Living Reflections From A Dream

by everaining

Summary

When Louis arrives at the family orange plantation that summer, the last thing he expects is to find an arrogant, semi-naked university student from California lounging on his bed.

(Cue three weeks of pining, sexual frustration and awkward teenage boners)

Notes

Hello! Just a few quick things to note:

1. This fic will contain vague references to homophobia, relating to both the Roman Catholic religion and the era that the story is set in. None of the views expressed reflect my own, nor do I condone them.

2. I apologise now for any inaccuracies about orange farming in Spain. Although my research was thorough, there will undoubtedly be some dubious information at times... sorry :/

3. Above all else this is a work of fiction, and has nothing to do with real life. None of the opinions expressed by any of the characters necessarily correlate to my own. It’s just a story, nothing more.
With that out of the way, happy reading!
June 21st, 1985

Louis is sweating.

He’s sweating because the temperature in this damned city is hotter than hell during the summer months, and the air conditioning unit in the taxi cab is apparently as shitty as they come. His fringe is matted to his forehead and underarms are unpleasantly damp due to the fact that he chose today of all days to fucking layer his shirts, and the leather seat beneath his ass is sticking backs of his knees. Even when he rolls down the window to try to let some air in, he is only met with a dry and endless wave of heat that licks at his skin and burns his eyes.

Seville in June might as well be the fucking Sahara desert for all Louis knows. He should probably be used to it now, what with seventeen years of Spanish summers under his belt, but he swears down that every time he comes here it’s worse.

“Global warming,” Valentina had told him sadly during one particularly deadly heatwave a few years back, “Polar ice cap is melting, Louis. Es no good.”

And Louis has to agree with her there, because this weather certainly ‘es no good,’ especially when one is longing for lush green grass and English rain. He doesn’t blame the Sevillian locals for fleeing the city during the summer months, heading somewhere cooler until Autumn rolls in and it’s safe to return. In fact, he commends their wisdom. When July comes around, things will undoubtedly get ten times worse. Unfortunately for him, the searing heat provides the very thing that keeps his family coming here back year after year.

That thing being oranges, of course.

Orange farming has run in the Tomlinson family for decades, having started when Louis’ great-grandfather Sebastian Tomlinson, had bought the small estate on a whim after a vivid dream about being happily surrounded by miles and miles of citrus fruit. He firmly believed it to be his calling in life — an instruction from God himself, or so they say. In any case, he sowed his seeds and lo and behold, the Tomlinson naranjal was born, spreading love and fresh citrus fruit to all.

But even great-grandpa Sebastian never dreamed that his small family business would grow to such enormous heights. That happened long after his time of course, when some smart business-head came up with the idea of marmalade and consequentially transformed Tomlinson’s Oranges into a household name across the Western world.

Which brings us to the more recent generations of the Tomlinson family; Louis’ father, Dean Tomlinson, is as commercially-minded as they come, and since inheriting the company has taken it upon himself to invest every ounce of his being into further enhancing the family business. He drives a Chevrolet Corvette, has been married to two women (and is currently engaged to a third), and spends the majority of his evenings smoking and playing poker with all his corporate pals.

In short, he is a dick.

This statement was confirmed earlier this morning when, instead of picking up his own teenage son from the airport, Dean sent a taxi cab because he wasn’t, quote, ‘feeling too good.’

(read: he is hungover).
Louis sighs, grimacing as he shifts against the hot leather. Within half an hour they’ve made it out of the main city and into the more rural surrounding areas, characterised by miles and miles of yellow fields and distant, faded mountains. With the window still half open, he is able to smell the estate before he sees it: tangy and bitter, the scent of fresh citrus carries in the air, the promise of orange trees now only a few minutes away.

He thanks the driver when they finally come to a halt, politely refusing his help with the luggage as he exits the car. Thanks to the local boys who took him under their wing all those years ago, his Spanish is good enough that he can speak it almost as naturally as he can speak his mother tongue, and he’s been told by many that his accent would be difficult to tell from a native’s. He feels as though he’d picked up the language almost in the same way that one learns how to swim; kicking his legs as a natural response to being thrown in at the deep end, flailing about stupidly until he eventually found himself above water.

“Mierda,” he mutters to himself now, glaring down at the artful sweat-patches that decorate his front. No doubt his hair is a greasy mess after sleeping during the plane ride too, and all he really wants at this point is a cold shower and a glass of Rioja, perhaps followed by an afternoon dip in the pool. He doesn’t think he can handle the onslaught of obnoxious kisses that Valentina is likely to assault him with as soon as he steps through the door.

There are distant voices coming from the back garden, and Louis takes the opportunity to sneak inside unnoticed. With a bit of luck, he might even have time to drop off his things upstairs and have a quick lie down before having to make himself known. He patters up the stone steps, his suitcase in one hand and a travel bag in the other, and slips in through the open door to the hallway.

It is thankfully cooler in here. Golden light floods in through the high windows, casting an ethereal glow across the hardwood floor. Judging by the lack of noise, the downstairs level of the house is empty, and Louis can only assume that everyone is either napping or out back. Either way, he is immensely grateful to have this pocket of time to change his outfit into something more weather appropriate before being accosted. As quietly as possible, he slips off his Chuck Taylors by the door and heads up the staircase.

The house is just as it has always been; creaky and well-polished, with the comforting smell of fresh linen emanating from the laundry room and the constant chirp of bee-eaters floating in through the open windows. The walls are dusty pink in colour and seem to soak up the all the heat and citrus-scented air deep into its plaster, trapping it there for an eternity. In thousands of years to come, when archaeologists eventually dig up the ruins of this place, Louis is certain that the crumbled remains will still hold the smell of oranges and warm bedsheets in their dust.

He shuffles across the quiet landing towards his room, which is situated at the end of the corridor. The door is slightly ajar, an indication that Valentina had been in there earlier to change his bedding, and perhaps even to leave a little bar of turrón on his pillow like she used to when he was little. Louis smiles at the thought.

He pushes the door open with his foot, fussing over his suitcase as he tries to get it through the threshold. He’s so preoccupied with it in fact, that he neglects to notice that anything is at all out of place.

That is until a deep, male voice breaks the quiet.

“Hey, man.”

Louis almost shrieks in surprise, snapping his head up so fast it’s a wonder he doesn’t give himself whiplash.
His wide eyes zero in on the bed, upon which a young man — perhaps in his early twenties, give or take — is comfortably splayed out, with his legs crossed casually at the ankles and a book laying open on his lap, staring right back at Louis with a lazy smile on his face. His shirt is sky blue and unbuttoned to just above his navel, exposing a sliver of black ink on his stomach, and his feet are completely bare. Not so much as a sock. Just naked toes on Louis’ sheets.

Louis blinks.

“You must be Dean’s son.” The man props himself up, setting his book beside him on the mattress. His hair is damp, Louis notices, smoothed back and hanging in dark ringlets about his shirt collar. The hue of his skin is rosy, and his eyes are a little red-rimmed from chlorine irritation, contrasting the striking green of his irises. When he smiles, a dimple pops in the left corner of his mouth. “I’m Harry.” He says.

Which… Okay?

The thing is, ‘Harry’ means nothing to Louis. Nor does he know why ‘Harry’ appears to have taken it upon himself to move all of his clothes and books and other miscellaneous items into Louis’ room while he was gone. He can find no explanation for the weird little Buddha ornaments on the window sill, or the Walkman radio playing Everybody Wants to Rule the World on the bedside table. He can’t explain the scent of herbal shampoo lingering in the air, or the tattered leather loafers by the door, or the stacks of hand-written papers littering every surface. And he certainly can’t explain the weird things his stomach is doing at the sight of a bare, tattooed chest, making him want to burrow himself deep into the ground and hide and never, never come out again.

“You weren’t expecting me.” Is what Harry realises then. His smile is amused.

“Um,” Louis coughs, startled by the congestion in his throat. “Well… no? Not really?”

“Sorry about that, mate. Must have given you a fright.” He doesn’t look very sorry. He’s actually yawning when he says it, stretching his arms up above his head and cracking his spine. “I’m a friend of your dad’s, see. Your parents are renting me a room while I’m out here working.”

Louis doesn’t really know what he’s more offended by: the fact that this man genuinely thinks that Patricia is his mother, or that his father actually gave away his fucking bedroom without offering him so much as a heads up. Surely that would have been the courteous thing to do? Just a quick text to let him know he was being ousted out would have sufficed.

“Oh, your things are next door,” Harry informs him, picking up on Louis’ obvious bewilderment. “Valentina had them packed up I think. Although, I did find a tub of bath salts under the sink. Are they yours?”

Louis stares at him blankly, because of course they’re fucking his, this is his room for Christ’s sake, who else’s bath salts would they be?

“No.” He finds himself saying. He shifts awkwardly. “They’re — they’re probably Ana’s.”

“Ana?”

“My sister.” Louis clarifies. “She’s not here yet.”

“I see.” Harry nods, clearly less than interested.

They’re quiet for a moment.
Then, thanks to his compulsive need to fill the silence, Louis tacks on dumbly, “But she probably won’t mind you keeping them. She’s got tonnes of shit like that anyway, definitely way more than she needs, so…” he only just resists the urge to punch himself in the face, “…so they’re all yours.”

Harry smiles again, a languid grin that looks like warm treacle. “Oh, well. Cheers mate.” He ruffles his damp hair before focusing his eyes on Louis once more. He looks him over. “You need a hand carrying your bags, or…?”

Louis fish-mouths for a second before realising that yes — yes he is being politely kicked out of his own room, and no, this man has not once apologised for his unwanted presence.

He snaps his mouth shut and inhales slowly, trying to stop his head from spinning with all of this new and unpleasant information.

“No. Thank you. I’ll be fine.” He manages.

“‘Kay.” Harry shrugs, laying back down against the pillows and reaching for his book. He isn’t even looking at Louis anymore. “See you later, man.”

“Yeah. See you.” Louis mutters. Then he is reversing his suitcase back through the threshold and closing the door behind him.

Once safely back in the corridor, Louis stops short, taking a moment to process this turn of events. It seems that his room, or what had been his room (for seventeen years, no less), has now been commandeered by a tall, wet Englishman with bare feet, a ridiculously slow voice, and a collection of porcelain bird figurines.

As family holidays go — and they don’t usually go very well — this one might just take the biscuit.

Scowling, Louis ignores the muffled opening lines of Simple Mind’s *Don’t You*, and begrudgingly makes his way towards the guest room at the other end of the hall.

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“¡Louis! ¡Has crecido tan alto, cariño!”

Valentina’s voice calls out to him the minute that he steps onto the kitchen, and not a moment later he finds himself engulfed in her arms, enveloped in her familiar, fruity scent. She pulls back only to grasp his cheeks and press three wet kisses to his forehead, before hugging him close once again, babbling about how much she’s missed him and how handsome he’s become, and Louis can do little else but stand there and accept her affections.

“How have you seen my father around?” He asks when they finally separate.

“Señor Dean is in back yard,” she ruffles his hair and leans closer, lowering her voice to a whisper. “Señora Patricia no es happy. She is being sour puss about wedding arrangement again. *Es muy estupido.*”

Louis rolls his eyes upon hearing this. Of all the words to describe the nature of his father’s new fiancée, *muy estupido* are certainly some of the most fitting. He exits through the back door to find her lounging by the poolside in a distasteful gold bathing suit and a floppy sunhat, her permanent scowl concealed behind a pair of large round sunglasses. Even from a distance, Louis can spot the unimpressed curl of her painted lips.

His father sits beside her, smoking a cigarette and reading the newspaper. He glances up when Louis
stalks towards them.

“Louis, my boy! How was your—“

“Why is he in my room?”

Patricia scoffs, reaching for her mojito and mumbling something under her breath that sounds a lot like ‘oh, here we go’. Louis pointedly ignores her.

“No, now,” his father’s voice is placating, almost weary as he takes another drag from his cigarette. “There’s no need to be terse. Harry needed a place to stay, so we offered to help him out. There’s nothing to get upset about. As soon as he’s gone, you can move back—“

“But why did you give him my room specifically?” Louis cuts across, his skin prickling with frustration. “Why couldn’t he just take the guest room?”

“The AC in the guest room is caput.” His father explains with a wave of his hand, “He would have roasted in there.”

“So I have to roast in there instead?”

“He’s a paying guest, Louis, what else would you have me do?”

Louis stares at him, dumbstruck. “You — you didn’t even tell me—“

“Look, you’re making a mountain out of a molehill here, son. It’s for only for a few weeks anyway.” His father sniffs, squinting in the direction of the orange grove beyond the wall. “Who knows, you might even get on with him. He’s a smart lad — an economics major, no less. He goes to university in the States, did you know?”

It’s all Louis can do not to start pulling his own hair out. He pinches the bridge of his nose and sighs. “Dad. I honestly couldn’t care less where he goes to uni. I just want my room back.”

“Sorry, son. No can do.”

“But—“

“Louis, please don’t act selfishly here. Harry is our guest and you should treat him as such.” His father fixes him with a firm look. “Now, if you're bored you can make yourself useful and ask Valentina if she needs help in the kitchen. We’re eating in tonight.”

With that, he pointedly turns the page of his newspaper and carries on reading. In other words, the discussion is closed.

Patricia sips her cocktail like a smug cat, and Louis huffs indignantly as he turns away, the white-hot glare of the Spanish sun mercilessly mocking him from its azure sky.

And so it begins.

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Come dinnertime, the house is filled with the delightful scent of Valentina’s signature bacalao con tomate, which wafts through the open French doors and eventually draws Louis from his afternoon nap. Not that it had been particularly restful. His father hadn’t been joking about the broken AC unit, and the guest room is small and cramped enough that it traps the remains of the midday heat between its walls like a bread oven. He awakes to the unpleasant sensation of sweat pooling in the small of his
back, sticking him to the mattress.

Ten minutes later, when he trudges out onto the patio, he finds their guest already seated beneath the arbour.

The first thing Louis notices is that he’s changed his outfit. Long gone is the baby blue blouse, and in its place is a crisp white shirt (albeit still less than buttoned) coupled with a pair of slim-fit jeans which serve to elongate his slender legs where they are crossed beneath the table. His hair is dry now too, a rich chocolate brown in colour and artfully curled to frame his angular face. His body is reclined against the back of his chair like a sated cat basking in the sunshine, and there’s a cigarette between the fingers of his left hand where it rests comfortably against his thigh.

Louis’ father and Patricia are also present, smoking cigarettes of their own as they pass around the bread basket. They’re laughing, the three of them. Already engaged in some highly amusing and intellectually stimulating conversation which Louis likely has no interest at all in attempting to follow.

He takes the empty seat beside Patricia just as Valentina brings out a pitcher of fresh juice.

“Absolute nonsense,” his father is saying, blue eyes crinkling with mirth, “That man is the best thing to happen to America since Buddy Holly. This economic boost is going to last them years, I guarantee you, which is a bloody miracle after the state Carter left things in.”

Harry chuckles along, and Louis’ eyes follow the sound. He watches the man take a drag from his cig, breathing out a puff of grey air before saying in his slow, syrupy voice, “Forgive me, Dean, but I’m going to have to disagree with you there. Reagan may have regulated government spending and reduced taxes and all that jazz, but he still has yet to make good on his pledge to balance the federal budget. His debt level is through the roof. Not to mention the fact that he’s added more trade barriers than any president since the nineteen-thirties.” He pauses and smiles mischievously, dimple making an impromptu appearance. “And if trade should become restricted, then how on earth am I going to keep buying your delicious marmalade when I get back home? I am a student, after all, Sir. My budget can only stretch so far.”

Louis’ father laughs boisterously. He’s clearly delighted to have found such a keen sparring partner. Louis has never heard someone as young as Harry speak with such fluidity and intellectual capability before, especially not on the topic of American trade, and promptly decides that his breezy self-confidence must be a defect of living in the States for so long.

His aversion to shoes must be a similar story.

“Please,” Patricia speaks up beside him, her native accent curling around her syllables, “Enough talk of politics now. I would like to know how Harry is liking the city so far, hm?”

“Oh, very much so, Señorita,” Harry assures her as he digs into his meal. “Although I haven’t had the chance to look around as much as I’d like to yet. Getting this essay done is my first objective, so you’ll have to forgive me if I spend most of my time here with my nose buried in a book.”

“But of course, sweetheart. You do whatever you must.” She smiles at him fondly, the upturn of her lips sickeningly sweet. “Have you travelled much before?”

“Not extensively. I’ve been here and there I suppose. Asia, mostly.”

“Oh?” Louis’ father raises his eyebrows in interest. “For studying purposes, or…”

Harry shakes his head. “No, not as such. I took about four months out before uni to go
backpacking.”

Louis pushes his fish around his plate, listening to his father and Patricia prod their guest for stories about his many adventures. As usual, he feels somewhat out of the loop for being the youngest at the table, but this is something he’s grown used to by now. He’s even learned to enjoy it. The people around here kiss his cheeks and ruffle his hair, perhaps make a passing comment about how much he’s grown (which he never has), and then promptly leave him to his own thoughts in favour of striking up a conversation with the real adults. And he likes it that way. Nothing is expected of him.

The manner in which Harry speaks makes it pretty clear that he has never known such a feeling. Louis can tell that this man is more than familiar with being the centre of attention.

“I started out in Thailand, if I remember correctly,” He’s telling them now, still smiling to himself as if recalling some private inside joke. “I was keen to see Ayutthaya and Chiang Man, among other cities. After that, I shackled up in a little fishing village in Vietnam for about a week, before going on to Cambodia where a friend of mine was staying at the time. Malaysia was a brief pit stop, purely because the weather at the time was so miserable, and we eventually wound up in Singapore. Completely empty-pocketed, of course. We had to scrounge for shrapnel in a local diner.”

