested on his wrist.

‘Stop being creepy,’ Louis grumbles, turning towards him and stuffing his face against the pillow. Harry giggles.

‘Can’t help it,’ he sighs, reaching and touching his fingers to rest on his cheek, ‘you’re beautiful.’

Louis rolls his eyes and lifts his arm to hook around Harry’s neck, pulling him down into the bed. ‘Come on, go back to sleep.’

Harry pushes at his side and whines, ‘Louis, it's Christmas and Liam has to leave at eleven, and we need to get up!’

Louis groans and squeezes his eyes closed. ‘Yesterday I was woken up to breakfast in bed and morning sex and now I’m being forced out. Brilliant.’

‘Stop being stupid and get up,’ Harry laughs, kissing the top of his head before he’s slipping out of bed.

Louis thinks that maybe he’s won, until Harry’s ripping the duvet off him.

Louis drives Liam to the train station just before eleven, making sure he’s eaten a sufficient
amount of Harry’s gingerbread and has drank near a litre of hot chocolate before he lets him leave.

The road’s a bit slippery and the radio’s playing awful Christmas songs that they both sing along to as they make the quick drive into town, Louis slowing the car next to the walkway, down to the terminal.

‘Send my love to the family, alright?’ Louis says with a clap on Liam’s shoulder, unbuckling his seat belt.

‘Of course,’ Liam replies, climbing out of the car and walking round back, Louis popping open the boot so that Liam can sling his tog bag onto his shoulder.

Liam pulls him into a hug, his body warm against the cold, and Louis pats his back before ruffling his hair.

‘Congratulations, Lou,’ Liam tells him after he’s pulled back, running his fingers through his hair to fix Louis’ damage. ‘I’m so glad that you’re happy again.’

Louis scoffs and pulls him right back in for another hug. ‘You’re such a big softie, Li.’

‘I’m serious Lou, you two deserve each other.’ Liam says again, laughing slightly.

Louis just presses his grin into his shoulder and squeezes him tighter. When he lets him go, Liam back steps down the walkway and waves his hand as a goodbye.

‘See you in April!’ Louis calls after him, waving until Liam turns his back, then climbing back into his car.

Louis sets the table while Harry and Niall make lunch, Zayn and Arabella playing rummy in the lounge with *The Philosopher’s Stone* on as background noise.
Niall and Harry carry out lunch with proud grins on each of their flushed faces as Louis pours them each a glass of wine.

He eats so much he thinks he may burst, his cheeks pink and his belly sore from laughing so hard. They pull crackers and gorge themselves on trifle, lunch lasting until late afternoon when they all collectively move over into the lounge.

Louis ends up on the floor, leaning back against the couch with Harry sitting between his knees, resting against his chest. Louis plays with his hair while Harry giggles drunkenly. When Harry reaches the point where he starts trying to educate Niall on The French Revolution, Louis decides it’s time for him to get to bed.

He drags him up the stairs, arm around his shoulders so that he doesn’t fall flat on his face. Harry giggles as he undresses him, setting down two paracetamol and a glass of water on his bedside.

Once Harry’s sufficiently calm, lazy grin on his lips as Louis surveys him from the foot of the bed, he crawls up between his legs and gives him his Christmas present, coming in the form of a neat blowjob. He has to tuck two fingers into Harry’s mouth to stop the others from hearing him make too much noise.

Harry tries to return the favour, sucking Louis clumsily before finishing him off with his hand.

Boxing day is spent nursing Harry with a fry-up before lugging the mattress off Arabella’s bed down the stairs, pulling all the cushions off the couches and pushing the coffee table to the side, as they make a giant Christmas bed in front of the TV as Harry makes them watch *Serendipity* for the second time.

Louis makes toasties for dinner before they fall asleep in a dog-pile, snow drizzling down softly outside and Niall’s leg hitched over his waist, Harry’s elbow pressed against his sternum.
Christmas gives way to New Year’s easily.

Arabella’s the last to leave, catching her train on the twenty ninth, with Niall and Zayn both leaving on the twenty eighth.

They spend New Year’s Eve soaking up beers and breezers, cuddled together on the couch with the heating on the television humming with the year’s variety performance. It’s around eleven when they start kissing to pass the time.

They don’t make it to the countdown, running upstairs to bed and ringing in the New Year pressed together, skin sweaty and fingers linked.

January (116 days)

Louis wakes up some day in January with Harry sitting cross-legged and watching him, cradling a mug of milky tea between his palms with toast on a small plate next to him which Honey keeps trying to lick at.

Louis hides his face in the pillow as Harry chews thoughtfully.

‘Remember when you said we could go camping?’ Harry asks, mouth full. Louis creaks open an eye to peek at how Harry’s still staring at him. ‘We should go camping.’

Louis pushes himself up to sit, reaching for his glasses and pushing them on as he crinkles his nose at the sour taste at the back of his mouth. He rakes his fingers through his hair before levelling Harry’s gaze.
‘It’s below freezing outside, and you want to sleep in a tent?’

Harry pouts. ‘But you said we could,’ he whines softly, his cheeks puffing out.

‘I say lots of things,’ Louis argues, scooting closer to his baby and picking up one of his quarters of toast.

Harry slaps the back of his hand against his chest and puffs his cheek even more, his lower lip curling into a sweet pout.

Louis wants to kiss the wet inside of his lip and maybe nibble it a bit, but instead he rests his hand on Harry’s bare knee and leans in closer. Harry must think he’s going to kiss him too, because his eyes flutter shut oh so delicately and he leans into him slightly, frown still in the corners of his eyes but not smothering his will to kiss Louis whenever possible.

‘We can do a bit of gallivanting, if you’re that keen,’ Louis promises, lips almost brushing Harry’s.

The corners of Harry’s mouth lift in a smile before he rests one arm heavily over Louis’ shoulders, the bread-crust between his fingers grazing at the back of his neck as Louis finally kisses him softly.

The wind’s howling when Louis stops the car, pushing open his door and stepping out.

He comes around the front to open Harry’s door for him, watching him through the window as he wraps his scarf around his neck, pulling it up to cover his mouth.

He takes a deep breath, inhaling the sea-salt scent, as Harry sets his feet down on the gravel and Louis reaches for his hand.

The sea’s angry and wild, the tides low as the waves come in viciously, crashing against the pale
Louis pulls Harry down the rickety wooden steps and onto the sand, the toes of his shoes already digging in. Harry stops beside him, eyes fluttering closed as his chest rises with his inhale, and Louis has to fight the urge to pinch his nose when his nostrils flare.

His eyes start to crinkle with a smile, and his dimples indent his cheeks before he’s opening his eyes and he turns his head to look at Louis, squeezing his hand before he thuds down onto the sand and reaches for the zip on the inside of his tatty leather boot, pulling down.

It doesn’t take Louis’ mind long to click before he’s dropping down next to Harry, pulling off his shoes and peeling off his socks, letting them settle haphazardly in the sand as Harry rolls up his jeans, the denim stretching a surprising amount for Harry to bunch them halfway up his calves.

Louis pushes his jeans up to his knees, scrabbling to push himself just as fast as Harry and chase him down the shore toward the grey waters.