Louis is baffled by how he says it all so casually, as if backpacking across Asia is something that every young man does in his free time. It’s not. Louis can’t think of a single person he knows who’s been to Asia, let alone had the time and freedom to skip from country to country as they pleased. He tries to quash down the envy he feels — envy that Harry is so well travelled and well cultured, and has all these conveniently placed friends situated around the world. He can’t help but resent him a little bit too, with his stupid Americanisms and cocky-yet-appropriately-self-deprecating attitude. He has no idea what has his father and Patricia so smitten.

“I must admit, the whole thing was thoroughly impulsive.” Harry tacks on, chewing thoughtfully. “I was too young to realise the good sense in planning ahead. But I suppose there’s no better time to be reckless than when you’re eighteen.”

“Oh, of course,” Louis’ father agrees with a smile. “Hear that, Lou? That could be you next summer, off to see the world.”

Suddenly everyone’s eyes are upon him, and Louis has to resist the urge to squirm uncomfortably. It’s not that he’s shy or anything — It’s just that conversation has not always been his strong point. Especially when he’s so used to being the baby of the family, and has grown up being spoken for rather than spoken to.

In the end, he settles for a quick nod, and a noncommittal, “Mmmhm.” He hopes that that will be enough of a contribution for the topic to move on.

But when his eyes flit up two seconds later he finds that Harry is still watching him, the same lazy curl to his lips as before.

“Are you interested in travel?” He asks, his voice like hot caramel dripping from a spoon.

The question is posed in such a way that Louis is left wondering whether he is actually interested in the answer or simply asking for the sake of being polite in front of his hosts.

Either way, he can’t help but turn warm with embarrassment at being directly addressed again.

“I guess so.” He responds with a shrug of his shoulder, looking down at his plate.

“Obsessed with atlases, this one,” his father smiles fondly, placing a hand on the back of Louis’
head, “His dorm room at school was practically covered in maps, wasn’t it, Lou?”

Louis shrugs again, hoping that his father will drop the subject. He doesn’t.

“Where was that place you were so desperate to go last year?” He presses, furrowing his eyebrows thoughtfully, “…Somewhere in Morocco, wasn’t it? Casablanca?”

Louis picks at his fish, the hot blush still prickling his cheeks.

“Chefchaouen.” He mutters.

“Chefchaouen, that was it!” His father snaps his fingers, “Have you ever heard of this Chefchaouen, Harry? Because I certainly hadn’t until Louis started prattling on about it.”

“Can’t say I have, sir.” Harry shakes his head, taking a sip of his wine. When he places his glass down again the movement is slow, as if it might shatter should he set it down to hard. “Though I’d be interested to hear about it at some point.”

He wouldn’t. Louis can tell.

“I don’t know much,” he says.

It’s a lie. He knows everything.

He’s read about Chefchaouen in every worn travel book he could find in the Westminster library. He’s torn pages from their spines and pinned them above his bed like a giant scrapbook — a shrine to all of the wonderful places he will never go. He knows about the handmaid jewellery stalls and dusty, narrow alleyways. He knows about the mosques, their carpets woven with silence. He knows about the city walls, painted bright blue in an effort to reflect the sky, like arriving in the exact place where Heaven touches the earth: indigo, cobalt, navy, denim. Blue on blue on blue, a whole fucking architectural ocean of it as far as the eye can see. A labyrinth of ultramarine.

Louis knows these things. He knows what paradise looks like, and he isn’t willing to share that knowledge with anybody. Especially not Harry the phoney Englishman. As if he’d understand it.

The conversation moves on, naturally, and Louis sits in silence whilst his father asks Harry about his university course. He’s studying at Berkley, which Louis knows full well is one of those fancy establishments set up exclusively to educate the children of stupid rich old fuckers, and he kind of wants to laugh. He wants to laugh at how ridiculously impressive this man’s life is. How ridiculously free.

Apparently Harry can talk the hind legs off a horse when he gets going, because there’s barely a moment’s silence throughout the whole duration of the meal. Everything he says is so horribly intelligent too; he’s talking about bloody Greek literature by the time Valentina brings out the dessert, banging on about Homer and Hesiod like they’re old schoolmates of his, and Louis’ father is lapping it up and smiling so wide it looks painful, and the whole display is making Louis feel so, so inadequate. He wonders how it is that he has known his father his whole life, and has never once managed to impress him as much as this virtual-stranger is doing right now.

When the opportunity finally arises, he excuses himself from the table under the guise of being tired. He kisses Patricia goodnight at the request of his father and bids the two men farewell.

“Night, man,” Harry responds as Louis stands to leave.

The words are bland. He is too focused on lighting his third cigarette to look up.
June 22nd

At 3.46am, Louis is still wide awake. Even with the windows flung wide open the guest room still feels like a sauna, so he’s had to strip right down to his boxers and cast the bed sheets aside to avoid death by heat stroke. Now he’s just laying there with his hands on his stomach, staring up at the ceiling through the darkness and thinking. Thinking, thinking, thinking, with the gears of his brain churning like the insides of an overworked machine.

He fiddles idly with his necklace, rotating the small silver crucifix between his thumb and forefinger. It was a baptism gift from Father Manuel. The chain has broken and replaced a few times over the years, but Louis has never stopped wearing it, not even to play football or rugby. The only time he ever takes it off is when he takes a rare dip in the lake, scared that it might snap off and become lost in the depths of the water. He’d always leave it carefully on the grass bank, placed in the sole of his right shoe.

His mother once had an identical one. She used to hold the pendant in her hand sometimes when she was praying in church, or before family meals, and Louis would copy her. He would clasp the little cross tight in his hands and try to keep up with the strange words that Father Manuel and the rest of the congregation were reciting. It took him a while to learn the prayers by heart, because learning things has never been his strong suit. Mum had to help him quite a bit with that.

When he closes his eyes and thinks really hard, he can still conjure up her voice in his head.

“Dios te salve, Maria,” she would say quietly, kneeling at Louis’ bedside as he lay there tucked up, stroking his fringe back with her gentle fingers. “Llena eres de gracia. El Señor es contigo…”

“Bendita tú eres entre todas las mujeres,” Louis would always butt in at that point, grinning because that was his favourite part.

Blessed art thou amongst women.

‘Hail Mary’ was a celebration of motherhood, and back then he was lucky enough to have the most gracious, caring mother in all of the world.

Louis lets the necklace drop to his chest with a sigh and readjusts his head on the pillows. He doesn’t know why he dwells on these things. He really doesn’t.

In the end, throws his arm over his face to block out the dim slivers of moonlight, and waits impatiently for sleep to take him.

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Louis has come to believe that there is no one on this earth who loves Tomlinson’s marmalade more than Niall Horan.

No, really. The boy would happily guzzle the stuff straight from the jar. In fact, Louis has often witnessed him doing just that, dipping a teaspoon into the orange jelly and eating it like he would an ice cream sundae. It’s both fascinating and disgusting, but Louis allows it because it’s far from the weirdest thing he’s seen Niall do at this point.

Being the son of a Valencian mother and an Irish expat father, Niall is in pretty much the same boat as Louis, aside from the fact that he lives in Spain full time whilst Louis only spends a maximum of two months. Niall speaks Catalan with his mum and sisters, English with his dad, and Spanish with
everyone else. The way he switches between the three so fluidly is quite remarkable, and often leaves Louis blinking in surprise when he dips from language to language in the middle of a conversation.

Right now, Niall is sat outside with his feet up on the table and a jar of marmalade in his lap, reading the local paper. He’s got a pair of sunglasses perched on his nose and his skin is an impressive shade of lobster red. Apparently the Irish don’t tan well.

“I’m gonna ask Cristina to have sex with me tonight,” he says matter-of-factly, his eyes skimming the business ads.

Louis itches his calf. The bloody midges really have it in for him today, he swears to god. There are little red bites all up his legs.

“Since when were you dating Cristina?” he asks absently.

“I dunno.” Niall shrugs, “For a couple of months maybe. We really hit it off at the April fair. You should have seen us dancing, Lou, I was like Patrick fucking Swayze out there.”

“I’m sure you were, Ni.”

“We made out in her car after, y’know. I didn’t put the moves on or anything though, ‘cos I promised I’d be a gentleman, and I’m nothing if not a man of my word.”

“Right. Of course.”

Louis isn’t really listening. Niall doesn’t seem to care.

“Her parents are, like, devout Roman Catholic though,” he continues prattling, “So they probably wouldn’t be into the whole sex before marriage thing.”

“Doesn’t mean Cristina won’t be.” Louis offers.

“Well, I’m hoping not. I mean she’s been a right tease this whole time, you know. She keeps giving me the eyes at Sunday mass.”

Louis snorts, but he’s not even surprised. A lot of girls give Niall Horan the eyes at Sunday mass. They also give him the eyes at the fruit market, and across the Plaza de España, and everywhere else for that matter. You could say he’s somewhat of a hit with the ladies.

Last summer there had been this girl called Gabi, if Louis remembers correctly. Gabriella Alvarez-Sosa. She had come from Salamanca or Valladolid or somewhere, and she was rather beautiful. All big eyes and curly blonde hair and short sundresses. She’d attracted more than a couple of suitors. But of course, Niall was the only one who caught her attention. He’s a proper flirt when he wants to be. Louis is convinced he could charm the pants off almost anyone, and that’s exactly what he did with good old Gabi in almost no time at all. Within about three days he had her sitting on his lap and stroking his hair and lighting his cigarettes for him. Louis and the other boys didn’t even have it in him to be jealous, they were that impressed.

“I think I’m gonna take her on a date first,” Niall ponders aloud, “A tapas bar maybe. Do you reckon she’d like it at El Toro, Lou?”

Louis is about to open his mouth and tell Niall that El Toro is always full of creepy old men and their flea-ridden dogs, and possibly the least romantic setting possible, when some movement catches his eye in the distance.
“Uh oh,” Niall sings, “Gringo alert.”

Louis rolls his eyes. *Gringo alert,* indeed.

He’s not wrong though. Harry has just come through the gate at the far end of the garden. He’s been in the orange grove with Sancho, the head gardener, most likely gathering information for his paper. Some sort of a study on *social and economic sustainability through organic agriculture, particularly regarding the citrus sectors of Spain,* or so he’s been told.

Yeah. Louis doesn’t know either.

Harry looks like a right pretentious twat, wearing this big floral print shirt and white shorts. His hair is tied up in a bun, and there’s a cigarette perched behind his ear, a couple of books under his arm. The absolute picture of a self-righteous college student.

Louis narrows his eyes and watches him talk animatedly with Sancho. All big hand gestures and witty jokes. He even manages to get the old man to crack a smile, which Louis has never once witnessed in all his life. Not *once.* Yet there he is now, chuckling over this stupid pun about irrigation like it’s the funniest damn thing in the world.

Louis turns to Niall.

“I think everyone’s gone mad.” he says.

“It’ll pass,” Niall assures him, nonplussed. “I’m telling you, this is what happens when Americans are involved. They can’t help but shake things up a bit. It’s just their way.”

“He’s not even American.”

“But he’s as good as. He certainly dresses like one.”

Louis tracks Harry’s movement across the lawn. He bids Sancho farewell at the shed, shaking the old man’s calloused hand, before turning and heading up towards the house.

Louis groans. “He’s coming.”

“Oh. Shall we make a run for it?”

“He’s literally looking right at us, Niall.”

“So? We could just make out like there’s a hornet or something —”

“Just shut up.” Louis hisses.

A few seconds later, Harry walks up the steps and onto the patio.

He stops a few feet in front of Louis’ chair, one hand tucked into his pocket and the other supporting the books beneath his arm. The sun catches in his green wheel of irises.

Louis watches as a dark tendril of hair slips loose from Harry’s bun, curling over his left eyebrow. He swallows.

“Hey.” Harry smiles pleasantly.

“Hey.” Louis nods in return.
There is a weird sort of tension in the air. One that Louis isn’t altogether sure even exists, or if it’s just something he’s making up in his head.

“This is Niall.” He says a bit too quickly, because he’s worried that these extended periods of silence are going to kill him.

Niall grins and waggles his fingers. “Buenos días.”

“What’s up, man. Nice to meet you.” Harry nods politely. He is courteous enough not to question the fact that Niall is eating marmalade from a spoon, and instead turns his attention back to Louis.

Louis resists the urge to squirm in his seat.

“It’s a nice day out,” Harry says.

For a second, Louis is worried that his brain will short circuit before he manages to think of an answer, leaving him stuttering like a fool. He briefly wonders if Niall’s fake hornet plan would be such a bad idea after all.

“It is,” he says in the end.

*If you enjoy sweating like a pig, that is.*

Harry nods, his surveying the patio thoughtfully.

“I might go for a dip later.”

Louis isn’t sure if Harry is just thinking aloud, or if he’s actually asking if Louis wants to *join* him or something. He glances to Niall for help, but all he gets his a confused face and a shrug.

“That sounds nice.”


*Please go away now.*

Harry smiles at him, readjusting the books in his grip.

“Do you have sunscreen?”

For a split second, Louis stupidly thinks that Harry is checking whether or not Louis is *wearing* sunscreen, like he’s concerned for the health of his skin or something. It takes him a few moments to catch up to the fact that no, Harry is asking to *borrow* some sunscreen. Louis could be frying like a crisp for all Harry cares.

“Oh, sure. I think there’s some in the medicine cabinet. I could go grab it for you—”

“No, no, you stay put. I got it,” Harry places a large, warm hand on Louis' shoulder, stopping him before he can get up.

Louis’ flushes warm, right down to his toes, and instantly goes pliant.

“Okay.”

Harry pats him once on the arm, then moves past him towards the door.
He pauses on the threshold.

“See you around, man,” he says to Niall.

Niall gives him the thumbs up. “Hasta Lluega.”

Then he is gone.

Louis is silent for a moment. He can still feel the heat of where Harry’s palm had made contact, the skin prickling beneath his t-shirt. Something unpleasant is tightening in his belly.

“Wow,” Niall laughs, licking his sticky fingers. “What a douchebag. He sounded proper anal, mate. I don’t even know what to call that accent.”

“Yeah,” Louis hums. He feels fuzzy, like he’s a million miles away.

“And did you see that watch he was wearing?” Niall snorts, “A bloody Cartier. I’d have to sell everything I own plus my right arm to afford one of those.”

Louis pretends to be listening as Niall rambles on, making occasional noises of agreement.

Eventually Patricia pokes her head out and asks Niall if he’ll be joining them for dinner, but he has to decline. He’s got a date to plan, after all.

He says goodbye an hour later, pulling Louis into a hug before mounting his bike and cycling away down the dirt track.

“Good luck with the Gringo!” he hollers over his shoulder.

He means it as a joke, but Louis reckons he’s gonna need it.

He heads back inside.

***

If Louis was under the impression that he could just ignore their guest until he eventually went away, he was sorely mistaken.

The following afternoon his father seeks him out, requesting that he drop what he’s doing immediately and escort Harry into town.

Naturally, Louis is less than enthusiastic.

“Why can’t you do it?” he huffs.

“Because I’m busy today,” his father says calmly, leaning against the doorway of the guest room with folded arms. “I’ve got work to do.”

“So do I.”

His father raises his eyebrows. “Oh yeah? You call this work?”

(Louis may or may not be making a collage out of Valentina’s old magazines. He’s bored, okay.)

“I don’t want to.”

“Well I’m not going to argue with you about it. It’s just a quick trip, there and back. Nothing to kick
up a fuss about."

"Dad—"

"How would you feel if it was you, Louis? On your own in an unfamiliar country, no idea how to speak the language—"

"Fine. Fine!" Louis throws down the nail scissors and gets up off the carpet. He furrows his eyebrows angrily. "But let it be known that I’m not happy about it."

"Noted."

"Come on. He’s waiting downstairs."

---

Señor Ortega, a round-bellied, heavily bearded man who has been a neighbour of the Tomlinson’s for as long as Louis can recall, had kindly offered to give them a lift to the plaza. His car was old and the interior reeked of cured meats, so much so that Louis had to breathe through his mouth so as not to be overwhelmed by it. Harry had sat up front and chatted happily away to Señor Ortega. The pair of them somehow managed to strike up a happy medium between Spanish and English, though Louis strongly doubted whether either of them actually knew what the other was saying. In any case, Harry still managed to get old Ortega roaring with laughter. Evidently, his charming sense of humour is universal.

Ortega had dropped them off by the fountain, agreeing to meet them back there in an hour.

And now Louis is alone. With Harry.

"So," Harry is first to break the silence, "...the library?"

He turns full circle, almost like he’s waiting for a library to jump out and go 'Here I am! Come on in!'

(It doesn’t.)

"This way."

Louis nods to his left and starts walking. He doesn’t look back to see if Harry follows, but he can see his shadow on the ground.

He catches up with Louis in less than two strides.

Louis bites the inside of his cheek as they walk in silence, his hands rooted deep into the pockets of his shorts. Every now and again he’ll glance at Harry out of the corner of his eye. Stealing glances at the acute line of his jaw, or the straight slope of his nose. His eyes are hidden behind a pair of dark sunglasses.

Louis doesn’t know if he’s meant to make conversation or not. It feels a bit strange, just walking in silence like this, and they’ve got a good five minutes left before they reach the library.

He desperately searches his brain for something remotely intelligent — anything really — to say.

Then he accidentally starts thinking about Harry’s hand on his shoulder, and heat flashes through his belly, making his toes curl.

"What’s California like?"

He blurts.

Literally, blurts. The question comes out a bit like vomit. Like he tried to hold it in but couldn’t.
Harry looks at him.

“Sorry? I didn’t catch that.”

“What’s—” Louis digs his nails into his palm, staring straight ahead. He clears his throat. “What’s California like?”

A second or two passes. Louis is terrified that Harry won’t answer. That he’ll just shrug him off and carry on walking. He can already feel the sharp slap of rejection stinging across his face—

“Colourful.” Harry says.

Louis waits for him to continue.

“I mean, it’s plenty colourful here too. And it’s colourful in England sometimes, but,” Harry shrugs, “It’s a different sort of colourful out there.”

Louis wonders if there will ever be a point in the future when he understands what the fuck this man is talking about.

“You should visit someday. You’d like it.” Harry tacks on.

Sure. Because you know me so well. is what Louis doesn’t say.

“Maybe I will. Someday.” is what he does.

It’s a lie though. Louis doubts he will ever go to America. It’s not really his scene.

The pair of them make it about six paces before Harry speaks again.

“So how did you learn to speak Spanish?” he asks, squinting at a group of little kids playing tag outside a cafe. “I mean, if you only ever come to Spain for the holidays that must have been pretty difficult to maintain.”

Louis shrugs. “My mother was Spanish, so I guess that gave me like, a basic understanding. She used to speak it to me at home sometimes. Plus, there are tonnes of bilingual expat kids here who were happy to help. Niall speaks about a billion languages. He taught me quite a lot.”

Harry nods. It’s hard to tell if his expression is pensive or just bored.

“How come you don’t live here all year round then?”

“School.” Louis says simply, “Dad wanted my grades to come first.”

“And what about your sister?”

“What about her?”

Harry continues to take in the city sights around him. “Is she in England too?”

“Oh — yeah. She’s studying at Oxford.”

“Impressive.”

Louis’ chest inflates with pride before he can stop it. He subsequently quashes the feeling. Harry wasn’t even complimenting him, for fuck’s sake.
“She’s studying law,” he goes on, because he’s unable to resist the opportunity to brag about Ana. “International law mainly. She’s super smart.”

“I’m sure she is.” Harry tells him, “I look forward to meeting her when she arrives.”

Louis’ good mood is gone as soon as it came. The thought of Harry meeting Ana doesn’t sit well with him, mainly because he’s got this horrible feeling that Harry might…try things on.

(Louis isn’t dumb, okay. He knows that his sister is a good looking young woman, and she’s got a fantastic personality too.

He also knows, from an objective standpoint, that Harry is a highly intelligent, highly attractive man, who might just take an interest in her. And Louis has no doubt that Harry knows exactly what he’s doing when it comes to women.)

All of a sudden, Louis feels like a walking storm cloud.

They don’t talk again until they reach the library.

Harry nudges him when they’re inside, and Louis nearly startles right out of his skin at the contact. He looks up at Harry like a baby deer in the headlights.

“Do you think you could translate for me?” Harry asks. “I need to ask a few questions.”

Louis can only nod.

For the next ten minutes, Louis translates Harry’s queries for the young librarian. Turns out he’s had a load of books ordered in specially to cater to his research. Four huge volumes to be exact, each of them about as heavy as a brick. The librarian places them down on the counter with a thump.

Harry thanks her, struggling to pick them all up. He grimaces under their weight.

Louis places a light hand on Harry’s bicep.

“Here,” he says quietly, moving in, “Let me help.”

“It’s okay, I got it—”

“Let me help.”

Louis takes two of the books, adjusting them so he’s got one under each arm and staring at Harry pointedly. He doesn’t know where this sudden rush of bravery came from, but it’s gone as soon as it came. The way Harry looks at him makes him feel shaky and breathless.

“Thanks,” Harry says. His voice is a touch deeper than usual.

The next port of call is the post office, because Harry’s got a letter he needs posting, and he needs Louis to do the talking again. They stand in line and wait to be seen.

“Who’s it for?” Louis asks, eyeing the white envelope in Harry’s hand. “I mean,” he blushes hot, suddenly backtracking, “If you don’t mind me asking, that is. You don’t have to tell me. I was just being nosy.”

He ducks his head in embarrassment.

“It’s to my professor back at Berkley,” Harry says, unbothered. There’s a hint of a smirk on his lips.
“He’s asked me to keep him updated with how things are going out here.”

“Oh, that’s—” Louis flounders a little, “—nice. Nice that he cares, I mean.”

Harry chuckles. “I think he’s just concerned that I’ll treat this like a vacation instead of getting any actual work done. I’m already spending too much time by the pool, as it is.”

Louis casts his mind back to a few hours earlier. Harry had indeed gone for ‘a dip’ after Niall cleared off. Louis had been clearing up the table on the patio at the time, disposing of the empty marmalade jar that Niall had left behind and such, and everything had been fine until Harry sauntered out in a pair of bright green swimming trunks.

He hadn’t meant to stand there staring. He was just intrigued is all — he’s never seen a man with a big fucking butterfly tattooed on his stomach before, alright? It was weird. And Harry’s got this weird body type too, all soft and hard at the same time, and Louis hadn’t really known what to make of it. But it’s not like Harry minded, is it? He’s probably used to people staring at him. Probably get’s it all the time.

“Cheers for the help, man,” Harry says when they make it back to the fountain, waiting for Señor Ortega to pick them up again. “I appreciate it.”

“Any time,” Louis tells him. He doesn’t quite meet Harry’s eyes.

June 24th

Mass on Sunday is a big deal. Almost everyone attends. They all get dressed up, trading in their board shorts for smart trousers and getting up early to spend hours in front of the mirror. The ladies wear knee-length dresses and sit there fanning themselves, trying not to sweat off their makeup. The young men try to catch their attention with cheeky glances as the cathedral fills up, sometimes earning themselves a smack upside the head from their disapproving mothers. The atmosphere is busy and tangible, families flooding through the grand entryway and taking their seats, greeting one another with smacking kisses and handshakes.

Louis sits towards the back, tapping his foot against the floor. Valentina sits to his left, chatting away to his father, and Patricia is still mingling with a group of local women who work in the hair salon. Harry had decided not to join them for the service, because he said he needed to crack on with his report, but Louis doubts that he would have attended even if he could. Harry doesn’t strike him as the religious type. He’s too modern. Too alternative. The type of person who spends his Sunday mornings jogging or frying bacon, not sat in a cathedral listening to Father Manuel drone on.

Louis spots Niall by the door, and gives him a wave. The whole Horan family file in one by one, all four lemon-haired siblings dressed in varying shades of green. Niall is the oldest, would you believe it. He’s got two younger sisters and (as of six months ago) a baby brother, who is currently sleeping peacefully in Mrs. Horan’s arms.

Behind them, Cristina emerges with her mother and father. Louis hasn’t seen her since the Easter holidays, when she’d thrown up after the Semana Santa parade. Boy, what an evening that had been. Louis had spent forever trying to scrub the smell of her sick out of his sweater.

She looks a lot better than she did then, though. Her dark hair is tied up out of her face, and she’s wearing a nice lilac dress with pleated frills. Louis thinks he can understand why Niall has suddenly taken a fancy to her. She’s grown up quite a bit over the past few years.
Niall taps her on the arm and points towards Louis. They come over.

“Hola, mi conejito,” Cristina coos, leaning over the pew to peck Louis’ cheek.

“Watch it,” he warns her, “You’ll get makeup on my shirt.”

“Ever the complainer.” Cristina sighs, her accent heavy.

She and Niall slide into the row directly behind him, and Louis twists around to see them properly. They are definitely sitting closer than they would have before. Almost leaning into each other, in fact. Niall shoots him a wink.

“No gringo today?”

“Apparently not. He’s working.”

“Shame,” Cristina chimes in, “Alejandra said she saw him in town the other day. I hear he’s ravishing.”


“Is it true, Louis?” Cristina asks, opting to ignore Niall’s comment.

“Is what true?”

She rolls her eyes. “That the gringo is drop-dead gorgeous. Everyone’s saying so.”

“Oh. Um,”

Louis pauses. His stomach turns, and he has to surreptitiously pinch his thigh, because his first thought is to say Yes. Yes he is rather gorgeous. Which, of course, would be fucking stupid. He’s never said such a thing about a man in his life, and he certainly isn’t about to say it of Harry.

“I dunno, Cris.” he shrugs.

“Well you live with him, don’t you?”

“Yeah but he’s a bloke, you moron,” Niall points out, “It’s not like Louis’ a bloody maricón, is it? How would he know if the guy’s good looking? You girls, honestly.” He raises his eyes to heaven.

Unexplainably, Louis’ heart drops to his stomach.

Maricón.

Faggot.

He feels a bit sick. He doesn’t know why his mood is so fragile these days, but he thinks he should probably do something about it. In the words of Valentina, 'no es healthy to be so worrisome all the time, Louis.'

Cristina and Niall bicker like an old married couple for a while longer, only stopping when some more of the local teens come up to greet them. Louis receives hugs and claps on the back from the lads, who stand around and garble in loud, slang-riddled Spanish until their mothers move them swiftly along. Cristina’s pals come to say hello too, and his requests that they keep their makeup away from his shirt are futile. They all kiss him anyway.
When Father Manuel emerges and asks that everyone be seated, Niall’s parents summon him over to sit with them, because his mother can’t handle all the girl’s on her own. Cristina’s family join her in the pew behind Louis, and the service begins.

Generally, Louis likes mass. It’s one of the rare times that he can actually manage to sit still for an extended period of time. He likes the prayers, and the breaking of the bread, and the sharing of the wine. He likes the sound of Father Manuel’s voice when he reads passages. It’s a voice he’s grown up listening to, and it’s one that makes him feel that little bit closer to home.

When they all bow their heads to say the Hail Mary, Louis clasps his crucifix pendant tightly between his hands.

***

There’s a knock on his door in the evening, before dinner.

“Come in.” Louis hums.

The door opens. He’s expecting it to be Valentina, so when he glances up from his book to see Harry standing there at the foot of his bed, his lips pop open in surprise.

“Oh,” he says, his voice slightly higher than usual. “Hello.”

“Hi.” Harry does that slow, lazy smile. He leans back against the closed door. “Whatcha doing?”

“Just reading.” Louis swallows tightly. Harry’s never been into his room before.

Harry’s never sought him out before.

“Do you need to, like, borrow something?” He asks, because Harry is just standing there, leaning against his wall and watching him, and that must mean he wants something, right? Perhaps he needs suncream again. Or maybe some shoes, seeing as his feet are still perpetually bare all the time.

Harry tilts his head, looking simultaneously amused and perplexed.

“No?” he says, “What made you think that?”

Louis flounders for a bit, grappling for something to say. Harry’s gaze is making him feel hot again, and he’s all too aware of the fact that he’s only wearing a thin t-shirt and a pair of little turquoise swimming trunks that stop mid-thigh.

Harry doesn’t wait for him to reply though. Instead, he pushes away from the wall and flops down onto the mattress at Louis’ feet, making the bed bounce.

Louis’ bed. Harry is laying on Louis’ bed. Whilst Louis is also on his bed.

“What are you reading?” Harry asks.

Louis actually has to look down at the cover, because his brain feels like a big fuzzy mess all of a sudden, and he can’t for the life of him remember the title, even though he’s been reading the bloody book for at least two weeks now.

“The Catcher in the Rye,” he says, “It’s, um. It’s an American book. It’s by—”

“J.D Salinger, I know. I’ve read it.”
Louis mentally berates himself for not thinking of that. *Of course* Harry’s read it.

“What do you think of it so far?” Harry asks, picking at the loose thread on Louis’ duvet.

The thing is, whenever Harry asks a question, Louis isn’t sure if he actually cares about the answer or if he’s just doing it to be polite and make conversation. He never speaks with any real enthusiasm. His voice is so languid and unhurried all the time, and Louis can’t really imagine him actually getting excited about anything.

“I like it, I guess,” he answers anyway.

“You guess?”

“Well, I mean. When I read it, it makes me feel kind of lonely, you know?” Louis thumbs gently over the pages, avoiding Harry’s gaze. “It’s like… a lonely book.”


“I can’t explain what I mean, and even if I could, I probably wouldn’t feel like it.” Harry quotes in a nasal, New York accent. It’s not bad actually. He looks up at Louis. “You read a lot?”

“A bit.” He shrugs.

“Ever read any poetry?”

“A little. When the mood strikes.”

Harry hums, and returns to picking at the thread. Louis wants desperately to pull the covers up over his legs or something. He’s pretty sure that everything is on display right now, the little blue shorts doing nothing to preserve his modesty.

His eyes flicker over Harry’s long torso, stretched out where he lays. His shirt is unbuttoned, as per usual, allowing his butterfly tattoo to peek out from between the fabric. Louis can see the dark outline of his nipples too, the hard nubs protruding and drawing attention to his chest.

Louis presses his legs together.

“Since feeling is first…”

He tilts his head up again when Harry speaks, only to find the man already gazing back at him intently.

The back of his neck suddenly feels like it’s on fire.

“Since feeling is first,” Harry repeats casually, like he’s reading a shopping list or something, “who pays any attention to the syntax of things will never wholly kiss you.”

And, oh… Oh dear *god*. Harry is speaking poetry. Reciting it by heart, in his slow, syrupy voice, looking up at Louis through sweeping lashes as he does so, causing heat to zip down his spine like an electric current.

“Wholly to be a fool while Spring is in the world…”

Louis doesn’t really know what this situation calls for, so he kind of just sits there, looking at Harry like a fool, watching the way his lips move when he speaks.
“My blood approves, and kisses are a better fate than wisdom,” Harry fiddles idly with the rings on his left hand, eyes occasionally flitting up to catch Louis’. There’s a smirk on his lips. “The best gesture of my brain is less than your eyelids’ flutter which says we are for each other.”

Louis squirms.

Harry sighs, looking up at the ceiling contentedly.

“And death I think is no parenthesis. Louis’ mind beseeches him to finish.

Only he doesn’t.

He leaves the last line unsaid, allowing the silence to hang heavily between them in the air, his green eyes dark and penetrating.

He must know, Louis’ mind tells him, his heart throbbing in his ears and face burning red, He must know what I’m thinking, he must be able to see it, he must know what he’s doing to me—

“Do you smoke?”

Louis blinks. His heart contracts dangerously.

“I—yes.” he croaks.

Harry reaches into his back pocket.

“Have a cigarette with me.”

Louis wonders if he can claim compensation on emotional whiplash.

Harry takes out a cigarette and places it between his lips before offering Louis the packet. “Here.”

“Thanks,” Louis says, his voice coming out hoarse and making him cringe.

Harry sits up to light his fag, leaning back against the railings at the end of Louis’ bed. For a second, Louis is worried that Harry might try to light his cigarette for him too (which one hundred percent would not help the situation) but instead he ends up tossing the lighter onto the mattress by Louis’ hip.

It takes him at least three tries to strike up the flame. It’s pretty embarrassing.

The pair of them take their first few drags in silence.

Harry looks good when he smokes. Normally when Louis watches his friends smoke he thinks they look tacky, but not Harry. He looks sort of lovely, actually. His eyes close when he inhales, lashes fluttering against his hollowed cheekbones like a reincarnation of James Dean. Then the smoke pours back out again from between his red lips, and he sighs and pulls this facial expression that makes Louis’ stomach flip.

He shudders, and he folds the edge of the duvet over his lap. He reckons it’s too late to try for subtlety now, anyway.
Harry pinches his lip thoughtfully between his fingers before he speaks again.

“You're a Westminster boy then,” he says, “I recognise the uniform.”

Louis follows his line of sight to the picture frame that sits on his bedside table. It’s a photo of himself, Liam and Zayn outside the chapel, dressed up for the end of term Christmas service last year. Their cheeks are ruddy and their ties are askew, and they’re smiling like idiots because that was the first day of snowfall in London, and singing the carols had put everyone in the festive spirit.

Louis feels a pang of something in his chest.

“I was,” he says eventually. “I finished my final exams a couple of weeks ago.”

Harry raises his eyebrows. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you.”

“Any plans for next year?”

“University, if I get the grades,” Louis takes another drag. His hands are marginally less shaky now. “Dad wants me to go to Oxford or Cambridge. Or Durham, if all else fails. He wants me to get a business degree.”

Harry looks skeptical. “Is that what you want?”

Louis huffs out a feeble laugh. He’s been asking himself that same question for years.

“I don’t really know what I want.”

Harry doesn’t seem to have a response for that, so they just sit in an almost amicable silence for a while, patiently waiting for Louis’ hard-on to go down.

Louis watches the white tendrils curl in the air when he breathes out, slowly filling the room with a dreamy mist. It mingles with the soft evening sunlight, the result being a carpet of weird, swirling shadows across his floorboards. It’s kind of beautiful, in a way.

“I was in the choir,” he tells Harry then, because he is useless at detecting when a conversation is over.

“Were you?” Harry entertains him anyway.

“Well,” Louis pauses, “I was for a while. Before my voice broke, I mean.” He fiddles with the cigarette in his lap, a small smile on his face. “Me and my mate Liam were soloists in first year. We used to play this game where we’d try to make each other laugh while we were singing the high note in *Agnus Dei.*”

Harry snorts at that one, and Louis feels irrationally happy about having said something amusing.

“Our choirmaster hated us,” he goes on, “I’m pretty sure the only reason we didn’t get kicked out was because Liam’s dad was on the board. He would have gone apeshit. We actually made it all the way to third year, but our voices were too deep after that.”

Harry’s smile is crooked. “Did you have to wear those stupid ruffled collars?”

“Hey. They weren’t stupid.”
“Oh, you did,” Harry gasps in delight, “Now this I need to see. Do you have a photo or something?”

“Yeah, that’s not happening,” Louis shakes his head, “Twelve was really not a good age for me. I wasn’t an attractive child.”