Harry shrieks when he runs in, the water splashing up his thighs as he freezes, his scarf falling down around his neck so that Louis can watch the pink of his mouth as he shouts, ‘Fuck!’

Louis runs into the water just after, a shock to his system as the freezing water whips at his ankles, at his calves, and sinking in through the denim and shocking his skin where it splashes on his legs. ‘Fucking hell!’ he shrieks, his body slamming into Harry’s.

Harry’s laughing, louder than the roar of the ocean as it hurries back in, pulling hard on Louis’ ankles and drizzling the sand forward so that he and Harry stumble forward, Louis clutching his arms around his waist to prevent him falling, deafening laughter in his ear.

Harry spins around in his grip, his eyes glinting and Louis moves his grip to his elbows and holds him steady as Harry surges in to kiss him hard. Harry’s lips are pulled so tight from his infectious smile that their teeth click together, sharp, and Harry starts to laugh again before Louis tries to suck it away, kissing him again and again and again.

Harry screams when they’re splashed, water splashing high onto his shoulder, a droplet landing on his cheek and he pulls back from Harry, his jeans soaked at his knees.
Louis roars with hysterical laughter, hugging Harry into his chest as another wave hits, his lower legs going numb from the sting of it, needles of cold piercing his skin.

Harry jumps back from the shock of it, trying to bolt out of his arms and leaning back in his hold, body shaking with it.

‘Lou!’ he screeches before Louis kisses him again, the tide trying to suck them in.

Harry kisses him back obligingly, smiling into it as his body starts to shiver. Louis gives him a last kiss before the waves splash again, up to mid-thigh, and he squeals with fright before he’s scampering out the water, pulling Harry with him, his feet digging into the wet sand before his heels are digging into the soft, dry sand.

It clings to his feet, slipping between his toes and speckling up his calves. It irritates his skin and he wants to wipe it off but Harry’s pressing himself into his chest, pressing his cheek to Louis’ and laughing boisterously into his ear.

Louis’ fingers dig into his waist, through the thick of his jersey and parka. The wind blows against them, making Louis’ ankles nip colder as sand blows up around them, his hair blowing around his head as Harry’s fringe gets caught in his eyelashes, his scarf almost hanging off his neck.

‘That was so stupid,’ Harry giggles, folding his arms up against Louis’ chest. ‘Why did we do that?’

Louis pulls Harry into his chest to steal his warmth, dipping his neck to breathe into the crook of his neck, the skin warm against his cheek.

‘I think my feet are going to fall off,’ he laughs, a shiver working up through his vertebrae.

Harry nods, his fingers curling around the colour of his jacket. ‘Is it weird that I kinda want some ice cream now?’

Louis giggles and rubs his hands down Harry’s back. ‘You’re such a loser.’ He sighs, and Harry growls softly into his chest, ‘but there’s a café down the road if you’re that desperate.’
Harry nods and Louis nods, grins, pats his back. Harry’s fingers twitch against his jacket as he lets go of his waist, stepping back from him.

He hooks his fingers into his shoes, stuffing his socks down into the toes, skin crawling at the thought of socks on over sandy feet. Harry does the same, wrapping his arm around Louis’ middle as Louis wraps his arm around his shoulder, letting Harry curl to fit against his side.

Their walk along the beach is slow and a lot less romantic than Louis’d always imagined a stroll on the beach with a loved one would be. Sand gets into his eyes and his hair blows in all directions, and he has to give up all pretence of romance when a lock of Harry’s hair blows into his mouth.

Louis holds the door to the café open for Harry before approaching the counter. Harry presses his middle finger against the glass of the pastry display as Louis reads the chalkboard menu mounted onto the wall.

Harry gets vanilla in a sugar cone while Louis orders a hot chocolate with marshmallows. Louis asks for a flake at the last minute.

Louis suggests they sit on the beach as an attempt to salvage any romance for the date, but Harry pouts and takes a long lick of his ice cream, catching the vanilla on his tongue, before he looks at Louis with an adorable frown. ‘But I’ll get sand in my ice cream,’ he mews softly.

Louis touches his hand to his waist, just to feel him, and Harry leans into it, turning to look at the sea again. Louis can feel the heat of the person from behind the worktop in the café’s eyes on them, through the glass, as they stand and block the door.

‘We could always go back to the car, switch on the heating maybe.’

Harry nods before he leans up and gives Louis a kiss laced with the sweet of ice cream.

Louis turns the heating up when they climb into the car, Harry testing his jeans as he crosses his legs in the passenger seat, licking at the slowly melting ice cream cone, his soft tongue peeking out in kitten licks over his fingers where ice cream dribbles out of the cone.

Louis tries a sip of his hot chocolate, burning the tip of his tongue so that he hisses. Harry pulls his flake from his ice cream, biting off the bottom half first before offering the other to Louis, holding
it to his lips as Louis takes a bite that results in flecks of chocolate falling into his lap, promptly melting into his jeans at his attempt to brush them away.

‘Can’t believe I let you convince me to drive forty minutes to get to the beach, only to get frostbite on my toes and get you an ice cream.’ Louis says with a shake of his head, pulling off the plastic lid of his paper cup and setting it on the dashboard, blowing over his hot chocolate so that the steam puffs forward.

‘We could snog in the backseat if that makes it more worth your while?’ Harry offers, taking a bite out of the sugar cone.

Louis thinks about it a second before he nods. ‘After I’ve finished my drink.’

‘I don’t think I ever want to be old,’ Harry sighs, chin propped up on his hands resting on Louis’ tummy, looking up at him.

Louis looks up from where he’s checking the guest list for those who have RSVP’d. ‘And why is that?’

Harry tilts his chin down and presses a kiss to Louis’ stomach, soft lips against soft skin.

‘I had a nice long chat with Arabella before she left, you know, the night you passed out at eight?’ Louis nods, to show he’s listening, as he ticks off a Peter Mitchell from the list. ‘She told me that you were a little shit when you were little, when you were a teenager too. But now you’re just a big softie.’

Louis rests his paper down on his chest and reaches forward to flick his nose, making Harry’s face scrunch up. ‘I am only eight years older than you, thank you very much, and are you saying you’d love me more if I shaved off your eyebrows every other month and woke you up by putting my balls in your mouth?’

Harry giggles, pressing his nose into Louis’ skin and moving his hands to rest over his ribs,
laughing out against his stomach. ‘Nevermind, you don’t get it,’ he sighs before he’s blowing a raspberry into Louis’ tummy, making him take hold of his head and pull him away and up towards him, Harry kicking against the sheet to let Louis pull him up his body.

He holds his face between his palms and looks him in the eyes before he kisses his nose. ‘No matter how old you get, you will always be my baby.’

Harry grins and closes his eyes, his hand resting over his fluttering heartbeat.

Louis listens to Harry talking to his mum on the phone one night, sitting next to him in the study as he pages through flower options. Harry starts crying someway through, but he wipes his tears away with his thumb and curls his feet up into the chair, his toes hanging off as he cradles the phone between his skinny fingers, held against his ear.

Sometimes he forgets that Harry’s only nineteen, living with someone who was a stranger mere months ago and who was downright awful to him for half of one of those months, and that he’s gone from being with his family every day to not having seen them for a good four months.