“No?” Harry is still grinning, “Not even when you were all dressed up in your church frock?”

“Robes.” Louis fixes him with a scowl, “They’re called robes.”

“Whatever you say, Aled.”

Louis kicks him in the shin. Harry’s dimple pops.

“Will you sing me something?”

“No chance.”

“C’mon,” Harry tilts his head, “Just a little? Laudate Dominum is my all time favourite.”

“Go away, you imbecile.”

“I could do the harmonies—”

“Bloody hell, I confide in you about my choral past and all you do is poke fun at me,” Louis sniffs, sticking his nose in the air. “I’m hurt. I really am.”

“I wasn’t poking fun, I swear,” Harry laughs. He reaches out and grabs Louis’ socked foot to emphasise his point, and Louis has to resist the urge to jerk away from the touch. “I’m sure you have a lovely voice. You were a soloist after all, you must have been at least a little bit good.”

He doesn’t take his hand away, and Louis does his best to ignore the point of contact. Ignore the feeling of Harry’s fingers brushing against the bare skin of his ankle.

“Yeah, well.” He coughs, “maybe everyone else was just exceedingly bad.”

Harry smiles. “Doubt it.”

His thumb runs almost imperceptibly over the sole of Louis’ foot, sending little shivers scurrying down his leg. Somewhere downstairs, Valentina is yelling, complaining that dinner has been on the table for five minutes and if no one is going to come down and eat it then she has no qualms about feeding it to the group of mangy stray cats that keep wandering into her kitchen, because then at least someone will appreciate her efforts.

Harry quirks an eyebrow, biting back a laugh. “That doesn’t sound good.”

“You should go down,” Louis says, “before she bursts a blood vessel or something. Valentina’s pretty terrifying if you keep her waiting.”

“You aren’t coming?” Harry retracts his hand.

“I’m tired.” Louis lies, “I’ve not been feeling too great since I landed, actually. I might just take a nap.”

“Oh.” Harry’s face is unreadable, “If you, like, want me to bring you up some water or
something…”

“I’ll be fine. Thank you, though.”

Harry nods in understanding, pressing his lips together. He gets up off the bed.

“Well. I hope you feel better soon, man,” he reaches up above his head, stretching out his back with a quiet groan, “Was nice talking to you.”

“Likewise.”

Harry heads for the door and pulls it open, pausing in the threshold just as Louis had a feeling he would.

He turns around.

“You really ought to get that air con fixed, by the way,” he says, “it’s awfully hot in here.”

Louis opens his mouth. Closes it again.

Harry smiles and shuts the door behind him.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Sexual content (aka - raunchy pillow time with Louis)

Enjoy!

Louis was eleven years old when his father announced his plans to permanently relocate to Spain in order to oversee the naranjal.

He had cried at first, of course. Big, clumsy tears and pitiful sobs, clinging to his dad’s jacket and begging him not to go, not to force Louis off to the scary boy’s boarding school in London and leave him behind. Back then the idea of being without his dad was enough to send him into a fit of panic. Aside from Ana, dad was all he had left. Dad was the one who taught him how to ride a bike and tie his laces. Dad was the one who had stuck haphazard plasters all over his kneecaps when he skinned them on the ground during cross country, kissing them both better before sticking on the TV and heating up some mac n cheese. Dad was the one who had stood stoically in the place of a deceased mother, even though he clearly had no idea what the fuck he was doing. Even though Louis hadn't always made it easy.

Ana didn’t cry. At fourteen, she was old enough just to get on with things. She was even pleased when she received her acceptance letter from St Helens, and Louis couldn’t for the life of him understand why. Why would she be happy about leaving everything they knew behind?

(Things became clearer later on when she started coming top in all of her classes. Ana was never destined for the shitty local comprehensive. She was always going to do big things, and St Helens gave her a real shot at achieving that. After all, one of them had to be the smart sibling.)

Looking back on it now, however, Louis finds it amusing that he was so terrified of the change. Going to Westminster was undoubtedly the best thing that could have happened to him. Although he never received particularly remarkable grades in anything other than PE, he did stumble across some of the best people he could have hoped to find. He’d slotted right in with his dorm mates, Liam and Zayn, like a missing jigsaw piece clicking into place, and the three of them had been inseparable from day one onwards.

As time passed, his longing for his father had faded, and he became content in the knowledge that he would see him soon enough during the school holidays. At half terms and exeat weekends, he would fly out to Seville and spend his afternoons running barefoot around the orange grove, having just enough time to get a nice bronzed colour on his skin before jetting back to London again. It was a lifestyle he quickly learned to love. The back-and-forth rhythm, the stark contrast of the wicked sun against the damp English air: after a while it was all he knew. He grew up as a boy of two nations, both cultures as deeply rooted inside of him as the other, and he wouldn’t change that for the world.

But sometimes, however selfish it might be, he still wants more.

More time with his friends, more independence from his dad. A mum who’s still alive.

Louis has grown up being told that he's the luckiest boy in the world. If only they knew how much
of his life the luckiest boy in the world wastes coveting the things he can't have.

June 25th

They all eat breakfast together on Monday morning, which is a rare occurrence because the Tomlinsons are all notoriously late risers. Breakfast is usually omitted from the proceedings altogether, made up for later with whatever fantastic dish Valentina presents them with at lunchtime. But today is different.

Today, the orange harvest begins.

Louis sits opposite Patricia and his father at the table, tearing his sweet bread roll into small chunks. The smell of tangy citrus is heavy and hopeful in the air. The small iron gate at the end of the garden has been left open, and Sancho and his men are already carrying stacks of empty crates into the grove, ready for filling.

It’s a late one this year. Usually the harvest has been and gone by the time Louis arrives for the summer holidays, but occasionally the weather acts up and pushes it back a few weeks.

Louis likes it when this happens. The orange harvest is always something to look forward to. For some reason, it puts everyone in a better mood.

Harry pads out onto the patio at around seven, barefoot despite the slight morning chill. He pauses to watch as one of the gardeners reverses a pickup truck into the garden.

“Today’s the day, my boy,” Louis father tells him proudly. “The highlight of our year. The moment of truth. Watch closely, Harry, because this is when the magic happens.”

Harry lets out a low whistle, shielding his eyes from the sun.

“How long will it take to harvest the whole crop?” He asks.

“Usually takes about a week.” his father responds, looking out across the busy orange grove, “Then they’re packed up and shipped off all ‘round the world before the end of the month.”

“Come, sit down, Harry,” Patricia indicates to the vacant seat beside Louis, “Your food will get cold.”

Harry’s eyes nearly bulge right out of their sockets when he catches sight of the heavily-laden plate that’s already been set out for him.

“You made me a fry up?” his face breaks out into an elated grin like he’s just won the lottery or something, dimples popping adorably at the sight of fresh bacon and eggs, “Man, I haven’t had a proper fry up in months. Is this Valentina’s doing?” he slips into the chair and seizes his knife and fork, “God, that woman is a miracle worker.”

“Actually, it was all Louis.” his father smiles behind his paper, “He reckons we need to start beating the British back into you.”

Louis flushes a deep shade of scarlet, glaring at his father. He’d promised not to say anything.

“You cooked me breakfast?” Harry looks at him disbelievingly.

Louis shrugs, pretending to be occupied with sweeping crumbs from the table.
“I woke up early.” he says. As if that’s a perfectly valid explanation for why he’d insisted that Valentina bring eggs back from the market that morning, and subsequently almost set the house alight trying to use the stove.

A slow, beguiling smile plays out across Harry’s lips.

“Thank you, Louis,” he says, his voice deep and earnest, “This was most generous of you.”

_He knows, he knows, oh god, he knows._

Louis does his best to look nonchalant. “No problem, man.”

He cringes right after he’s said it, because really? _Man_?

He’ll have to make a conscious effort to spend less time with Harry from now on in, because clearly, his affected vocabulary is highly contagious.

Harry continues to smirk as he digs into his bacon, seemingly amused that Louis has made a tit of himself yet again, and Louis silently hopes that he chokes and dies. He really does. His life would be a whole lot easier right now if Harry would just do him a favour and cease to exist.

“What are your plans for today, boys?” his father asks them.

“None as of yet, sir,” Harry shrugs, “I’m thinking of taking a day off today though. Perhaps I’ll visit the city again.”

“Louis?”

“Hmm?”

“Plans. Today.” his father quirks an eyebrow, “Got any?”

“Yeah, actually, I think I’m going out with Niall.”

“Where to?”

“The Maria Luisa. We’ll be back around dinner time probably.”

His father claps his hands together suddenly, making Louis flinch. “Well, let’s not be _rude_, son. You must take Harry with you, of course. We can’t let him go home without having seen the sights, can we?”

Louis starts to panic. He glances at Harry out of the corner of his eye. “Dad, I don’t think—”

“What do you say, Harry?” His father asks, “You can’t very well spend your day off by yourself, or you’ll go mad with boredom. Lou will take care of you.”

“Dad—”

“Actually,” Harry cuts across him, looking to Louis with a strange air of uncertainty, “That sounds really nice.”

Louis goes abruptly quiet.

“Perfect,” his father grins, his eyes flitting between the pair of them across the table. He looks inexplicably pleased with himself. “You can take the bikes. I’ll have Valentina pack you a lunch.”
The Maria Luisa is located in Seville’s historical centre, and functions as both a botanical garden and a social hub for the local families to play sport or have an impromptu picnic. Niall often brings his little sisters down during the daytime to give his mother a break, and it’s sort of goes without saying now that if Louis is around, he comes with them. Niall’s sisters adore Louis.

(Louis tells himself it’s because he’s charming and funny, but deep down he suspects it might be because he brings them candy.)

They shout in delight when they see him approaching, and both of them come galloping across the grass at him like a pair of excitable baby lambs, their dresses billowing out behind them.

“Lou-bear!” Eight-year-old Jazmín is the first to reach him, latching her arms right around his middle and burying her face in his stomach. She looks up at him and grins. “Look, I lost another tooth!”

“Well, would you look at that,” Louis pulls her top lip up to get a better look at the impressive gap. “Bet old Ratoncito gave you a fortune in exchange for that whopper.”

(Ratoncito is a mythical mouse. Louis does not know why the Spanish people rejected the idea of a tooth fairy in favour of spinning their kids lies about friendly vermin who crawl under their pillows and steal their teeth as they sleep, but hey. It’s a unique culture.)

Little Abril tugs on the leg of his jeans then, staring up at him with big shamrock eyes and a hopeful smile.

“Hello there, darling,” Louis coos, stooping down to lift her onto his hip. “And how are you today? I’m loving the braids, by the way. Very pretty.”

“I’m five,” Abril tells him proudly.

“You’re four,” Jazmín corrects her sternly. She looks at Louis. “She’s four.”

“She can be whatever age she wants,” Louis hushes her, pressing a kiss to Abril’s button nose. She scrunches her face up in disgust. “What, you don’t like kisses now?”

“Nope.”

“What if I told you I have a lollypop in my back pocket with your name on it?”

“Kay, fine.” she sighs dramatically offers up her face for kissing.

Louis is hopelessly endeared.

“Getting a bit jealous over here,” Niall materialises out of thin air as Louis is peppering Abril’s face with kisses. He puckers his lips. “How about showing your old pal Nialler some lovin’?”

“I’d rather not,” Louis grimaces, “I don’t want to catch it.”

“Catch what?”

“Whatever it is that you have.”

Niall snorts and rolls his eyes. “Bloody charming, I’m telling you.”

“I’m five.” Abril announces again, looping her arms tighter around Louis’ neck.
“You’re not,” Jazmín hisses, “Niall, tell her she’s not.”


Abril makes a displeased sound. Louis rubs her back comfortingly.

“So,” Niall sets his hands on Jazmín’s shoulders, “Where to first?”

“Actually,” Louis brushes his fringe back, “we’ve got to wait for Harry. He’s just in the restroom.”

“Harry…?”

“The gringo.”

“Oh,” Niall raises his eyebrows, “he’s here?”

“Dad made me bring him. Be nice, okay.”

“Hey, I’m always nice.” Niall huffs indignantly.

Then, no more than two seconds later:

“Can I pretend I don’t speak English?”

Louis rolls his eyes. “He knows you speak English, Niall.”

“Mierda.”

“Watch your language, for goodness sake, there are children around.”

“What’s a gringo?” Jazmín queries, her brows furrowing as she looks up at them.

Niall places a hand atop her head and gently turns her to face the direction of the cafe. He smiles wryly.

“That, my dear, is a gringo.”

Louis turns to see Harry strolling towards them, running a hand through his wild curls. The arms of his baby pink cashmere sweater are looped over his shoulders and, for once, there is a pair of shoes on his feet. Expensive ones at that — cream coloured brogues that only just peek out from beneath his well-tailored slacks.

“Dear God,” Niall half-laughs, half-groans. “Your parents actually let him go out like that? In public?”

“Will you be quiet,” Louis swats his chest.

There is an amiable smile on Harry’s face when he reaches them. Louis stares resolutely at his hairline to avoid blushing like an idiot.

“Hi.” Says the gringo, “Sorry I took so long.”

“Harry,” Louis carefully places Abril down on the ground, despite her protests. “You remember Niall?”

“Of course,” Harry extends his hand, “How are you, buddy?”
“Lo siento. No hablo ingles.”

Louis punches him in the arm.

“Alright, alright, Jesus,” Niall laughs, rubbing his bicep. “Just a little joke,” he takes Harry’s hand, “it’s nice to see you again, mate.”

Harry is either unperturbed, or blissfully unaware that Niall is mocking him. In any case, he continues smiling like the English-American gentleman that he is, showing off his perfect white teeth like the star of a bloody Colgate commercial.

“Likewise,” he says politely.

He looks down at the two girls before him. Both of them are gazing silently at him with wide eyes and parted lips, like they’ve just watched him clamber out of a UFO or something.

“Well now,” Harry beams, “I don’t believe we’ve been introduced.”

“Harry, these are Niall’s sisters, Jaz and Abril,” says Louis.

Harry crouches down to their level, still smiling like a fool.

“Hello there,” he says, holding his hand out for Jazmín to take. “I’m Harry. It’s lovely to meet you.”

Louis’ stomach turns to mush.

“Woah, your hair is so curly,” Jazmín marvels, reaching out to touch. “S’like a poodle.”

Harry chuckles, bowing his head so she can run her little hands through it.

“I’m glad,” he says “Poodle is the look I was going for, after all.”

She giggles delightedly.

“I’m Abril,” says Abril, clutching Harry’s knee. “I’m five.”

“You’re not.” Jazmín and Niall say in unison.

Abril whines something unintelligible, dropping her chin to her chest.

“Hey, it’s alright,” Harry touches her hand lightly where it rests on his leg, leaning in to whisper, “I believe you.”

Jazmín rolls her eyes. Abril lights up like a Christmas tree.

Harry winks at her, his dimple carving a crater into the left side of his mouth.

“Right.” Louis claps his hands together, louder than intended. Everyone turns to look at him. “Shall we make a move?”

If he has to stand around watching Harry interact with little kids any longer he thinks he might melt into a pool of goo.

“I want to show Harry the pond!” Jazmín exclaims, taking Harry’s hand when he stands up.

His green eyes sparkle as he looks down at her.
“I would love that,” he says earnestly.

Abril makes an unintelligible sound, grappling for Harry’s other hand. She hates being left out.

Niall scoffs. “Do you think they know that I’m their brother?” he asks no one in particular, “Like, their actual blood relative? They sure as hell never hold my hand.” He looks at Louis with puppy dog eyes. “Will you hold my hand, Lou?”

“We’ve been over this.” Louis sighs.

“You’re cruel, Tomlinson.”

The girls start dragging Harry off down the path at that point, and the two of them have no option but to follow.

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In the end, it takes all of twenty minutes for Niall to go from calling Harry ‘gringo’ behind his back and making snide remarks at every chance he gets, to hanging off his every word like a lovestruck teenager.

Apparently, no one is immune to Harry’s charisma.

Louis can’t pinpoint the exact moment when Niall’s attitude towards the guy made the abrupt 360 turn, but he suspects it happened sometime around the point when Harry started talking about football.

Specifically, Real Madrid. The team that Niall lives and breathes for. As soon as Harry mentioned about the time he met Hugo Sánchez at a charity event, the boy was pretty much sold.

“Well, fuck me. Who knew that gringos could be so cultured,” he tells Louis in awe as the two of them lay down on the grass bank. “I mean, he’s even aware that there’s more than one language spoken in Spain. The man is a walking miracle!”

Louis watches Harry where he lays on his belly about twenty feet away, picking blades of grass with Jazmín and Abril on either side of him. They’re whispering amongst themselves, ducking their heads to speak to one another despite the fact that no one is around to hear what they’re saying anyway, and to an outsider, the scene looks ridiculously cute.

“I suppose he could be worse,” Louis sighs, resting his arm behind his head. “He sure takes some getting used to though.”

Niall narrows his eyes in Harry’s direction. “I bet he gets girls. I bet he gets so many girls.”

Louis hums in agreement. He’s seen the way that the local girls trip over themselves when Harry’s around. He’d have to be blind to miss it.

“How do you think he gets his voice so deep and raspy?” Niall wonders. “He must smoke like ten packs a day.”

Louis makes another noise of agreement. Harry does smoke all the time. It’s quite distracting actually. Even now there’s a cigarette stuck behind his ear, half-hidden beneath the fabric of his bandana, waiting to be used.

“I wonder if he’d buy us fags if we asked nicely?” Niall continues thinking aloud, “I mean, it’s not
like we can get ’em off that Rafael kid anymore, he’s off to uni in September. And that old hairy guy at the store always asks for my ID, the cunt.” He pulls a disgusted face, “I’m nearly eighteen anyway, for fuck’s sake, I don’t see what difference a couple of months makes.”

He nudges Louis’ rib.

“Do you think he would, Lou? Buy us fags, I mean?”

Louis shrugs. He isn’t really listening anymore.

Across the way, dappled rays of sunlight catch in Harry’s hair and slide over his face as he shifts, picking up the golden flecks of his irises. Louis watches his mouth moves slowly, languidly, slanting into a crooked smile whenever Abril says something particularly charming, and he can’t help the way his heart seizes at the sight.

He really should have predicted that Harry would be unfairly good with children too, the bastard.

Louis thinks that this is maybe what swooning must feel like. He has the sudden urge to stick his head in a bucket of ice water.

At that moment, Harry tilts his chin up and locks eyes with him, causing Louis’ breath to stutter. His cheeks heat up almost immediately because he knows he’s been caught staring again -- and getting caught staring at Harry seems to be becoming an all too common occurrence these days.

The man cocks his head to the side. His grin dissolves into a soft, closed-lipped smile.

For whatever reason, Louis doesn’t feel immediately compelled look away, and the two of them take each other in for a quiet moment. Just looking and breathing, and existing in the same space as time moves leisurely onwards.

Louis feels something coiling right in his belly again. The same thing he’d felt when Harry had touched him the other day. It’s hot and heady, and he just knows.

He knows it’s something he’s not supposed to feel.

He breaks eye contact with a quiet groan, flopping down onto his back and throwing his arm across his face.

He’s not sure what he’s done to deserve this, but he’s pretty certain that he’s being punished for something. The good Lord has finally got wind of all his childhood sins and decided to make Louis Tomlinson his personal source of entertainment to exact revenge.

Which apparently starts with Harry, the devil-spawn sent from Hell (California, USA) to tempt him.

Louis removes his arm and looks up at the sky, glaring in a way that hopefully conveys his sardonic: Congratulations. You got me.

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“How about those ones?” Harry asks. He points up at a couple of small birds flitting about in a nearby tree. “What are they?”

Louis squints.

“Bluethroats,” he says, “Both male, I think.”
“How can you tell?”

“They both have orange crescents on their breasts, see?” Louis explains, “Females don’t have that.”

“Huh,” Harry nods, continuing to watch the two birds jump from branch to branch.

Niall has taken the girls off to get some ice cream, leaving the pair of them sat alone on the edge of a fountain, their shoulders brushing gently. Harry has been questioning him about the wildlife native to Seville, and for once in his life, Louis’ extensive bird-knowledge is actually coming in handy.

“Are they building a nest?” Harry asks.

Louis snorts. “A nest? You know that male birds can’t lay eggs, right?”

“Doesn’t mean they can’t hang out,” Harry insists, “It might be, like, their party nest. Lads only, you know? If I were a bird, I’d totally have a party nest.”

Louis stares at him, because what even is he?

“If you were a bird, we’d have a problem,” he says.

“Why’s that?”

“Migration,” Louis tells him seriously, “You’d spend too long deciding whether you want to spend the winter months in England or America, or bloody Vietnam, and before you know it the rest of the flock will have flown off without you,” he presses his lips together, fixing the man with a piteous look. “The life of a bird is not for the weak, Harry.”

The answering laugh he receives makes him feel like he’s floating on air.

“Touché,” Harry chuckles.

Louis flashes him a toothy grin.

“How come you know so much about birds anyway?” Harry asks. He sounds genuinely interested, which is a rare occurrence, so Louis will be damned if he doesn’t take it and run with it.

“Zayn, my best mate from back home. His dad is an ornithologist —” he pauses, glancing at Harry, “that means someone who studies birds, by the way,”

“I know,” Harry’s lips twitch. “Continue.”

“Right, well. I guess he sort of got me into it?” Louis looks out across the garden, “There was this one Easter when all the flights out here were cancelled, so I ended up having to go and stay at Zayn’s place in Dorset. They’ve got tonnes of great wildlife out there. We’d spend hours just sat out on the cliffs with our binoculars, watching all the seabirds,” he chuckles, ducking his head, “Which I know sounds pretty sad, but. Yeah. That’s why I like them so much.”

Harry smiles, nudging Louis with his elbow. “That’s not sad,” he says gently. “It’s actually really cool that you’re so passionate about something. I wish I had been, at your age.”

Louis wants to point out that Harry was actually travelling all around the world at his age, but he doesn’t.

He feels a bit forlorn, actually; he misses Zayn. He misses England.
Harry extends his legs, tapping the toes of his shiny white Oxfords together.

“So,” he says, “what do you guys usually do for fun around here?”

Louis shrugs. “I don’t know,” he gestures vaguely to their surroundings, “This? Seville is a pretty beautiful place. Sometimes it’s nice to just sit and observe.”

Harry gives him an unimpressed look.

“Your idea of fun is to… sit and observe?” He says slowly, raising his eyebrows. “Come on, Louis. I don’t believe that for a second. You’re a seventeen-year-old guy, fresh out of high school. Tell the truth.”

“High school,” Louis snorts, “You know, where I come from we call it secondary school.”

“Oh, shut up,” Harry rolls his eyes, “Tell me.”

“Well which would you like me to do? Shut up or talk? I can’t do both, Harry.”

He receives a pointed glare in response.

Louis laughs, taking a moment to enjoy the image of Harry looking like a pissed-off labradoodle. His angry face is really quite amusing.

“Okay, let’s see,” Louis tilts his head back, looking up at the clouds. “I like dancing, if that counts?”

“Dancing.” Harry nods, processing. “Like… flamenco dancing?”

Louis narrows his eyes. “It’s not nice to stereotype.”

“Just curious,” Harry drawls, raising his hands in mock surrender.

“If you must know the specifics, I’m talking about disco dancing,” Louis tells him, flicking his fringe out of his eyes. “There are some really great nightclubs in the city. There’s a group of us who go down there most weekends.”

“And they don’t ID you or anything?”

Louis shakes his head. “Everyone knows everyone here. They know we aren’t out to cause any trouble.”

“You’re not?” Harry cocks his head to the side, “Binge-drinking and public sex don’t cut it for you then?”

Louis makes a face. “Please. I was raised to have some respect. You clearly haven’t been to Spain before.”

Harry smiles lopsidedly. “So you don’t drink then?”

“Of course I do. I just know how to hold my liquor.”

“Ever smoke weed?”

Louis lifts his shoulder. “Sometimes. Only at parties though. It doesn’t really do much for me, in all honesty.”
“Nah, me neither,” Harry agrees. He links his hands in his lap. “What about girls?” he asks then, “You date much?”

“As much as the next person,” Louis says, because it sounds like a vague enough answer. “I’m not too fussed about it though.”

“No?”

Louis shakes his head. “Not really. I’m still young, so there’s plenty of time to do that stuff later. It’s highly unlikely that whoever I date now will stick around for more than a few months, so I just… don’t really see the point, I guess.”

Harry chuckles. “That sounds awfully pessimistic.”

“It’s not, though,” Louis insists, “not if you look at things logically.”

“What do you mean…?”

“I mean that no one stays here forever,” Louis turns to look at him then, because this is important. If Louis can teach Harry anything, then he wants it to be this. “No one ever comes with a view to spending the rest of their life here. They're all just passing through. Taking a holiday or stopping off on their way to somewhere better. They’ll all leave eventually, either when it gets too hot or too cold, or they get offered a university place in some other city. Maybe their mother remarries. Maybe their grandmother dies and they inherit some fancy house in Barcelona. Whatever it is, they’ll be up and gone in the blink of an eye before you can say so much as an adios, amigo. And that's it. Maybe they’ll come back to visit, maybe they won’t. Only time will tell.”

Harry’s smile fades. Louis almost feels bad for telling the truth.

“So, what,” the older man frowns, “you go your whole life refusing to get close to people in case they bugger off someday?”

Louis sighs. “That’s not what I said.”

“It kind of is.”

“Look, you asked, alright? I was only being honest,” he turns his palms upwards, a peace offering. “Besides, I’ve got tonnes of time to figure all that shit out later. And if I don’t end up finding a girl on my own, then I’m sure my father will eventually intervene and find one for me. This is a strictly Catholic country after all. Marriage is sacred, and all that.”

He’s only half kidding.

“I’m sorry,” Harry apologises, “I didn’t mean to pry.”

He looks away, the frown etching lines into his face.

“Hey. You weren’t, I promise,” Louis assures him, suddenly loathing himself for making Harry upset. Harry should never be upset. “You were just asking questions. It’s fine, honestly. In fact…” a mischievous smile creeps onto his face, “It must be my turn to ask you some things now, right?”

Much to his relief, the corners of Harry’s mouth tilt up into a small smirk.

“Louis Tomlinson,” he says in his signature smooth-as-caramel timbre, “…are you trying to find out if I’m single?”
It’s a joke, obviously, but Louis feels unsettled anyway. His cheeks are no doubt turning an unattractive shade of red at the implication.

“Well,” he laughs weakly, “that would be a good starting point, yes.”

Harry looks down at him, and Louis is suddenly terrified that he can see straight through his feeble facade. He’s probably about as transparent as cling-film right now.

He doesn’t know why he feels such immense relief when Harry eventually shakes his head.

“I don’t have anyone right now,” he tells him easily. “I dated around a bit when I first arrived at uni, but only for fun and to meet new people. Never anything serious.”

Louis nods thoughtfully, the gears in his head churning as they take in this new information.

Only for fun. Never anything serious.

He wonders if that’s Harry’s roundabout way of admitting he sleeps around.

“Hey. What are you thinking?”

Harry’s voice is soft. He fixes Louis with a curious evergreen gaze, his eyes searching the younger boy's face like they're trying to read him.

Louis doesn’t think he’s ever seen a person with eyes so entreatling. Two vibrant rings of juniper that draw him in and make him want to open his mouth and spill his guts about every stupid thought he’s had over the course of the past week; every stupid impulse he’s been pushing away since the moment he opened his bedroom door to find Harry laying there reading a fucking book like nothing was wrong.

Harry’s eyes make Louis forget himself. If just for a second.

“Sorry about that, lads, the queue was bloody massive, you should have seen it,”

Louis snaps his head up to find Niall and the girls looming over them.

“But hey, it’s gonna be worth it I promise,” Niall leans down to give Louis a plastic cup of ice cream, “One chocolate fudge for you, garnished with fresh raspberries, as requested,” he says proudly, before turning to Harry, “and for you, my good sir, the finest honeycomb crunch in all of Spain. One hundred percent satisfaction guarantee. If you don’t like it, I’ll shave my head.”

Harry accepts the cup with a grin. “I’ll hold you to that.”

Jazmín and Abril assume their rightful positions, huddled against either side of Harry's body and giggling as they eat their deserts.

Once again, Louis and Niall are watching from the sidelines.

Niall eyes up Louis’ ice cream.

“Give us a spoonful then.”

Louis sighs. He doesn’t even complain when Niall ends up consuming half of his desert, along with all of his own. He’s not that hungry, anyway.

***
It’s common knowledge that Dean Tomlinson is a people person. He likes parties. He likes elaborate dinners with distinguished guests and impressive food. He likes to drink. He likes to smoke. And boy, does he like to gloat.

In order to get all of these things out of his system, large social gatherings at the Tomlinson household are a common occurrence. At least once a week, Dean and Patricia will call up a selection of their local pals and invite them and their families along for an evening get-together. In comparison to England, Spain is an excessively sociable country, and it took Louis many years to come to terms with the stark difference in cultural attitudes.

When they arrive back at the house that afternoon to find Valentina frantically preparing gazpacho, it becomes clear to Louis that he ought to start bracing himself for yet another of his father’s impromptu dinner parties.

“Nialler,” Dean appears out of thin air, clapping Niall on the back. He is clearly in high spirits. “Ladies,” he pats both girls on their heads, “always wonderful to see the Horan’s out and about. You simply must join us tonight. I won’t take no for an answer.”

“Of course, Mr. T,” Niall assures him, “We’d love to, wouldn’t we girls?”

Jazmín and Abril nod their heads in agreement.

(Well, Jazmín does. Abril is too busy trying to jump onto Harry’s back.)

“Excellent,” Louis’ father starts shimmying in time with the opening drum beat of Sussudio as it comes onto the radio, “Absolutely wonderful. This is going to be —” a quick, three-sixty degree spin, followed by a tilt of his imaginary hat — “a night to remember.”

“Dad.” Louis warns, “Please stop.”

“Why?” His father keeps bopping, “Am I embarrassing you, son?”

“Yes. Very much so.”

Dean chuckles, doing some sort of a moonwalk (at least, Louis thinks that’s what it’s meant to be?) towards the kitchen door.

“You kids don’t know good moves when you see them,” he sighs, disappearing out of view. “See you tonight, Nialler, my boy!”

“Will do, Mr. T!” Niall shouts back, stifling a laugh. He turns to Harry. “Put on your best shirt, gringo. Things are about to get wild.”

***

The annoying thing is that everybody likes Harry.

The locals are all drawn to him like magnets, charmed by his hair and dimples and elegant British wit, and they all take it in turns to shower him with affection. Over the course of the evening, his cheeks are kissed by every young woman present, and his face is blotchy from the vibrant lipstick of Señora Garcia, a middle-aged lady who can’t seem to stop herself from fondly smothering him whenever the opportunity arises.

Harry takes it all in his stride, of course. He laughs and mingles and blushes appropriately, ever the English gentleman. Louis is fascinated to discover that whatever Harry does — even if it is as
mundane as chewing lettuce — he will always be the central point of attention at any given moment. He amuses the guests to no end with his attempts at Spanish (leaving them all howling with laughter when he accidentally uses the word ‘mamada’ in the place of ‘mermelada’) and impresses them with his in-depth knowledge of the country’s literature and historical background. He seems to glide through social situations with the ease of a swan taking to water, and Louis can’t help but feel equal parts irritated and entranced.

By the time that dessert is served, everyone seems to have swapped seats, and there are several conversations going on at once; to Louis’ left, Patricia and Señor Dubois garble in French about some upcoming political affair, whilst the young couple opposite are engaged in a lighthearted quarrel over what sounds like the correct way to prepare pulpo a la gallega. Beside him, Niall does his best to involve Louis in the friendly banter that he and Cristina are sharing, but he eventually gives up when he realises that Louis’ mind his elsewhere.

‘Elsewhere’ meaning focused on Harry, of course.

The man sits at the other end of the table, his elbows planted on the hardwood and fingers interlocked. He leans forward as he speaks quietly with one of Señor Ortega’s daughters, a petite brunette with freckled skin whose name has escaped Louis for the time being. She watches, smiling as Harry shows her some sort of magic trick involving a coin and his glass, and proceeds to laugh in delight when he transforms ten céntimos into a peseta. Louis feels something unpleasant curl in his gut when a few moments later, Harry places a cigarette between his lips, politely asking her to light it. She does so, shielding the flame with her delicate hands when she brings the lighter forward, and Harry inhales deeply before tilting his head back and releasing a puff of smoke with a relieved sigh. The masculine line of his lax jaw makes Louis’ neck feel hot, and his dick gives a feeble twitch of interest in the confines of his shorts.

He’s sweating again. He feels like he hasn’t stopped sweating since he got here.

“Niall,” he says quietly, nudging his friend in the ribs. He doesn’t take his eyes of Harry.

Niall turns away from Cristina, disgruntled.

“Kind of working on something here, mate,” he whispers back, “what’s wrong?”

“That girl that Harry’s talking to. What’s her name?”

Niall follows his line of sight, taking in the pretty brunette as she reaches out to casually touch Harry’s forearm.

Louis’ stomach clenches.

“Oh, that’s Tatiana,” Niall tells him, “She’s the one that used to swim naked in my pool, remember?”

Louis doesn’t remember. A lot of girls used to swim naked in Niall’s pool. He doesn’t recall any of them specifically.

“Do you think he wants to fuck her?” Louis asks quietly, watching the pair lean into one another’s space.

Niall shrugs. “Maybe, yeah. He looks pretty into it.”

Louis bites the inside of his mouth, hard enough that he can taste blood.

And honestly, he wants nothing more than to just turn the other cheek and forget about it. Maybe
even strike up a conversation with one of the others at the table. One of the girls perhaps. He wants to flirt and flaunt himself like Harry does, and impress people without even trying. He wants to show Harry that he doesn’t give two shits what he does, that he couldn’t care less if Harry’s going to take Tatiana Ortega to bed tonight.

Except, he can’t do any of that. He can’t do any of that because he keeps thinking about what Harry’s face might look like when he undresses her. If he’d do it slowly, pressing kisses up her thighs and stomach, or if he’d rip her clothes off like a feral animal, and push her down onto the mattress with a growl. He wants to know what Harry’s hard, aching cock would look like when he finally, finally pulled it free from his boxers. Wants to know if he’d push it straight into her heat, or pump himself a few times to get the blood going. He wants to know what Harry looks like when he’s inside someone. When he’s moaning. When he’s about to come.

Louis sucks in a sudden gasp of air, his lungs tight and burning.

“Louis? are you alright?” Patricia asks him.

He must look seriously unwell if Patricia is showing concern.

It takes him a couple of seconds to realise that everyone else is staring at him too.

Harry is not exempt. His eyebrows are pulled together, and his expression worried, like he’s trying to read what’s going on in Louis’ mind.

Louis is irrationally afraid that he can.

“I, um,” he tries, his hands shaking, “Bed. I need to go to bed.”

His father frowns. “Are you feeling unwell again?”

Louis nods, already standing up.

To his horror, Harry starts to get up with him.