Harry ends his call laughing and Louis can hear the deep rumble of his dad’s voice through the receiver, but Louis feels guilt under his fingernails, and he stares at the little stationary cup beside the desktop until Harry sets the phone back into its cradle, the creases at his eyes slowly smoothing out.

Louis can only blink before Harry’s in his lap, thighs resting over his as he wraps an arm around his neck and presses his cheek to his fresh-scented hair, humming softly.

Louis’ arm makes its way around him by instinct, and he draws him in closer to his chest, as Harry reaches for the flip-file of flower arrangements. He picks up the little colour swatches sitting on the desk and holds them against a tulip arrangement as Louis squeezes his hip.

‘Harry, are you happy?’
Harry laughs softly setting the flip-file down shortly and turning to face him, smiling at him warmly. ‘I’ve never been happier, Lou. I love you,’ he grins, biting his lip after. Louis wants to kiss him, but refrains, instead rubs his hand over the swell of his tummy as Harry flips the page of the flip-file.

Louis frowns slightly, tightening his hold around him. ‘But, I mean, don’t you get homesick?’

Harry stills slightly and shifts to get more comfortable, leaning back into Louis.

‘Of course I do, but I have you and the farm and everything else to make up for it. I had to leave home at some point, and I can’t think of any place better for me than here.’

Louis pulls him in for a fleeting kiss before Harry goes back to flower arrangements.

Louis answers on the second ring when Zayn calls, Harry napping in the crook of his arm, drooling onto his chest.

‘Alright you bugger, what do you want?’ Zayn starts, and Louis assumes he’s gotten the delivery.

‘Before I ask,’ he says, pausing to scratch down in between Harry’s shoulder blades, Harry snuffling softly. ‘I need to make sure that you’re buttered up enough. Are you?’

‘A tray of Terry’s, some sparkling wine and some flowers? Yeah, I think I’m good. Now what do you want?’

‘I told Harry you’d sing at our wedding.’ He rushes, pressing his nose into Harry’s hair as his fingers twitch where they rest against his stomach.

Zayn laughs softly through the receiver. Louis thinks he must be shaking his head. ‘You’re such a cock,’ he sighs.
‘I’ll send you a song list in a few days’ time. Love you,’ he tells him, ending the call before Zayn can protest.

Harry picks up one of the CD cases, skimming the track list before he reaches for the other.

‘What am I looking for again?’ he asks, brow furrowed sweetly.

Louis opens the case and sits the CD into the radio, pressing it closed. ‘We need to find a song for our first dance,’ Louis reminds him, skipping to track seven.

‘Can’t we just go for something easy? Like Britney?’

‘No, we need something special.’ He reinforces, getting to the chorus before pressing the stop button and ejecting the CD. He looks at the case in his hands, digging his thumb into the gap. ‘We need something that we can play for our kids during car trips just to make them groan, or something that I can play for you whenever you get mad at me for not doing the laundry. We need a song that can always remind us of how we feel about each other right now, so that when we’re old and dying, we can play it and remember when we were young and in love.’

As soon as he’s finished his small tangent, Harry’s in his lap, hands on his cheeks, and he’s kissing him like he’ll never get another chance. Louis reaches for his waist on instinct as Harry breaks the kiss into small little ones, peppered along his jaw and over his cheeks and over his eyelids before he’s kissing him again, long and slow.

When he manages to pry Harry off him, Harry cuddles up into him. ‘I love you,’ he mumbles, reaching for Louis’ hand and squeezing.

Louis repeats the sentiment before kissing Harry, just next to his eye. He still has the CD case in his hand, but he knows that they’re not going to get anything else done, and that Harry will want to go upstairs to show Louis how much he loves him.
He sighs and sets the case down with the others, letting Harry breathe out over his neck and trails their joint hands up his side.

‘You know, I’m never going to get any work done when you’ve got the libido of a fifteen year old.’

Harry giggles and kisses his neck, right over his pulse.

February (85 days)

Louis storms into the living room and stands with his hands on his hips until Harry looks up at him from where he’s doodling on the TV guide, television set on Paul Hollywood. Louis can’t look at him the same now that he knows Harry used to fantasize about him.

‘Your mum is on the phone.’ He tells him, frowning and setting his lips in a thin line.

He watches Harry’s throat as he swallows before he’s raising his eyebrows. ‘She is?’

Louis stares at him a bit longer, clenching his fingers on his hips, waiting. Harry stares back at him, face an image of faux innocence. Louis squints his eyes before he sighs and he folds his arms over his chest.

‘When were you planning on telling me it was your birthday Harry?’ he sighs, tilting his head.

Harry slips his legs from the couch, setting his feet on the floor. His socks are bubble-gum pink, and Louis wants to kiss each of toes so that he giggles.

He shrugs and sets the TV guide down next to Honey, giving her a light scratch as he does. ‘Didn’t
think it was important, you know?’

Louis rolls his eyes and spreads his arms, fingertips touching the door frame on each side. Harry’s smile is bashful as he shuffles into his arms, wrapping his own around Louis’ middle and letting Louis hug him tight.

Harry kisses his neck softly, just under his jaw, and Louis rubs down his spine as he kisses his forehead. He pulls Harry back by his shoulders, getting a good look at his boy before he gives his shoulder a soft shove.

‘Don’t keep your mum waiting, my little twenty year old.’ Louis teases, and Harry groans.

‘Don’t even start, Lou,’ he warns before he’s fitting past him and walking into the study, picking up the phone a few seconds later.

Louis attempts to bake a cake for him, only to find that Harry’d made it seem a lot easier than it had turned out to be. But at least he can ice it nicely.

He knows that there are candles somewhere, he just has to dig through all the drawers and the spice cupboard and the baking basket until he finds twenty candles, mismatched and different colours all different degrees of use evident, some new and some nearing little stumps.

So far, Harry’s done as told, staying in their bedroom with Louis’ laptop and Netflix password, bedroom door closed. Louis has a few shreds of hope that Harry can’t smell the cake from the room and that it’ll be a great surprise, but he doubts it when he’d poured probably half a bottle of vanilla essence into the batter and the other half into the icing.

Luckily, he’d managed not to fuck up the bacon, so he still has that to make into a toastie for Harry.

He has to use one of the big trays, stacked behind the end table in the dining room, to fit the cake, Harry’s little toasted sandwich, and his small bowl of raspberries on. It’s a great task to get it upstairs, and he faces a new challenge when confronted with the closed bedroom door.
Balancing the tray on his forearm with his fingers splayed underneath, he pushes down the door handle quickly, before he can drop the tray and all its contents. Once he’s happy with his hold, he nudges the door open with his hip.

Harry covers his mouth with his hands, pushing Louis’ laptop off to his side so that he can sit up straight, presumably crossing his legs under the duvet so that Louis can set the tray down in front of him.

Harry makes him climb in bed with him, Louis resting his laptop on his upper thighs so Harry can carry on with his film. Harry presses raspberries onto each of his fingers, and Louis thinks of their first date and how much he’d wanted to kiss Harry as he’d plucked at the small flowers and the sun had kissed him.