“Here,” he says, setting his serviette down on the table, “I’ll walk you up—”

“No!”

The entire congregation exchange puzzled glances at his outburst. Harry stops, staring at Louis blankly.

“I mean — ” Louis hurries to amend, his entire face flushing bright red. “I’ll be fine. On my own. Thank you.”

Harry glances around awkwardly. “…Okay.”

He slowly sinks back down into his chair.

“Goodnight everyone.” Louis nods to the rest of the table, receiving a murmur of response from the guests.

Niall and Cristina gaze at him in bewilderment. They know something’s up.

Not wanting to stick around long enough for them to figure it out, Louis turns on his heel and practically sprints for his bedroom.
Everything is spinning when he finally crashes down onto his bed. He doesn’t switch on the light. He just lays there in the near-darkness, panting and shaking, and trying to stop the dizzy feeling that keeps crashing over him in waves.

He doesn’t understand what’s happening to him. Nothing has ever made him feel like this before, not even a girl. Louis has never had sex before because he’s never felt the need to rush into things, but right now he’s feeling restless and frustrated, and he knows there has to be some sort of a release somewhere in all this. There has to be.

He whines, shifting on his stomach. His cock is hard and hot, trapped between his body and the mattress, and the inside of his underwear is sticky from pre-come. He’s tempted just to reach down and jack off straight into his boxers, but they’re too tight and uncomfortable, and it’s still so fucking hot in this room.

Breathing quickly, he pushes himself up onto his knees and takes off his shirt, tossing it carelessly on the floor.

He’ll give himself this, he thinks. He’ll allow himself this one thing, and then be done with it. After tonight, he’ll just put it away and never think about it again, no harm done.

(Yeah. Right.)

He reaches down, fumbling with the button of his jean shorts and sliding the zipper open.

“God,” Louis whispers, biting his lip as he massages himself through the material of his boxers. There’s a significant wet patch where the head of his cock is pressing up against the front, and he already knows this isn’t going to last long.

He shoves his shorts and underwear down in one, almost face-planting into the mattress in his haste to kick them off.

When he’s finally rid of them, he settles back on his haunches, taking his twitching shaft in his hand.

He starts to wank himself off with punishing speed. His fist flies back and forth using the slick glide of his pre-come, the harsh movement driven by the instinctual, hungry need for satisfaction.

His jaw goes slack at the long-awaited stimulation, and he tilts his head back to release a high whine. “Fuck,” he whimpers, almost inaudibly, “fucking fuck,”

His eyes roll backwards in pleasure. He’s aware that his abdomen is already starting to contract. At this rate he’s going to come before he even reaches the thirty seconds mark, which is embarrassing even for him.

He pinches his thigh, hard, like he usually does when he’s trying to stave off his orgasm, but it doesn’t work this time. He’s too wound up. He can practically smell Harry’s cologne in the air as the feeling in his belly starts to build…

Abruptly, he rips his hand from his cock.

The feeling of being so close, only to deny himself, hurts worse than a punch to the gut. Louis hunches forwards, making a pained sound as his dick spasms feebly, blurring out pre-come but lacking the stimulation needed to fully ejaculate.
He bites down on his bottom lip, revelling in the pain.

It feels good, in a sadistic sort of way. Refusing himself an orgasm serves as a strong reminder that what he’s doing is wrong. Thinking of Harry while he masturbates is wrong.

Louis groans, cupping his balls and stroking his thumb back and forth, coaxing another weak pulse of wetness from his slit, and he decides then and there that if he wants to come tonight, he’s going to make himself work for it.

With a strange, calm sort of conviction, he grabs the pillow from the top of his bed and shoves it down between his legs.

His breath catches when he lowers himself down onto it. The material is cool against his throbbing cock, making his thighs tense up in anticipation.

He has to take a few moments to get his thoughts together before he starts to thrust.

“S-Clip,” Louis breathes, dropping his sweaty forehead down onto the bed and screwing his eyes shut as he drives his hips forward.

He humps against the pillow in earnest, his motions stuttering and irregular. It’s not enough, not like his fist was, and he feels like he’s teetering right on the edge again. Eternally suspended in the dark space between euphoria and agony.

Louis’ always been noisy when he gets off. He can’t help it. He has to shove his face right into the mattress to muffle the wanton mewls that keep tumbling from his mouth, terrified that someone might hear him.

Then again, he supposes a small part of him wants to be caught. A small part of him wants Harry to open the door and find him laying there, hard and desperate, rubbing up against his pillow. Wants him to let out that deep, condescending laugh that makes Louis hot with embarrassment in the best way when he sees him. To make some sort of comment about how pathetically needy he looks, grinding messily all over his bed, trying to make himself come. He wants Harry to chuckle and run his hands over Louis’ feverish skin, and bite the shell of his ear when he leans down to whisper the words, ‘need a hand, little one?’

Louis whines, a flash of heat running through him and settling in his stomach. He pumps his hips faster, panting heavily until the mattress below him is damp with precipitate. His hands make fists in the crumpled sheets, and he screws his eyes shut, chasing and chasing and chasing, whimpering at the sensation of the rough fabric gliding against his prick. It’s almost punishment, the way he denies himself permission to finish the job with his hand. He wants to come just like this, rutting onto his pillow with his boxers around his ankles; wants to spurt onto the mattress and have to lay in it afterwards, and be forced to think about the consequences of his actions.

He gasps as his abdomen starts to contract again, his balls tightening. He’s too lost in the feeling now to stop even if he wanted to, slave to the up and down motion of his hips and the excruciatingly good friction on his cock. His mouth falls open and he presses his cheek hard into the mattress, furrowing his brows and crying out softly as he shoots his load, the wetness soaking through the pillowcase and sticking to his belly.

He clamps his thighs tight around the pillow, continuing to rock gently, riding it out.

When he finally comes down from his high, he feels equal parts wretched and satisfied. So what if he just came thinking about Harry? It’s not like he’s done any harm, is it?
June 26th

“What the hell is going on?”

Louis pauses mid-way up the ladder, peering down to look at Niall where he stands on the ground.

“What do you mean?”

Niall fixes him with a pointed look, shifting the crate of oranges onto his hip.

“You know exactly what I mean,” he says, “You’re acting all out of sorts. Going all quiet in the middle of a conversation. Running off without telling anyone where you’re going. Generally being weird.”

Louis reaches out to twist a ripe orange from the tree.

“Am I?” he hums.

“Don’t play dumb, Lou.”

“I’m not!” Louis exclaims, throwing the fruit at Niall’s blonde head. He misses. “Stop cross-questioning me. I’ve just been —”

“Tired, yeah,” Niall scoffs, “I know. You’ve been tired an awful lot lately.”

“Piss off, Ireland,” Louis plucks two more oranges from the branch, “It’s none of your business what I do in my free time. You’re not my bloody mother or anything.”

“Defensive, much?”

“Just saying it how it is.” he shrugs.

Below him, Niall sighs wearily. He crouches down and starts gathering the fallen oranges, placing them carefully in the crate.

“Is it the gringo?” he asks after a moment.

Louis goes still, his arm outstretched.

“…What?”

“The gringo. Harry.” Niall clarifies patiently, “Is he the reason you’ve been acting all strange?”

Louis swallows, anxiety blooming in his belly like a toxic garden.

“Why—” he coughs, clearing his throat before trying again. “Why would you think that?”

Niall squints up at him, a look of sympathy crossing his face.
“Look, if you’re annoyed about the whole Tatiana thing, then seriously, don’t let it get to you.” he says, “I can set you up with another bird in no time. Just say the word. There are tonnes of girls just visiting for the summer if a quick fling is what you’re after.”

Louis doesn’t know whether to laugh at his friend’s obliviousness, or break down in ugly sobs right there in the middle of a citrus tree because why, why God does no one understand?

He settles for keeping his expression carefully neutral.

“Thanks, mate. I’ll bear that in mind.” he says, continuing to seek out ripe oranges among the leaves. Then, to change the topic: “Look, are we going out tonight or what? Because I’m really gonna fancy a drink after all this orange-picking.”

Thank god Niall is easily distracted.

“Sure we are;” he says, “Enrique’s. everyone’s coming.”

He starts peeling one of the oranges.

“Oi,” Louis barks, “Stop eating the profits!”

“Please, you’re rich enough. I’m only saving you from yourselves.”

Louis scoffs and rolls his eyes, climbing further up the ladder so as to reach the higher fruits.

He makes the mistake of glancing over the stone wall into the garden and catching sight of Harry were he’s laying by the pool, his papers spread out before him and a jug of lemon water at his side. He’s shirtless, wearing only a pair of cherry red swimming trunks, and his hair is still damp from his morning swim. His eyebrows are furrowed in concentration.

Guilt stirs to life, deep in Louis’ stomach like a sickness. Here he is, creeping on this poor, unsuspecting man — a man who is seven years his senior, no less — longing for something that is so deeply foolish he can’t help but detest himself for it.

He’s stupid. He is a stupid little boy.

He is stupid for wanting Harry the way he does.

Grinding his teeth, he returns his attention to the orange tree, continuing to pluck fruit from its branches with a touch more vigour than necessary. He barely even notices when his throw misses the crate, and one of the oranges ends up hitting Niall square in the face on the way down.

“Ow — steady on!” Niall grumbles, rubbing his nose. “Gilipollas.”

Louis doesn’t apologise.

***

A couple of hours later, Harry pads into the kitchen in search of food.

Louis is sitting on the counter at the time, flipping through the pages of Valentina’s recipe book. As soon as Harry enters the room, a flurry of nervous butterflies start swarming about in his belly.

“Hey,” Harry says, opening the fridge. “How do you feel?”

It takes Louis a second to understand that he’s referring to last night, when he had rather
unceremoniously dashed out of his father’s dinner party to take care of his untimely erection under the guise of being unwell.

“Better, thanks,” he says, keeping his eyes trained on the book.

Harry hums, rummaging around until he finds the fruit. “I’m glad to hear it,” he says. “You want a drink or anything? Orange juice?”

Louis shakes his head.

“Suit yourself.”

He steals a furtive glance, watching as Harry bumps the fridge door closed with his hip and sets the fruit salad down on the island. He’s still got his swimming trunks on, but his broad chest is now thankfully covered by a white T-shirt. The look is surprisingly casual in comparison to his usual high-fashion ensembles.

“I never thanked you for taking me with you yesterday,” Harry says as he leans against the island, skewering a cherry with his fork. “It was nice of you guys to show me around. Niall and the girls are really great.”

Louis offers him a polite smile. “It was nothing. I’m glad you enjoyed yourself.”

He briefly wonders if Harry ended up doing anything with Tatiana Ortega last night.

She definitely didn’t stay over after the party. Louis is a light sleeper — he would have heard her sneaking out of Harry’s room this morning. And if he hadn’t, then Valentina certainly would have, and consequently the entire neighbourhood would know about it by now because Valentina can’t keep her mouth shut about anything.

Louis swings his legs, watching Harry sift through the bowl of fruit.

“How’s the paper coming along?” he asks.

“Eh, not bad,” Harry scrunches his nose, “There’s still a lot of research to be done before I can draw my conclusion though. It’s kind of a more complex topic than I originally thought.”

Louis nods in agreement, as if he knows all about the issues of agricultural sustainability and what-not.

“I’m sure you’ll get it done,” he says reassuringly.

“I hope so,” Harry pops a bit of pineapple in his mouth, “My professor wants me to have at least a first draft by the time I get to Valencia.”

Louis stops swinging his legs. He looks at Harry with furrowed brows, uncertain whether he’d heard correctly.

“Valencia?” he repeats.

“Uh-huh,” Harry nods, his mouth full, “That’s where I’m headed after here.”

Louis blinks in confusion. “How come?”

“Variation, I suppose. It bodes well for my research if I can back it up with evidence from multiple locations,” he crosses over to the sink and starts washing up his cutlery, “Plus, Valencia is the orange
Louis frowns. He feels irrationally hurt by the implication that his city’s citrus production is anything less than first rate.

“Will you be staying with another family?” he asks, fearing the worst.

Harry continues to wash up with his back to him. “I think so, yeah. This elderly couple offered me a place on their plantation. It looked pretty posh actually, I get my own little guest villa and everything.”


Harry smiles at him over his shoulder. “It does, doesn’t it? Although I doubt it will have a patch on this place. There’s no way their cooking could live up to Valentina’s, for a start.”

Louis knows he’s only saying that to be nice. Valencia is beautiful. Whoever Harry is going to stay with next will no doubt have ten swimming pools, and an orange grove twice the size of the Tomlinsons’, and a whole host of attractive, unmarried daughters. It will probably be like the Hispanic version of Pride and Prejudice, in which Elizabeth Bennet is actually called something like Luciana or María José, and Mr. Darcy is a charming young gentleman from overseas instead of a reclusive British asshole.

Louis scowls at Harry’s back. Life is so, so cruel.

“I’d better crack on,” Harry says, placing his fork on the drying rack. He shoots Louis a dimpled smile on the way out. “Catch you later, man.”

And then he disappears outside again, humming happily to himself, swallowed up by the afternoon heat.

***

Niall and Cristina have been making out for almost half an hour now, backed up against the far wall with people dancing past them, sucking on each other’s tongues like it’s an Olympic sport. Louis finds the whole thing quite revolting.

He leans back in his chair, taking a drag of his cigarette. The rest of their group have either fucked off to get high or are engaged in their own conversations. The only person still paying Louis the slightest bit of attention is Brigitte Charpentier — some girl from Paris that Niall is trying to set him up with — and quite frankly, he’d rather just be left alone.

It’s not that Brigitte isn’t nice, or anything. She’s plenty nice. It’s just that Louis has been in a particularly irritable mood since they arrived at the party, and her constant pestering isn’t doing anything to improve that. She keeps leaning her elbows on the table and scooting closer and bumping her shoulder against his when a good song comes on, and it’s just so drab. Like something from a corny Hollywood romance.

“Voulez-vous danser, Louis?” She asks him when Cruel Summer starts to play.

Louis shakes his head. “Sorry, love. I’ve got a dodgy knee.”

He knows it’s shitty of him to lie like that, but getting up is really the last thing he wants to do right now. He’s had rather a lot to drink already. Things are getting a little wavy.
Brigitte looks upset at his refusal, but she keeps talking to him all the same, trying to coerce him into a conversation about some new movie that she went to see with her brother. Louis doesn't contribute much. He nods along at the appropriate moments of course, but for the most part he just keeps his mouth shut.

He watches the crowd.

In the centre of the courtyard, Harry is dancing. His head is tilted back and his eyes are closed, and there’s a dreamy smile on his face as he sways to the music. He isn’t the most graceful of dancers, but what he lacks in skill he more than makes up for in confidence, and he’s already received more than a few propositions from tipsy young ladies.

It was Niall who had invited him, of course. If Louis had his way, he’d be putting as much distance between himself and Harry as possible right now. As previously established, the man does weird things to his headspace.

He takes a gulp of his drink, alcohol stinging the back of his throat.

Currently, Harry is entertaining the likes of a large-breasted blonde girl. Her arms are looped around his waist, and they’re dancing almost comically off-beat, laughing and swooping from side to side and tripping over one another. Merely two sangrias in, Harry looks to be having the time of his life.

Louis stares. He’s too drunk to worry about the fact that he’s being obvious. A twinge of resentment tugs at the pit of his stomach as he watches, but he fails to understand whether its directed towards Harry, or the girl he’s dancing with, or just himself. He thinks maybe it’s all three.

The coloured lights slide over Harry’s face, orange and purple and green, pooling in the crevice of his dimples. His hips sashay this way and that and Louis’ eyes track every tantalising movement. He soaks up the beauty of it, carving the picture into the back of his mind. Something to revisit in the distant future when Harry Styles is, inevitably, little more than a faded memory.

The blonde girl slides her hand into Harry’s hair, her mouth stretched into a broad smile.

“Louis?” Brigitte touches his shoulder, “Tu semble malade…”

Louis catches sight of his reflection in his glass, only to find that she’s right. He does look sick. His skin is pale and there’s darkness beneath his eyes and he looks just about ready to murder someone.

“I’m tired,” he tells her.

He wonders how long this can go on for. How long he can keep up the pretence of being ‘tired’ before he’s forced to address the real, underlying issue.

Not for the first time, he longs to be back in England. He needs the cleansing scent of fresh rain and dewy football pitches beneath his feet. He needs to be free from this never-ending cycle of heat.

He finishes his drink and stands to get another.

“I’ll be back in a sec,” he tells Brigitte, though he’s not sure if it’s the truth.

He finds the ice bucket on the floor by the speakers. The ice has long since melted, leaving five green bottles bobbing sadly in the water. Louis stares down at them for a few seconds, wondering if he’s more drunk than he thought he was, because he may or may not be a little too fascinated by the bright colours dancing over the surface of the liquid.
He shakes his head, stooping down to grab a beer.

The crowd in the courtyard is big — Enrique is a popular guy, and his guests are always encouraged to bring a plus one — unfortunately, it’s not big enough to hide Harry and his dance partner from view. Every time Louis turns around his eyes automatically latch on to the middle of the floor, where the pair of them have moved right into one another’s space for a slow dance.

Louis leans back against the wall and cracks open his drink, taking a good long swig.

It doesn’t take long for the lights to go fuzzy. When he’s finished with his beer, he goes in for a second. He starts to feel drowsy — content, like he’s just on the precipice of sleep. He stays in his safe corner for another fifteen minutes or so, watching the gyrating crowd and nodding his head along to the music. Every now and again, people come over to chat with him for a bit. Old friends and new acquaintances alike, just making the rounds, checking in before moving on. At some point, a pretty girl gives him another drink, but it’s not a beer, this time. It’s something colourful and sweet which leaves him feeling dizzier than before, clutching onto the backs of chairs as he heads towards the exit.

He doesn’t know when he decided he didn’t want to be here anymore. He thinks maybe it was around the time he caught sight of Harry’s dance partner clumsily attacking his neck with her lips. He quickly pushes his way through the bodies, feeling nauseous and floaty, his eardrums still ringing from standing so close to the speakers. He considers finding Niall to let him know he’s leaving, but thinks better of it in the end. He’s probably run off somewhere with Cristina anyhow, and there’s no way Louis will find them if that’s the case.

He makes the mistake of looking down at the ground as he walks, trying to keep himself from tripping over his own feet, and ends up smacking straight into one of Enrique’s pals. The guy’s drink — something red and sticky — ends up all down the front of Louis’ shirt, soaking right through to his chest.

The dude starts shouting at him in Spanish, but Louis doesn’t stick around to listen. He mumbles some half-assed apology, embarrassed tears stinging his eyes, and gets out of there fast.

The chorus of John Waite’s Missing You plays him out mockingly.

***

When Louis arrives back at the house, everything is and quiet and unmoving, cast in soft moonlight. He lets himself in silently, prodding the stray cat that’s made it’s home on the doorstep, and pads towards the kitchen.

He should probably change his shirt or something, but he doesn’t want to risk waking anyone by fumbling about upstairs. Instead, he grabs one of his father’s ales from the fridge and heads through the back door onto the patio, quietly closing the door behind him.

In the stillness of the early hours, Louis makes his way over to the pool, it’s glassy surface reflecting the velvet black sky. Carefully, he slips his shoes off and lowers himself down onto the stone tiles to dip his feet into the water, sighing as the cool waves lap around his calves.

The buzz of whatever he’d been drinking has long since worn off, and now he just feels empty. Empty, sad, and completely alone.

Well — almost alone. The stray cat that was sitting on the doorstep has since wandered around the side of the house, and now perches a few feet away from him on the tile. It lets out a soft meow.
“What are you looking at?” Louis mumbles.

The cat blinks its eyes slowly; two pools of bright amber in the darkness.

“Go on,” Louis sighs, waving his hand in an aborted gesture, “get out of here. Go.”

He watches in mild irritation as the cat starts grooming itself, totally unfazed.

Apparently no one listens to a word he says. Not even mangy, flea-ridden animals.

Louis lets out a frustrated sound, dropping his head down between his shoulder blades. He’s never felt so utterly defeated in all his life. There’s just something so hopeless about all this — his feelings for Harry are driving him insane. He doesn’t know if it’s infatuation or lust or…or something else, but whatever it is, it’s wearing him down. Pretty soon he’s going to reach the end of his tether.

He glances down at his distorted reflection in the water, catching a glimpse of the heavy exhaustion between his eyes and the unruly state of his hair. He looks a mess. A crumpled, sleep-deprived, post-inebriated mess.

He closes his eyes.

Louis isn’t sure how long he sits there for in the end. A couple of minutes stretch into thirty, and after that time seems to slip away like dry sand through clumsy fingers. The sky above him morphs from indigo to violet, the dawn threatening to break at any moment, but Louis doesn’t dare look. Doesn’t dare open his eyes, lest things look any worse in the light.

He stays just as he is, shoulders curved and head bent, breathing slowly.

At some point, when the world is grey-purple and the birds are only just starting to sing, Louis is almost certain he hears the back door opening. He tenses for a moment, wondering if it had just been a figment of his imagination. An illusion, conjured up by his exhausted mind. Surely it was.

Then again, maybe not. There are footsteps now. Bare feet, padding softly across the lawn. They pause on the tiles behind him, and Louis can sense the presence of another body standing close by. Can feel their eyes raking over him.

“You left,” Harry says, breaking the silence.

Louis almost flinches at the sound of his voice. It’s deep and hoarse — most likely because he’s spent the entire night belting along to Tina Turner, but to Louis, the only word that immediately springs to mind is fucked-out.

He swallows tightly.

“I wasn’t enjoying it as much as I thought I would,” he says.

The words are met with silence.

Slowly, he blinks his eyes open against the light.

Harry is standing over him, his reflection visible in the water over Louis’ shoulder. He’s sporting a concerned frown upon his face, and his curls are falling everywhere, having no doubt been ruffled up by his overly enthusiastic blonde friend.

Louis feels sick all over again.
Neither of them say anything, but after a few seconds, Harry lowers himself down to sit beside Louis on the tile.

Silently, he rolls up the sleeves of his shirt to his elbows and leans forward to gently splash water on his tired face, sighing as the cool droplets run down his neck. He pushes his wet hand back through his hair when he’s done, and Louis’ feels his stomach contract painfully at the sight.

Harry meets his gaze.

“What’s got you so upset?” he asks quietly. His eyes are searching Louis’ for answers, and he looks beaten. Far more vulnerable than he’s ever appeared to be before.

Louis feels another pang of guilt deep inside him, but this time it’s mixed with something else. Anger, perhaps. Fury that Harry insists on torturing him like this.

Because, on some level, he must know. He must know that ever since he showed up, Louis’ life has been torn between avoiding him at all costs and desperately longing for his attention. That everything he does is with the intention of impressing Harry. That every moment he spends in Harry’s presence he feels so painfully not enough, but at the same time he can’t help himself from craving the older man’s touch and affection. That every fucking night he goes to bed and tries to stop himself from wondering what it would be like to have a firm body pressed up against his back, and warm breath on the back of his neck, and muscular arms wrapped around his torso.

After all this time, Harry must know. He must know that Louis is so hopelessly gone for him.

“…Lou?”

Harry’s voice is so soft. Like butterfly wings, flapping gently in the confines of a mason jar.

Louis’ heart constricts again in his chest.

“Hey,” Harry ducks to regain eye contact, “If there’s anything wrong… you know you can talk to me, right? I’m not, like, you’re parents or anything. I’m not here to judge.”

And…wow.

Wow.

It’s such sincere bullshit that it startles a laugh out of Louis’ mouth before he can even attempt to stop it.

“Talk to you, Harry?” he says bitterly, a sudden surge of bravery pushing him to look the man dead in the eyes. “No I fucking can’t. Don’t lie to me.”

Harry looks completely taken aback. Wounded, even. He opens and closes his mouth in shock.

“Louis, I didn’t mean to—”

“Yeah, I know, you didn’t mean to pry,” Louis waves him off, his words still coming out harsh and biting, “You never do, right? Because you’re just a perfect gentleman, Harry Styles, always thinking of others before yourself. Never setting a foot wrong. That’s why everyone loves you isn’t it?” he laughs again, the sound cruel even to his own ears. “Because you’re so bloody charming, aren’t you?”

Harry falters, gazing at Louis in confusion.
“Have I—” he visibly swallows, eyes flitting back and forth between Louis’ own. “— have I done something wrong?”

Oh Jesus. Jesus.

Louis releases an exasperated sound, tilting his head back to look up at the sky.

“Fucking hell,” he mutters to himself, screwing his eyes shut. “You know, for a student at one of the top colleges in America, you aren’t half thick.”

“I don’t… I’m not sure what you mean.”

Louis doesn’t respond immediately. They’re going in circles here, and it’s pretty obvious that Harry is still a little drunk. He probably wouldn’t have come searching for Louis otherwise. He would have headed straight inside and crashed into bed, none the wiser.

It would have been better that way, Louis thinks. But there’s no backtracking now. No hope of parting on good terms.

He has to get this poison out of his veins before it kills him.

“Harry,” he murmurs, head still tilted back.

He feels the man tense beside him.

“…yes?”

“I’m going to do something stupid now, okay?” a rush of courage. “Feel free to stop me at any point.”

He doesn’t get a response, and he doesn’t wait for one.

Opening his eyes, he regards the man next to him, indulging all at once in evergreen eyes and plump taffy lips, and dangerous tattoos which litter tanned forearms.

He revels in the catch of Harry’s breath when he reaches out to touch — a palm, placed flat against the exposed skin of his chest.

“Louis, I —”

“Shut up. Please.”

Harry doesn’t speak again, but his lips are parted and he’s watching Louis intensely. His breath speeds up as Louis strokes the warm skin beneath his fingers.

In truth, Louis has no idea what he’s doing. All he knows is that he’s reached a point of no return, and if he doesn’t do this now then he never will.

So he does.

He slides his hand around to cup the back of Harry’s neck and leans in to press a dry kiss to his lips.

It’s shaky and unskilled, but Louis doesn’t care. His heart is beating painfully fast, and his hand is trembling were it rests on Harry’s nape, and he keeps kissing him, again and again — small, chaste catches of their lips, a whispered plea of just let me have this. Please, just let me have this.
It takes a second. It takes more than a second, but then something inside Harry seems to give. A wire snaps, or a nerve end sparks up — something which jolts him into action like an electric shock. At once, he releases a soft sound that has Louis’ cock giving a twitch of excitement in his pants, and then a large hand is reaching up to cradle Louis’ cheek, and his lips are moving slowly against Louis’ own.

And for a moment they are suspended like that, wrapped up in uncertain touches and the gentle feeling of one another’s lips. So gentle. So soft and intimate that it has Louis’ breath coming out in erratic puffs and his entire body thrumming with want.

It’s only for a moment, though.

Everything comes plummeting back to reality when Harry sets a firm hand against Louis’ shoulder, nudging him away despite the noise of protest that falls from his lips.

Then he looks down at Louis with pupils blown-wide and chest heaving, his expression pained.

“We can’t,” he rasps, “I’m sorry, Louis, we — we shouldn’t do this.”

“Okay,” Louis whispers, his voice sounding foreign. He’s still trembling all over.

“Jesus,” Harry presses his hands over his eyes, shaking his head, “Jesus Christ, I’m an idiot. I’m so sorry, Louis. I should just — I’m going to go —” he’s already scrambling to get up, and Louis doesn’t try to stop him.

“Oh, all right,” he says again. It’s barely audible.

Harry stands, fistng his hair and staring down at Louis for a second longer.

“I’m sorry,” he says again.

Then he walks hurriedly back to the house, his tense figure cast in purple light.

***

When Louis eventually flops down into bed at 4.45am, he doesn’t curl himself up into a ball and cry.

Instead, he lays on his back in the sweltering heat, and allows a small smile of victory to play out upon his lips.

He’d kissed Harry. And for a moment there, Harry had kissed him too.

And if that means anything, it means that his feelings for Harry Styles, on some level, are not wholly unrequited.

(Read: there is hope for Louis Tomlinson yet.)
Chapter 3

June 30th

For the past three days, Harry has been avoiding Louis at all costs.

This has included accepting various invites to dinner at other people’s houses, stowing away into the orange grove for long, unnecessary chats with Sancho, and taking frequent solo trips into town to collect more ‘resources for his research.’

And, sure, it’s awkward as hell. But Louis isn’t prepared to let that put him off.

Ever since the mind-blowing revelation that Harry might not be as off-limits as he originally thought, he’s been keeping his head down and working quietly on his plan of action. It’s a risk, he knows — but the chance of kissing Harry again (and maybe more) isn’t an opportunity he’s willing to pass up.

So here he is: phase one of Operation Seduction.

Phase one includes nudity. Or as much of it as is possible when his father and Patricia are in the vicinity. Currently, Louis is splayed out across a deckchair in a pair of small, blue swimming trunks, pretending to read his father’s old copy of *Don Quixote*. On the ground sits Valentina’s radio, *Relax* by Frankie Goes to Hollywood crackling through the low-quality speakers. Louis nods his head absently to the beat.

Behind him, the gate to the orange grove creaks open.

He glances over his shoulder, lowering the rim of his sunglasses to watch as Harry and Sancho emerge, talking amicably in a weird mixture of Spanish and English.

Louis’ eyes track Harry’s movement as he helps to load some crates into the back of a van. When he’s done, he wipes his hands down on his jeans and gives Sancho a pat on the back, before turning and heading up towards the house.

Louis goes in for the strike.

“Harry,” he calls.
Harry stops. It’s a visible thing, the way the muscles in his back tense up. Louis can spot him consciously trying to relax them as he turns around, a carefully indifferent look upon his face when his green eyes dart quickly over Louis’ bare torso.

Louis realises that this the first time Harry has properly looked at him in three days, and an uncontrollable thrill runs down his spine.

“What’s up?” Harry says. It comes out dry and scratchy, like his throat is full of sandpaper.

Louis’ lips curl up into a devious smile as he pushes his sunglasses back up his nose. “Would you mind coming here a sec?”

Harry is obviously torn. He stays rooted to the spot for a moment, glancing back up at the house as if he’s gauging whether or not he can make a run for it.

Eventually, his shoulders sag in defeat. He comes over.

“You good?” he says when he’s standing over Louis, his muscular body blocking out the sun. There’s a definite air of caution in the way he stands. Like he’s not quite sure where the boundaries lie anymore.

Louis smiles up at him. “Can you do me a favour?”

Harry glances off to the left, uncertain. “Uh. Sure.”

Then Louis swings his legs off the chair so he’s sat facing away from Harry, and produces a bottle of sunscreen from the ground. He holds it out, flashing a toothy grin.

“Can’t reach my back.”

Harry goes rigid, fingers clenching at his sides, and for a moment Louis worries that he won’t take the bait — that he might just let out an angry sigh and stalk off without another word, continuing to ignore Louis’ general existence for the rest of his stay.

But he doesn’t do that.

After a few seconds of what Louis’ can only assume is a heated internal debate, Harry reaches out and takes the bottle.

Louis’ watches in a state of semi-shock as he snicks open the cap, because it actually fucking worked. Phase one worked, and now Harry Styles is going to touch him and run his big hands all over Louis’ back and lather him with oily sunscreen while Louis just sits there and —

“Turn around then.” Harry mumbles.

Right. Yes. Louis has to keep cool. He has to play this to his advantage.

He turns around, waiting with bated breath.

The moment that Harry’s hands make contact with his skin, he has to bite down hard on his tongue so as not to shudder. He can feel the cool liquid on his shoulders as Harry works it in oh so gently, massaging in wide circles with his palms.

He focuses on Louis’ upper back and neck first, kneading the lotion into his nape where the little
baby hairs grow, squeezing lightly. Then his skilled hands travel down, rubbing the expanse of his back with pleasurable force, causing Louis’ entire body to tingle with arousal. Though Harry’s disposition is hesitant, his touch certainly is not.

Louis lets out a rush of air when Harry reaches the band of his swim trunks, fingers working tenderly at the base of his spine. They’re probably both aware that it wouldn’t take much for him to dip down beneath the material — to touch Louis where he’s most vulnerable.

God, if Harry had any idea how much Louis’ wants that. He lets his eyes flutter closed, rolling his head back and enjoying the feeling of his cock perking up between his legs.

It’s only when he lets a small, almost inaudible sigh of pleasure escape from his lips that things come to an abrupt end.

Harry practically rips his hands away like he’s been burned, immediately taking a step back.

“I— um,” he clears his throat quickly, drying his hands on his T-shirt. “I think that’s done.”

Louis isn’t sure, but he reckons the front of Harry’s jeans have tented out a little bit too. Apparently he wasn’t the only one enjoying himself.

“Thanks a bunch,” he says sweetly, swinging his legs back up onto the chair and reclining. He doesn’t make any effort whatsoever to hide his own erection. Harry can take a good, long look for all he cares.

He doesn’t bid Harry farewell. Instead, he simply picks up his book and goes back to reading.

Harry stands there uselessly for a few more seconds, before mumbling something about his work and walking away. He trips over his own feet halfway to the door.

Louis chuckles under his breath.

Phase one: success.

July 1st

“Ow!” Jazmín sobs inconsolably, clinging to her older brother like a limpet, “Fa mal! Fa mal!”

“Shh, I know it hurts, babe,” Niall bounces her in his arms like an overgrown baby, “We’re gonna fix it up, okay? Just try to relax a bit, there’s a good girl.”

Louis squeezes little Abril’s hand as they watch Niall do his best to calm her sister down. They’ve attracted quite the crowd at this point, Jazmín’s screams echoing down the busy street and falling upon an audience of concerned mothers. It’s almost comical, the way they all automatically stop and start rifling through their handbags in search of medicinal wipes or a spare plaster.

After Mass, little Jazmín had taken a nasty tumble on the stone steps of the Cathedral, which left her with a large open cut beneath her knee. The past ten minutes have been spent frantically trying to get her to stop crying.

Mr and Mrs Horan, ever the social butterflies, are still inside and chatting to their neighbours and Father Manuel, blissfully unaware that their little princess has had an accident — and woe betide Niall if they come out to find her in this state, because when Niall is placed in charge of looking after
his sisters, anything that happens to them will be on his head.

“It doesn’t even look that bad,” he says as Jazmín sobs into his collar, “I promise it will stop hurting soon, Jaz. Try to be brave for me, yeah?”

Abril tugs at Louis’ hand.

“Is she going to die?” she whispers loudly.

Louis chuckles, shaking his head. “Of course not, sweetheart. She just needs a bit of a cleanup, is all.”

Abril huddles into his side, watching her sister thrash about in Niall’s arms.

“Christ, stay still,” Niall is huffing “Tía María — just don’t get blood on your dress, alright? —”

Fortunately for everyone involved, It’s at this point that their knight in shining armour arrives.

Isaac Dominguez, a small, dark-haired boy who lives right in the city centre, comes careening through the crowd with miniature first aid kit in hand.

“I’ve got it,” he’s saying, “I’ve got it!”

“Oh, praise the Lord,” Niall sags in relief, placing his sobbing sister down on the stone steps, “Are there bandages in there?”