Harry holds his fingers out to Louis, wriggling his ring finger for Louis to bite the raspberry off. Louis holds it steady so he can suck Harry’s finger into his mouth, his lips closing around his ring before he draws back and sucks off the raspberry. Harry’s got a bit of a happily dazed smile on his pretty mouth.

Louis lights his candles with the lighter in his back-pocket, refusing until Harry juts out his lower lip and widens his eyes to the point where he looks like Bambi to sing him Happy Birthday. Harry looks warm and happy after blowing out his candles, leaning into Louis’ side before pressing the knife down the centre.

It’s still soft in the middle, and burnt on top and bottom, and there’s too much vanilla and it makes Louis’ temples throb, but Harry at least licks the icing off with soft flicks of his tongue that have Louis closing his laptop, setting it bottom-up at the foot of the bed.

He lets Harry kiss him first, slow and tender and sweet, his hand cupping his jaw lightly and thumb tracing over his cheek as his hand rubs at Harry’s side, thumbing up the edge of his shirt to rest his fingers over his hip. Louis pulls back and looks at him, pink mouth and wide eyes, pressing him flat on his back and hovering half over him.

‘What do you want, darling?’ Louis asks softly, Harry’s arms winding around his neck, his fingers interlocking just at the nape. He leans in to breathe out over Louis’ neck lightly.

Harry smiles against his cheek. ‘I think I’m too full from eating cake to take you right now, but I do want you,’ Harry sighs, giggling softly at himself, leaning up into Louis’ chest so his thigh grazes
Louis’ own, the duvet wrapped around them and locking in their heat. Louis nods and kisses his temple.

Louis kissing him once more before Harry lets go of him, struggling to get his hands between them to untie his jogging bottoms before he’s fiddling with the hem of his shirt. He bunches the fabric up, getting to his waist, in an attempt to get it off, but it’s difficult with Louis right up against him, so once he reaches his belly-button, Louis pushes him back by his shoulders, slipping off the bed to peel off his own tee-shirt and drop it into a puddle on the floor.

Louis unbuttons his jeans and pushes them down to his ankles; his body should be cooling down as he strips, but he just feels hotter and hotter because Harry isn’t undressing anymore, just watching Louis as he gets undressed with his eyes blinking lazily.

Louis toes off his socks before he plucks at his glasses, setting them on the bedside table. Harry’s fingers are still toying absently with the hem of his shirt, sitting just below his navel, his head propped up on the decorative pillows as he wets his lower lip with his raspberry-stained tongue, eyes glued to where Louis dips his thumbs into his waistband, pulling down so that he cock bobs out and slaps his tummy.

He wraps his hand around himself, just to see how Harry will react, but his eyes flutter closed before he can even catch Harry biting his lip because he’s so very hard and his hand feels like heaven. He squeezes his fist as much as he can around his cock, dragging it up to the head where he gathers the wetness and smooths it down to under the head, gasping with it.

Harry gives a weak moan, wanting Louis’ attention, and Louis’ eyes flick to him before he crawls back onto the bed and settles between where Harry’s thighs are spread wide. He grips at the soft cotton and pulls down, pulling navy trackies down to his thin ankles. He pushes Harry’s t-shirt up to under his underarms, so that he can thumb over his hard nipples before he presses a quick kiss to his slackening lips. Louis rests his hands on Harry’s hips, pulling his body further down the mattress so that his shirt bunches up at his chest. Louis cup his hand under Harry’s thigh right above the crook of his knee, and pushes up so he can take hold of his bony ankle and peel his fluffy socks off, one foot at a time.

Harry’s eyes have already gone a bit glassy, blinking slowly as Louis runs his hands back up his thighs, fingers tickling at the edge of his underwear. He nudges his fingers into the tight fabric, pushing up until his fingers can peek over the top waistband and he can scrunch the fabric up, connecting finger and thumb and pulling downwards. Harry sighs when his cock is exposed; Louis’ sure there must be a wet patch at the front of his black underwear.

Harry’s body always goes easy when Louis gets his hands on him, so it’s easy to bend one leg up and pull his underwear off over his foot, then leave it on bunched up on his other thigh. Louis runs
his hands back up Harry’s body, over where his stomach sinks in slightly to where his nipples are pulled tight and dark against his skin.

He rests his hands on Harry’s thighs, feels the heat radiating off them and into his fingertips as he spreads Harry’s legs wider so he can slot in between, his toes slipping against the duvet cover.

He holds his body above Harry’s with his forearms, his body thrumming with energy as Harry’s hips buck up to try and find friction but Louis arches his back so that Harry grinds into the air. He kisses Harry softly as he lowers his hips, his biceps twitching at the effort of holding himself up before he lets himself rest and his cock fits over the heat of Harry’s.

Harry gives a sweet little moan, searching out Louis’ lips again as Louis rests enough weight on one arm so he’s able to reach between them, taking hold of both their lengths in his fist. Harry gives a satisfied groan and Louis kisses him again to swallow it up as he slowly smooths his fist down, squeezing tight. Harry gives a happy little sigh before Louis lets go of them and grinds his hips down into Harry’s.

Harry rests his hands on Louis’ hips, his short nails scratching at his skin as Louis drags their cocks together, sandwiched between their stomachs as sweat gathers at the nape of his neck and along his brow, a high moan coming from his throat as he feels Harry’s cock squeeze out more precome.

Louis can tell when he’s about to come, little oh’s starting low but getting increasingly higher as Louis pins his body down and grinds into him, their sweat pressed between them to slicken their cocks as Louis fucks them together, his own slipping to drag along the soft skin of Harry’s stomach, precome spilling over his tummy as Harry digs his nails into his hips and tries to make Louis rock against him harder as he pants into his ear.

Louis squeezes at where he has his hand wrapped around Harry’s narrow wrist, pressing it down into the mattress, and Harry comes, his voice high and his eyes squeezed tight as his body jerks and his cock gives out a few weak spurts of come onto Louis’ chest.

Louis reaches between them to grab for his cock, fucking his hips forward into his grip as his knuckles run along Harry’s twitching cock, hard and quick, until Louis’ biting into Harry’s shoulder to stop him from shouting Harry’s names as he comes, his fist going shaky as he jerks his come out onto the soft of Harry’s tummy.

Afterward, they lie there, Louis rolled off and next to Harry, only touching at the elbow and Harry’s knee to his thigh, but his skin feels like it’s burning where it makes contact with Harry’s. Louis takes a while to get his breathing back, feeling a bit dizzy from the heat of it as his body tries
to calm down and cool down.

When his head lolls to the side, he can see that Harry isn’t much better, his chest heaving up and down quickly.

He wants to pull him into his chest and kiss him silly.

Harry rolls over onto his side, seemingly reading Louis’ mind as a slow smile spreads onto his lips. Louis wants to kiss it away and make him come again and again until all he can do is whimper and pant. He’s still got rosy red high on his cheeks and down his neck, but it’s faint on his stomach and his cock has gone completely soft while Louis’ only half way there.

Louis reaches out to pull on Harry’s wrist, bringing him closer so his ear can rest on his ribs, just a bit more contact so that Louis can remember he isn’t dreaming. Harry moves his whole body closer, curling up into Louis’ side and Louis tangles his fingers in his hair, scraping softly over his scalp so that Harry all but purrs happily.

Louis drives to town on the thirteenth, having left Harry in the kitchen under the pretence of discussing menu plans with Cook and Henrietta and asking whether or not they should rather go with a catering company.

All the shops are decorated with red and pink, have been since January, but of course Louis’ left it last minute, so with his wallet in his pocket, he starts drafting up a plan of how to spoil Harry on Valentine’s Day.

He buys him pink roses, a tray of dark chocolates and some sparkling wine, as well as some ingredients that Harry had asked for, and he’s at the till where he decides to also buy him one of the heart shaped lollies sitting in the plastic bucket.

He pops all his shopping into his boot before walking across the road to the farmer’s market, where he buys a dozen pink and glittery cupcakes and a carton of strawberries.
He thinks he has all he needs, about to climb into the driver’s seat and reverse out his parking space, when a large teddy bear in the window of the toy’s shop catches his eyes. He justifies that Reginald must be feeling lonely where he’s still seated in the corner of Harry’s old room, Rodger on Harry’s bedside table, with his body propped against the lamp.

He buys the dark brown thing with the silky red ribbon around his neck and sets him down in the passenger seat, giving it two seconds thought before he reaches over and buckles the ball of fluff in.

Louis wakes Harry up with a cup of tea and two slices of jam toast, cut into very shoddy hearts, pressing a kiss to each eyelid to rouse him.

Harry’s a bit groggy and he’s halfway through eating his first slice of toast when he seems to click and sets it back down on the plate, reaching up for Louis.

‘Happy Valentine’s Day, Lou,’ he exclaims, mouth full.

Louis wraps his arms around him tightly, patting down on the mattress when Fudge advances for Harry’s plate.

‘Happy Valentine’s Day to you too, darling.’ Louis tells him before Harry pulls him in for a quick kiss, sweet from strawberry jam.

Harry finds the bear in the kitchen, sitting in one of the chairs with heart-shaped lollipop in his large paw. Louis can hear his squeal from upstairs, and he can hear Harry running up them moments later, bounding into the bathroom where Louis’ brushing his teeth.

He leaps at Louis, bear dropped onto the floor as his limbs octopus around Louis. His mouth lands on Louis’ upper lip and he’s smiling into it.

‘I love you,’ he sighs, giddy as he squeezes his body around him.
Louis holds him up, until Harry starts to wriggle too much and he has to step him back, resting him on the worktop.

Harry makes Louis dinner, setting the dining room table and pouring them each a glass of wine, candles lit in the centre, around where he’s put his roses into one of the crystal vases from the antique cupboard.

He feeds Louis cheesecake for dessert, climbing into his lap and placing forkfuls past his lips, chasing each with a chaste kiss. Louis carries him upstairs, promising himself he’ll clean up the mess first thing in the morning.

He thinks they may have a good half an hour before Honey and Fudge make their way upstairs, finished with the slivers of beef Harry had left them on side plates in the kitchen.

He spreads Harry out over the bed and kisses every inch of his skin, gets him breathless and pink-cheeked as he opens him up slowly, pressing kisses in the dip of his collarbones.

Harry holds him close as Louis rocks into him, his breath hot and fast into his neck as Louis’ fingers clutch onto him, gripping him tight so he’ll never leave.

Louis’ knee nudges Harry’s under the table, raising his eyebrows. He swallows his bite.

‘What do you think?’ Louis asks him, bumping his shoulder.

Harry frowns, thoughtful, smacking his lips slightly. ‘I don’t know, I think I preferred the plain vanilla.’
Louis rolls his eyes and has another bite from the chocolate sample, licking the taste from his teeth and savouring it. ‘I think I prefer the honey, to be honest.’

Harry swirls the taste around his tongue before he slides the saucer away from himself, pulling the saucer with the butterscotch closer.

He sucks the cake from his fork, and his eyes light up as he swallows.

‘Good?’ Louis asks, reaching for his own sample.

Harry licks at the buttercream icing, the tip of his tongue swiping out to gather the last of it from his upper lip.

‘I think this is the one, Lou,’ he says, eyes wide and smile wider.

Louis takes a tiny bite and his eyes slip closed, eyelashes fluttering, as he lets himself fully appreciate it.

He gives Harry a short nod before Harry’s reaching for him with his thumbs pressing against his cheeks, giving him a kiss that tastes like icing sugar and fondant.

Louis’ got his tongue down Harry’s throat and his hand fist into his hair by the time ‘Baking Belinda’ comes back with more samples.

March (57 days)

Harry’s clambering his way through Chopsticks as Louis sits on the kitchen worktop, mobile phone
to his ear as he tries to arrange a tent for their reception, as it looks like it will be undoubtedly still winterish weather at the time of their wedding.

Harry goes wrong a lot, and Louis likes to listen to him swear under his breath, frustrated, because even though Harry has elegantly spidery fingers, they’ve got no grace or coordination.

Harry mopes in as Louis’ discussing cost, coming to stand between his thighs and sagging into him with his lower lip jutting out. He presses his nose into Louis’ sternum, so it almost hurts through the thin wool of his turtleneck. Harry presses his palm at the centre of his chest, over his relaxed heartbeat as Louis rests an arm over his shoulder, trails his fingers down his spine so that he shivers.

Louis thanks the man and confirms that they’ll be there on the morning to set up, before he clicks end and lets his other arm rest over Harry’s back, holding him into his chest, dipping his chin down and pressing his nose to the top of his head.

‘What’s up poppet?’ he kisses, his nails skimming along Harry’s shoulder blades.

Harry sighs and curls in slightly, making him seem even smaller in Louis’ arms. ‘Why am I so clumsy?’

Louis chuckles lightly, fingers tracing up and tickling up the back of his neck, edging into his mess of hair.

‘There’s nothing wrong with being clumsy darling, just means that maybe I’ll have to kiss you a bit more to heal your bruises and guide you along a bit. Also, it means I’m always going to be with you to make sure you don’t ever hurt yourself, but if you do, I’ll be there to help you up.’

‘You’re such a sap,’ Harry mumbles into his chest before he’s biting at his jersey, pulling it from his skin, as Louis babies him.

‘Love you.’ Louis kisses, Harry’s fingers slotted over his ribs.

‘Love you more,’ Harry sighs, letting go of his turtleneck and leaning back so that Louis can lean in, hold back two seconds, before kissing him quick and gentle.
'Want me to come help you?' Louis offers, pulling back and brushing Harry’s fringe off his forehead.

Harry nods and lets Louis lead him back out to the piano, sitting him down on the bench before bending over him and covering Harry’s hands with his own, pressing them against the keys for him.

Harry grins the entire time.

Louis presses his thumb into Rodger’s tummy, freshly washed and dried and looking cleaner than Louis has ever seen him.

Louis’ socked feet make little sound against the floor as he climbs the stairs and crosses over the passage, hovering outside their bedroom door as he pulls on Rodger’s left ear.

As he’s about to nudge open the ajar door, his ears prick to the low sound of Harry’s voice coming from the other side. He pauses, listening to see if he can make out what he’s saying before he edges the door open an inch more.

When he leans in to peek through the gap, catching a glimpse of Harry scratching at the back of his neck, pulling on his sleeve as he paces out of Louis’ little space of sight.

‘These past few months have been the best of my life,’ comes Harry’s voice, soft and mumbled. ‘No no, that’s rubbish. You have made me the happiest man in the world these past few months,’

He paces back to where Louis can see his slumped shoulders and the neatly folded piece of paper in his hands, his knee bent as he skims over it, fringe hanging down in his eyes.

‘I never used to believe in soul-mates,’ Harry says, pausing to scrub his hair back out of his eyes. Louis holds his breath, leaning in closer so that he can hear Harry’s soft grumble. ‘I never believed
in soul-mates, but then I met you.’

Louis bites his thumb, forgetting about Rodger in his hand and dropping him down onto the floor with a soft thump. Harry pauses, his head swivelling to look at the door and Louis expects it, so he ducks back and stays still until he hears the floor creak with Harry’s light steps, slowly starting to speak again.

Louis decides that he can wait until their wedding day to hear his vows so that he won’t risk ruining the surprise.

When Harry comes down later while Louis’ making dinner, and Louis has to bite down his ridiculous grin when Harry kisses his cheek, his earlier words swimming around his mind.

‘What colour do you prefer?’ Harry asks from behind him, and Louis looks up from the decorative cushions, turning on his heel and humming in question.

Harry waves his scanner at the bed display, guiding Louis’ attention to the wall of bedding.

Louis folds his arms over his chest and scans the display, eyes lingering over where Harry grazes the back of his hand over a navy coverlet.

‘I think the cream looks quite nice.’ He comments, coming to stand beside Harry and rest his hand on the small of his back.

Harry turns to give him a slight kiss before he reaches for a cream set and scans it, getting a soft beep after.

‘Are we the decorative cushion type?’ Louis asks, rubbing his thumb against the bone jutting beneath Harry’s shirt.
Harry looks back at the throw pillow display, skimming them as he squints slightly. ‘Not really, I don’t think. But I think a good throw or fluffy blanket might do some good.’

Louis guides him toward the display, lets him choose and scan a fluffy white and grey blanket, before Harry pulls him to the kitchen section.

Harry stares at everything longingly, as Louis scans cutlery and crockery sets. Harry chooses a large red pot and matching salt and pepper shakers, as well as a set of new pans and knives. Louis asks his opinion before scanning a baking set.

Harry chooses mint-green bamboo towels and egg-white bath mats before Louis coerces him into choosing out a new clock before calling it a day.

When they get back home, Louis parks outside the library and gets Harry to dig around for his library card in the cubby-hole.

Harry stays by his side as he starts browsing, but he eventually peels off and wanders into the classics section. From where he stands in the fiction section, he can watch Harry flit around the entire library, watching him over the racks as he reads all the spines in the autobiography section.

By the time Louis has chosen a Stephen King, Harry has three books in his hands and a sheepish smile on his face.

Louis checks them out for him as Harry wraps his arms around his waist from behind, nuzzling into his neck as Louis smiles at Irma and tries to ignore the hot of Harry’s outbreath, just under his ear.

‘You’re coming in April, right Irma?’ Louis asks her Harry pinching at his hip as he presses his nose into his shoulder, clinging onto him, almost bashful.

Irma looks at him with a slight smile and nods as she stamps the first page of each book before sliding them towards him. ‘Wouldn’t miss it for the world. Enjoy the rest of your day Louis,’ she tells him, her skin wrinkling further around her eyes.

Harry leads him out and Louis kisses him when they get back into the car, his hand holding his jaw steady.
Harry’s a bit dusty when he comes down from looking through the loft, and Louis reaches to brush his hair back, running his fingers through it to dust out any dirt before he pulls Harry in and presses them together, pecking him slowly and draws back, giving Harry opportunity to set the box in his hands down on the kitchen table.

‘Puzzle?’ Louis asks. It’s a Ravensburg of a houseboat, on a sparkling lake. Louis traces over the image, imagines holding Harry on the deck and kissing him in the sunlight, laying together in the small bed, cooking him breakfast on the lull of the water before spending their days in the sunshine.

‘I was thinking we could build it. You know, to pass the time,’ Harry shrugs before he’s turning and wrapping himself up into Louis’ chest.

‘It’s only two thousand pieces; I’m sure we’d finish that in a few days, a week at most.’

Harry sighs out against his neck as his knee slips in between Louis’. ‘We could pace ourselves, do something sappy like only put in the last piece the day before. Or something,’

Louis nods against his head, trailing his hand down his back as he does. ‘Okay then, we can do that. Go clear the dining room table and we can start it.’

Harry gives him a quick kiss as he caresses his cheek, picking up the box and scampering off.

April (26 days)
Louis thumbs at the bare skin of Harry’s tummy, the muscles beneath skin shifting as Harry giggles softly in his throat.

Louis rubs his thumb over Harry’s knuckles of the hand he’s got held in his, resting against the sheets as Harry sags into him, his skin warm and his smile sated.

It’s properly sunny for the first time in months, and they’ve got the curtains wide open to let as much of the sunlight in as they cuddle up in bed, Honey and Fudge at their feet. Louis kisses as the crook of Harry’s neck, Harry wriggling slightly when his eyelashes brush at his neck, his thumb teasing up to rub against his ribs.

The sunlight plays over the bed and catches at their hands, Harry’s hand covering his as he presses his palm flat to the mattress, eyes on the pale of Harry’s fingers between the tan of his own, skinny silver tied around Harry’s ring finger, the diamond sparkling in the light.

Harry shifts and Louis knows he’s looking at it too, can feel his smile as he leans back into him and twitches his fingers, his back warm against Louis’ chest.

‘I love you,’ Louis breathes just behind his ear, into his clean-smelling hair as Harry brings their hands to rest on his tummy, over his belly-button, shifting back even closer to Louis. He just smiles in response.

(22 days)

‘Honeysuckle!’ Harry exclaims, and Louis looks away from where he’s grooming at Toffee’s flank to where Harry’s picking a small orange flower, digging his nail into the end, before putting it at his mouth, sucking at the end of it.

Louis frowns at him and Harry smiles back before picking another, fiddling with it as he walks back to Louis, almost tripping over his own daisy-clad feet as Toffee wanders off to Caramel and Harry passes him the flower.

Louis sucks, Harry smiling encouragingly, as he tastes the sweet-grassy taste of it. He nods as Harry pulls it back, dropping it down onto the muddy ground.
‘S’ sweet,’ Louis nods, and Harry grins, resting his hand on his shoulder, ‘but you’re sweeter.’

Harry slaps his chest and Louis feigns being affronted before Harry kisses him, his grin silly as he presses a sweet kiss onto Louis’ lower lip. He cups at Louis’ jaw, thumbing at his cheekbone and pressing a kiss there just after.

‘I like your stubble,’ he says thoughtfully, and Louis scoffs, reaching up to scrub his hand over his scruffy jaw. ‘M’serious Lou, it’s so sexy.’

Louis pulls him in then, arm wound around his waist as he pulls him in for a deep kiss. Harry laughs the whole time, his wellingtons digging into the mud as Caramel and Toffee wander further into the field.

(19 days)

It starts to drizzle when they’re walking back from town, and Harry giggles, squeezing Louis’ hand as Louis pulls him in closer.

It starts to properly pour down when they approach the farm, and Louis wants to run home to the safety of warmth, but Harry clings to him and cups at his jaw with wet hands before he kisses him.

Louis’ sopping wet and freezing, but Harry’s smiling as he kisses him giddily, and Louis doesn’t need to think before his arms are around Harry’s waist.

Harry’s giggling as they kiss on the side of the road, the rain falling down in buckets around them.

(12 days)
‘You know, I can’t bath with you when you wriggle around so much.’ Louis scolds, but he carries on tickling Harry beneath the water, over his slick skin so that he writhes and water splashes over the edge softly. ‘You’re making such a mess.’

Harry squawks but his body crimps up, his legs curling in so that more water splashes and his body slides lower into the water, his back sliding down Louis’ chest as Louis tickles under his arms, Harry splashing as he tries to curl his body up defensively, his hair wet and pushed back out his eyes.

Louis scoffs before he stops tickling him, drawing back and leaning back in the bath, so that the only contact left is Harry’s skin against his inner thighs and his knees.

‘You’re an utter menace,’ Louis jokes before Harry launches himself at him, his hands poised to tickle him. Water slaps down onto the floor.

Louis catches his wrists, Harry’s knees squeaking at the floor of the tub as he holds his arms, pushing him back. Harry wriggles in his hold, his arms flexing and bending, but Louis holds him steady until his feet must be pressed against the other side.

‘Stay there before you make an even bigger mess,’ Louis reprimands, sitting up as Harry sits back against the taps.

Harry shakes his head and slides lower, his body curving so that he’s lying with his head next to the tap. His legs stretch out until his feet are in Louis’ lap, and he laughs softly to himself. ‘You’re such a dick.’

Louis circles his fingers around his skinny ankles, rubbing his thumb over the bone of them slowly and giving him a proud smile.

‘You love me anyway,’ he brags, contemplating pulling Harry back by his legs, holding under his knees and seeing how easy he can get him in his lap.

Harry sighs dreamily. ‘Yeah, I do.’
Louis scoops for the fragment of eggshell from the batter, hoping that Harry won’t notice, before he shakes it off onto the floor.

‘How’s it coming?’ Harry asks, coming up behind him.

‘Good, good,’ Louis lies, wondering if Harry will notice that there’s too much milk and it’s a bit lumpy.

Harry sighs before he’s edging Louis out of the way, reaching for the wooden spoon and pressing the lumps flat against the sides of the bowl. Louis slides him the flour and he takes it with a sweet smile before he’s pouring a dash more in.

He cracks the final egg perfectly, the line of the crack neat and equal before he sets the shell down next to all the messy equipment.

‘Does it taste okay?’ Louis asks, biting at his thumb.

Harry nudges the bowl towards him, his smile warm and radiant. ‘Try some yourself,’

Louis sucks some batter off his finger and nods quickly.

‘Tastes great.’ He affirms.

Harry looks willing to take his word, ready to carry on stirring the batter, before Louis swipes his finger through again and holds it up to him. Harry’s brow furrows and he looks soft and sweet and confused and Louis wants to wrap him up forever before he wiggles his finger, a droplet of batter dropping down onto the floor.

Harry’s lips twitch before he’s ducking his head to wrap his lips around Louis’ finger, sucking softly. Louis’ breath catches in his throat, Harry’s lips wrapped around his first finger with his tongue lapping softly, licking his digit clean.
Harry’s eyes are wired when he draws back, Louis’ finger shiny with his spit. Louis licks at his lower lip, Harry’s eyes dropping to catch the flicker of movement.

Harry takes a deep breath and turns back to his mixing bowl, Louis copies, acting as if nothing’s happened.

Louis’ never been good with handling sexual frustration, so after they pour the batter equally into two separate moulds, Louis swipes two fingers through the empty mixing bowl and wipes them down Harry’s cheek.

Harry’s face is textbook image for shock, before realization hits him and he copies Louis, wiping batter across his forehead, his fringe catching on the stickiness. Louis gawps before gathers more and rubs his fingers over Harry’s nose. He watches Harry wrinkle his nose straight after, batter dotted thickly on the tip.

Before Harry can think out his next move, Louis reaching for the bowl of icing sugar, scooped up in his fingers, and he lets it drizzle over Harry’s head, dotting his hair white.

Harry’s expression flicks to surprised before he’s got a handful of flour that he shoots at Louis. Louis laughs before hitting him back with sugar.

It ends with a mess on the kitchen floor, their clothing discarded in the corner for washing, and their skin pressed together, Louis’ shoulder blades aching where they’re pressed against the floor and Harry’s thighs spread over his hips.

(3 days)

Louis comes back with mud on his boots, smelling rancid and of rabbit feed. Harry’s not in the kitchen, and he can’t hear any other sound in the house.

He seems to have a smile glued to his face, says Chester (but all had agreed) now that they’re only days away, only mere days until Harry’s his, his and only his.
He piles the post up and sets it down beside the kettle, to be sorted out later. He has to sit down to peel off his boots, resting them beside the dogs’ food and water bowls. He pulls a glass from the cupboard above the breadbin, opening the fridge next and pouring himself a glass of orange juice.

He still can’t hear Harry, but he doesn’t think too much of it as he sets his glass down in the basin.

It’s not difficult to find Harry, finds him sitting in front of the front door, his body facing the direction of the kitchen but his head turned to look at the door. Louis frowns but steps closer toward him.

Harry looks up, eyes wide, as Louis steps between his bent knees. He looks down as Harry looks up, eyes trained to Harry’s as Harry wraps his arms around his knees. Harry breaks it first, turning his face to rest his cheek against Louis’ thigh, eyes fluttering closed as he breathes of hotly.

‘I can’t believe this is real.’ He mumbles ever so quiet. Louis lets him cling to him a bit longer before he encourages him up, letting him shift his hold to around his neck.

Louis strokes down his spine and Harry breathes out softly into his neck, barely audible.

‘We’re getting married in three days.’ He whispers, and Louis’ palms are starting to sweat. He’s petrified of where he thinks the conversation is going. ‘My family is coming tomorrow.’

Louis nods and holds onto him tight, lets him finish at his own pace.

‘I still can’t believe you’re real.’ He very near whimpers, and Louis presses his nose against his neck, drinks in his delicate scent.

‘I love you so much Harry,’

Harry clings to him harder.
Harry’s parents and sister arrive later afternoon, and Harry cries as he hugs them, near hysterical.

Louis hangs back to let them have the reunion they deserve. They’re an attractive family, he thinks, leaning in the doorway to the living room as Honey and Fudge nip around their ankles in a confused greeting.

Harry wipes at his tears and sniffs into his sleeve, his smile ecstatic as he reaches for Louis. Louis walks into his outstretched hand, letting Harry grip his wrist and pull him in.

His mum, Alana, pulls him into a bone-crushing hug that he’s sure someone of her slight size should not be able to manage. His father, Jeffery, gives him a strong handshake before he too hugs him, even tighter than Alana. Louis feels like he’s had his breath squeezed out of him by the time Lilly hugs him, whispering a threat of you hurt him and you will wake up without a dick into his ear that makes him bark with laughter.

Harry’s quick to take them to their rooms before he introduces them to Honey and Fudge, and then pulling on his wellingtons and pulling Louis along as he takes them to be introduced to everyone else who’s eagerly waiting in the kitchen, and then finally to introduce them to all the animals.

He’s a little bit ridiculous, but he’s absolutely glowing, and as soon as they’re all cuddled into the lounge, Harry pulls him into the kitchen and climbs into his arms, his legs around his waist and his arms around his neck as he lets Louis kiss him against the fridge.

The rehearsal dinner is loud, and Louis squeezes Harry’s hand under the table every few minutes, eating clumsily with his left hand in order to keep their fingers tangled.

Zayn gives a long speech that makes Louis’ cheeks colour and Harry giggle wildly. Niall gets drunk surprisingly quickly, and he slurs his speech. Harry laughs at him as Niall makes kissing
noises at the two of them before improvising a Madonna song that has Harry cackling.

Harry feeds Louis dessert, guiding forkfuls of tiramisu into his mouth and kissing it off his lips. Lilly says something crude to her brother, and Harry leans back, his arm still resting around Louis’ shoulders as he frowns at her.

‘It’s our wedding, we’re allowed to be disgustingly sweet.’ He says with a pout, before he’s leaning back into Louis, licking the tiramisu from his tongue as he pushes the taste of sparkling wine into Louis’ mouth, and Louis is honestly so in love.

Louis rubs his thumb into his hip, snuck under the hem of his dress-shirt, and Harry curves into him, edging his chair closer, ducked small into his side before blinking up at Louis.

Louis smiles, squeezing his hip before he dips in to kiss him again.

When they get home, Louis pulls Harry into the dining room and makes him sit in the last piece of their puzzle.

(0 days)

Jeffery walks Harry down the aisle, their arms linked, and Louis’ heart is pounding in his chest. His cheeks hurt from how wide he’s smiling.

Harry has two or three small white flowers tucked behind his ear, the flowers from the field where Louis had taken him for their first date. He thinks he’s going to cry.

Harry’s hands are shaking when he holds them, and his eyes are shiny and wide as he recites his vows, squeezing at his warm hands. His throat clogs tight as Harry says his vows, keeping their gaze steady and Louis feels like they’re alone in the world.

Their reception is loud and long, and they have their first dance as Zayn croons into the microphone, his arms around Harry’s waist as Harry clings to his shoulders, swaying gently.
It drizzles in the evening, pattering against the shelter as Louis taps at his champagne glass with his knife, gaining attention before he can give his speech. Harry kisses him again when he sits down, earning a round of applause and a sweet blush across his cheeks.

They cut their cake with both their hands wrapped around the knife, pressing into the icing as Harry squeezes his eyes shut, grinning. Louis shoves cake into Harry’s mouth, smearing icing across his face and dotting his nose with buttercream. Harry squeals with laughter before he’s shoving a tiny bit of cake over Louis’ nose.

They get drunk off champagne and cocktails and sway on the dance floor, ending their night with Louis pressed to Harry’s back, his arm resting over Harry’s waist as he kisses his neck, moving against him slow and hot.

Afterward, Harry’s fingers lock with his own and hang over his waist, their skin tacky and warm beneath the sheets.

Harry brings his hand up to his lips, kisses over the ring and pulls Louis’ hand into his chest, to press at his heartbeat. Harry presses back against him, and Louis snuggles in closer, wanting to be as close as possible, desperate to match his heartbeat to Harry’s.

He presses his lips to Harry’s neck, no real fire behind it, and squeezes Harry’s fingers where they’re slotted between his own.

Harry falls asleep with a new surname, and Louis falls asleep with Harry’s outbreath of Love you spinning around behind his eyelids.

Seven Years Forward

‘Felix!’ Harry shouts from the living room. ‘Give the scissors to Papa or else I’ll call Daddy!’
Louis hears Felix squeal before there’s the light pitter-patter of footsteps hurrying towards the kitchen.

‘Sorry Daddy.’ Felix says, pushing the scissors back onto the worktop before running back out the kitchen.

Harry comes in moments later, holding a wriggling Felix on his hip before he deposits him in a chair. He reaches to scratch through Savannah’s hair before sidling up next to Louis, pressing a soft kiss to his cheek. ‘I’ll finish dinner if you keep them entertained.’

Louis turns around completely to set his hands on his husband’s hips, leaning in for a long kiss that has Harry sighing into his mouth, before he ends with a quick peck. ‘Deal.’

Harry takes over from Louis, continuing his job chopping the mushrooms as Louis sits down at the head of the table, diving into a story about pirates that has Savannah and Felix both squealing with laughter as Harry listens with a smile.

Pepper sniffs at his ankles and Harry shifts his foot so she scampers off to tussle with Bentley at the feet of Louis’ chair, growling playfully.

Once supper is finished, Louis makes sure that Felix eats all his vegetables while Harry feeds Savannah, Louis cooing at the baby faces he pulls to get her to eat.

Harry carries Felix upstairs, tickling his rounded tummy as he runs the bath and Louis lays Savannah out on the changing mat, blowing raspberries into her stomach so that she squeals with laughter.

After Louis’ put Savannah to bed, he comes to join Harry where he’s washing Felix’s hair, wet faceloth on his forehead to stop the shampoo from running into his eyes. Louis kneels behind Harry and brackets his body with his hands gripping to the lip of the bath on either side of him, and Harry giggles as Felix spits out water at them, rubbing soap over his sponge just so that he can squeeze foam out and blow it at his daddies. Harry just laughs and lets Felix do as he pleases and Louis hooks his chin over his shoulder, his knees bent awkwardly so he can hold Harry until he gets Harry to lean back into him and he can reach past him to hold out his fingers for Felix to grab onto. Louis presses an open mouthed kiss to Harry’s neck that sends shivers down his spine before Harry is shooing him, wanting to get Felix out the bath before he cries about having pruney fingers.
Louis dresses Felix in his pyjamas while Harry drains the bath, weaselling Felix into a pair of socks before drawing back his Superman duvet and setting him down, pillows arranged in a ‘V’ for him to sleep in as Louis tucks one foot under himself and opens up Felix’s bedtime story of the week.

Harry watches from the door for a while, arms crossed over his chest as he watches his husband read to his son, making him giggle with different voices and accents and funny faces. Sometimes Harry thinks he’s the luckiest man in the world.

Once Felix has fallen asleep, thumb tucked between his lips, Louis runs his fingers through his honey-coloured hair and rubs his thumb over his soft cheek.

Harry’s already tiptoed into their bedroom, so Louis bounces back downstairs to quickly take Pepper and Bentley outside, folding his arms over his chest to fend off the nipping cold as he waits for them to be finished so he can get back inside, back upstairs.

When he gets back to their bedroom, Harry’s already undressed. Louis locks the door, but keeps the key in the hole in case they need to bolt down the hallway, before he’s letting his hands settle on his husband’s hips, kissing him slowly and sweetly.

Harry wraps his arms around his neck, grinning into it as Louis’ hands drift lower, squeezing at the supple flesh of his arse. Harry giggles softly, one arm falling to rest on his waist, creeping down to toy with his hem. Louis kisses him again, and if he focuses hard enough, he can still taste the raspberries on his tongue from all those years ago.

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