“Bandages, disinfectant, the whole lot,” Isaac assures him. Louis watches the boy kneel down before Jazmín, offering her a kind smile. “Hanging in there, cariño?”

Jazmín whines unintelligibly.

“I know, I know. Don’t worry, I’ll get you patched up.”

Calmly, Isaac clicks open the medical kit and selects a disinfecting wipe, removing it from the packet.

“It’s going to sting a tiny bit, but nothing you can’t handle,” he says, holding it above Jazmín’s cut. “May I?”

She nods, hiccuping wetly.

Everyone watches, endeared as the boy carefully dabs at the injury, speaking to Jazmín all the while to distract her from the discomfort. When he’s done, he discards the disinfecting wipe and sets about wrapping her knee in a thin bandage, covering the wound.

“Would you look at that,” he marvels, leaning back on his haunches, “just like new!”

Jazmín cracks a feeble little smile, picking at the bandage.

“Oi, leave it alone,” Niall scolds, “You want it to start bleeding everywhere again?”

She shakes her head quickly.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. Say thank you to Isaac, babes.”

Jazmín wipes her snotty nose on the sleeve of her cardigan, mumbling a quiet thank you. Niall
follows this up with his own words of gratitude, giving Isaac a brotherly slap on the back.

They’ve known each other for years, Niall and Isaac. Back in the day, when they were just little kids themselves, Isaac was one of the first people Niall introduced to Louis. He fondly remembers the times that the three of them used to rally a group together every week after mass and head to the Maria Luisa for a game of footie. Isaac was a whiz on the pitch. With his help, little Louis had slowly gained control of his two left feet.

“Hey,” Louis reaches out to clasp Isaac’s shoulder when Niall is done with him, “come see us up at the house sometime, yeah? It’s been a while.”

The boy smiles warmly in return. “I’ll definitely take you up on that,” he says, patting Louis’ hand where it rests on his arm. “It’s great to see you again, hermano.”

“You too, mate.”

Isaac sticks around for a while longer, waiting for his own parents to emerge from the Cathedral before heading off home. Dean, Patricia and Valentina come out shortly afterwards, each of them making a big fuss over Jazmín’s freshly bandaged knee, pressing kisses to her head and calling her a brave little girl. Valentina even awards her with a little bar of turrón from her handbag, which Louis is a little miffed about because what is this unspoken rule that you have to be under a certain age to enjoy turrón?

He voices this complaint to Valentina in the car on the way back, earning himself little more than an amused laugh and a fond smack upside the head.

July 2nd

Phase two of Operation Seduction unfolds during ‘tapas night’ — an occasion for which Niall takes it upon himself to assemble a team of local teenagers and hit up as many bars as they can before Tapas Hour is up. It’s a sure fire way to get everybody broke, drunk, and stuffed to the gunnels with good food, but by God is it worth it when it comes to Sevillian cuisine.

It’s also a great opportunity to get at Harry, so really, Louis is all in.

By eight thirty, strings have been pulled, phone calls have been made, and everything is in position. Louis is sat up at the crowded bar, and Harry’s table has the perfect view of him. It’s time to strike.

“Voulez-vous une boisson?” he says in perfect French.

Brigitte turns to look at him, blinking in surprise when she finds him standing so close.

“Oh — Louis!” she says, “Niall didn’t say you would be here.”

There’s probably an irony in that, somewhere. The fact that as soon as Louis starts speaking her language, she starts speaking a different one.

“Well, to tell you the truth, he didn’t tell me you’d be here either,” he says.

(Which is a lie. Louis asked Niall to invite her. Brigitte Charpentier is an integral part of his plan.)

“But I’m glad that you are,” he adds, leaning against the bar and fixing her with a kind smile. “I wanted to apologise for running off the other night. It was incredibly rude of me to leave
unannounced like that.”

“Oh, no, not at all,” Brigitte is quick to shake her head, “It’s no problem, Louis. You don’t have to apologise —”

“No, no, I insist.” Louis cuts her off, “I’d had a bad day and I’m afraid you took the brunt of it, which I’m truly sorry about. If you were any less lovely you’d have hit me over the head with your purse and walked away as soon as I turned you down for that dance.”

Brigitte smiles and blushes, angling her face towards the floor. “It’s alright, Louis, really. I forgive you.”

“Thank you, sweetheart. But please, let me at least buy you a drink to make it up.” He signals the bartender over with a practised wave of his hand. “What’s it to be? A Raspberry Como? French Martini?”

Brigitte bites her lip.

“Boulevardier,” she says shyly.

“Ahh, a Boulevardier,” Louis grins, “Sophisticated woman, aren't you?”

(Another lie. Louis reckons a Boulevardier is about as close as one can get to drinking a glassful of pure pretension.)

He places the order.

One quick glance in Harry’s direction is enough to know that the game is on: he’s watching the pair of them already, curious green eyes no doubt honing in on the lack of space between their two bodies.

Louis turns his attention back to Brigitte. “Are you here with anyone, love?”

“Non. Just me.”

“Well then, you ought to come sit with us,” he nods towards the table where Harry, Niall, and a large group of other familiar faces are seated. “The more the merrier, right?”

Brigitte looks hesitant. “If you’re sure…”

“Oh, I insist.” Louis collects her drink and slides a note across the counter to the bartender. “Come on, I’ll introduce you to the lads. They don’t bite, I promise.”

That’s all the encouragement she needs to take Louis’ arm and follow him as he weaves through the various groups of people, giggling into his shoulder when he cracks some joke about the miserable looking fat guy sat in the corner giving everyone dirty glances.

“Here he is, the man of the hour!” Niall exclaims when Louis reaches them, clearly on his third mojito at least. “Move along boys, that’s it. Make room for my lover to sit down.”

There is a general murmur of greetings and chairs scraping across floorboards as everyone makes way for the pair to slide in. Louis finds himself squashed between Brigitte and Harry, who has to curve his broad shoulders inwards so as not to take up too much space.

He steadily avoids Louis’ eye.
“Evening, all,” Louis addresses the table with a nod.

“Who’s your moza, Lou?” a kid named Esteban pipes up straight away, making no secret of the fact that he’s checking Brigitte out.

“Steady on, tiger,” Louis chuckles. He slings his arm over the back of Brigitte’s chair, touching her shoulder lightly. “This is Brigitte. She’s visiting us from the beautiful land of Francia.”

This is met with an appropriate chorus of ‘oohs’ and ‘aahs.’

“Bonsoir,” Brigitte says with a timid smile.

It doesn’t take long for the boys to start asking stupid questions — ‘have you ever run into Celine Dion at the supermarché?’ and the like — and whilst everyone is conveniently distracted, Louis takes the opportunity to nudge Harry and get his attention.

“You alright, mate?” he says amicably.

Harry nods, offering Louis a smile that looks a little bit like a grimace.

“Splendid, thank you,” he says unconvincingly, “yourself?”

“Oh, never better,” Louis flashes him a toothy grin. He holds his gaze beneath the dim lights for a moment or two. “What are you drinking, then?”

“I’m —” Harry looks down at the glass between his hands, brows knitting together. “I’m not really sure. I asked for a beer and… got this instead.”

Louis snorts. Of course Harry had been too polite to complain. Even though he’s now sat there nursing something blue and sickly-looking, possibly the least masculine drink at the table, and definitely the furthest thing from a regular beer than he could have received.

“You’re gonna have to work on that Spanish, mate,” Louis tells him, his voice laced with sympathy. “Bet that cost you a fair bit more than a lager would have, too.”

Harry smiles ruefully into his glass. “I’m afraid it did.”

“Well,” Louis lets out an amused laugh, “at least you’ve got all evening to get it right.”

Harry opens his mouth to respond, but at that moment, Brigitte lets out a loud gasp.

“What?” Louis turns to look at her, “What is it? Are you hurt?”

“non, non, look!” she squeals in delight, pointing over at the door where a group of middle-aged men have just ducked through the threshold.

“Oh, hey, it’s Alvaro!” Niall shouts, waving his arms manically over his head. “¡Hola, Alvaro! ¿Que pasa? Gonna play the good stuff tonight, yeah? That’s my man.”

Old Alvaro, who has a proper Spanish guitar hanging from a colourful strap around his shoulders, gives Niall a friendly wave as he starts to set up in the corner of the bar.

“Oh, goodness,” Brigitte grabs Louis’ arm in excitement, “he’s going to play! Oh, I do love Flamenco music, Louis.”

She’s clawing at him like an exuberant puppy dog, and honestly, Louis has never seen anyone so
thrilled over some bar music. As soon as Alvaro starts plucking the strings, she’s leaning down to rest her head on Louis’ shoulder, squeezing his bicep and practically vibrating with glee.

“Music fan?” he chuckles into her hair as she pulls him closer.

“My mother was a singer when she was young,” she tells him, not once taking her eyes off Alvaro, “and my father could play every instrument in the world.”

Louis pretends to be interested, prodding her with questions about her upbringing and life back in Paris. He can feel Harry shifting awkwardly beside him every now and again, and it’s obvious he can hear every word. Can see the way Brigitte turns her head to tuck her smile into Louis’ collar whenever he says something overly flirtatious.

The pair of them stay like that for the entirety of Alvaro’s set, touching and teasing in the least subtle way, totally ignoring the rest of the table. At one point, Louis even reaches out to tuck a strand of behind Brigitte’s ear, murmuring romantic spiel in his best French all the while.

He hears Harry’s chair scrape back violently.

“Excuse me,” he says to the table, standing up, “I need to use the bathroom.”

Louis fights every instinct not to look up. He carries on talking quietly in Brigitte’s ear, even when Harry stalks away to the lavatory like a small child throwing a tantrum.

He allows himself a small smirk. The plan of his is unfolding exactly how he intended.

When Harry returns nearly ten minutes later, Niall’s watch is starting to beep.

“Time’s up, muchachos,” Niall announces, promptly downing the remains of his beer. He slams his empty glass down onto the table and thrusts a fist in the air. “Onwards!”

“He comes back nearly ten minutes later, Niall’s watch is starting to beep.

“Time’s up, muchachos,” Niall announces, promptly downing the remains of his beer. He slams his empty glass down onto the table and thrusts a fist in the air. “Onwards!”

“Onwards!” the rest of the congregation cheers.

This is followed by an erratic scuffle, during which everyone gets up and starts gathering their things, ready to move onto the next bar.

“My lady,” Louis says ostentatiously, extending his hand for Brigitte to take.

He doesn’t miss the fact that Harry does a piss poor job of concealing his scowl.

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The rest of the night is a blur of colourful cocktails and live music, and Louis keeps his hands on Brigitte the whole time. He twirls her around in the warm night air as they skip for bar to bar, speaking in slurred, nonsensical French before pulling her close to press chaste kisses to the side of her face.

He doesn’t miss the way Harry’s eyes follow into him the entire time, boring into his back and sending shivers up his spine. Nor does he miss the look on the man’s face Louis starts carding his fingers through Brigitte’s hair in the booth at La Bamba — a dark, stony expression that says he knows exactly what Louis is up to right now.

And — much to Louis’ secret delight — it’s working.
July 3rd

“Late night then?” Liam’s smooth voice crackles down the phone from some one-thousand-three-hundred-and-sixty miles away.

Louis smiles, leaning against the wall and playing with the rubber telephone cord. “How can you tell?”

“Your voice. You sound like you’ve swallowed broken glass.”

“My throat is a tad sore, yeah,” Louis chuckles, “I think I went a little too hard last night. But don’t you worry about me, young Lima, I know how to take care of myself.”

Liam hums sceptically. “I’m sure you do.”

“How the hell are you, anyway?” Louis asks, eager for any scrap of news from home. “How’s Zayn? You guys excited for UCL?”

Liam and Zayn are inseparable. They’ve been together since birth, so there was no way anyone could talk them out of going to the same university. Louis himself had been less certain of where he wanted to go, despite receiving offers from all four universities that he applied to. Eventually his father had talked him into accepting the place at Cambridge under the promise that he could switch to Oxford or Durham if he absolutely hated it, but he’s still unsure of what next year will bring once the summer is over.

Liam tells him about how he and Zayn have been frantically shopping for all of the weird and miscellaneous items that their mothers are insisting they take with them — clothing hangers and other such nonsense, apparently. As if they’re concerned about anything other than where the nearest pub is located.

Louis is in the middle of listening to Liam explain to him the exact dimensions of the room he and Zayn are going to be sharing next year, when the sound of heavy footfalls coming down the stairs catches his attention.

He glances over just in time to catch Harry slipping out of the back door in a pair of trunks and a loose t-shirt, clutching a towel in his hand.

“How’s Zayn? You guys excited for UCL?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m gonna have to call you back in a bit.”

“Oh — okay, sure,” Liam doesn’t sound concerned, “speak soon, mate.”

Louis bids him farewell and places the phone back on the hook before venturing into the kitchen to look out of the window.

Sure enough, Harry is stripping off the cotton tee and discarding it on the empty deckchair beside the pool. He stretches his arms above his head, like a peacock flexing its plume, then clambers down the steps into the water.

He starts to swim laps, a gentle breaststroke from one end to the other, ducking his head beneath the surface and coming up glistening wet. The golden sunlight slides over his tanned shoulders and down the broad planes of his back. Louis feels his stomach stir at the sight.
Phase three; it’s now or never.

Turning on his heel, he jogs out into the hallway and up the staircase.

***

The spray from the shower is scalding and fills the bathroom with clouds of steam, fogging up the mirror and forming droplets of precipitate which slide down into the basin.

When Louis eventually shuts the water off and steps out, his feet are pleasantly cold against the tiles. He stands there for a moment, dripping water everywhere, gazing at his naked reflection in the blurred glass.

His body is different to how it was this time last year. It’s not like he’s grown or anything, but he’s definitely filled out — his arm muscles are a little more defined, and the puppy fat around his hips and stomach is long gone. On his lower stomach he bears a small heart-shaped scar, which he still has no explanation for, and a couple of tiny freckles that have appeared just below his belly button. There’s the birthmark on his inner thigh, too. A minuscule, triangular shaped imperfection which looks like an upside-down pyramid. It used to drive Louis crazy when he was younger because the skin surrounding it would never tan, leaving him with a weird white patch that he’d have to hide beneath his swim shorts.

He doesn’t mind so much now though. He’s learned to live with it, just as he’s learned to live with his teeny tiny girl-hands (as Zayn likes to call them), and the realisation that he may never be able to grow actual facial hair. It’s just part and parcel of the person he is.

And in his opinion, the generous swell of his backside more than makes up for all of his misgivings.

Shaking out his wet hair, Louis fixes his crucifix pendant against his chest. He can’t ignore the residual buzz of excitement under his skin. The fact that he can already hear Harry’s thunderous feet coming back across the landing is enough to set his nerve endings alight. In approximately twenty seconds, the third and final phase of Operation Seduction will come to fruition.

In approximately twenty seconds, Louis will know for sure.

Or maybe less than twenty seconds, because the minute he turns to face the door it’s already being wrenched open, and the object of his attraction is striding in.

“What the —”

Harry stops short. He stands there in his swim shorts, staring at Louis in all of his nude glory, his hand going tight around the doorknob.

He blinks. Several times.

“Louis?” he says, his voice a little strangled.

He’s keeping his eyes firmly above the belt, but Louis can’t help the way his entire body heats up at Harry’s presence. He’s never been naked in front of a man before. Not in a sexual way, at least. Definitely not when he was dripping wet and his cock was threatening to perk up between his thighs.

“Yes?” he says. He makes sure to jut his chin out and maintain eye contact, because that’s the whole point of this operation, isn’t it? To show Harry that he’s not just some inexperienced little boy. That he’s mature enough to know exactly what he wants and to go out and get it.
Judging by the way Harry still standing there in shock, he must be doing something right.

“You —” Harry swallows tightly, a strangled sound coming from the back of his throat. “You’re —”

“Naked?” Louis offers.

“— In my bathroom.”

Which… wasn’t really the first thing he was hoping Harry would notice, but hey. Beggars can’t be choosers.

And — and did Harry really just refer to it as his bathroom?

“I had this room before you did, mate,” Louis huffs a laugh. “Besides, this is the best shower in the house. The water pressure’s heavenly.”

Harry’s nostrils flare, and Louis feels giddy inside.

“You might have warned me that you were going to be here,” he grits out, staring resolutely at Louis’ throat. “Locking the door wouldn’t have been a bad idea, either.”

Louis smiles coyly.

“Sure. But where would be the fun in that?”

He’s well aware that he’s semi-hard now, and there’s nothing concealing that fact from Harry either. Not even a pair of swimming trunks or a towel around his waist. He is completely bared and vulnerable to this man’s eyes, and the knowledge of that is much less daunting than one might expect.

He feels… liberated, perhaps. And not just because he’s free to swing his cock around all he wants. It’s more because he’s waited so long for a confirmation that his desire for Harry is mutual — that he isn’t just some pathetic teenager with a pathetic crush — and now he has it. The way that Harry is looking at him is burning him up, and if there was any doubt in his mind that Harry wanted him, it’s certainly been diminished now.

Harry narrows his green eyes to slits.

“I know what you’re doing, Louis,” he says, his voice low and dangerous.

And if that isn’t an invitation, then Louis doesn’t know what is.

He steps closer.

“What?” he asks innocently. “What am I doing, Harry?”

Harry stays silent. He swallows harshly, fixated on the spot between Louis’ collar bones where the stray water droplets from his hair are pooling. His jaw is locked, and he’s still gripping the door handle hard enough to shatter it.

Louis keeps moving towards him until they’re standing toe to toe.

Harry sucks in a sharp breath. Almost indefinitely, His eyes flicker down to where Louis’ cock is standing to attention between them.

“Shit,” he whispers, closing his eyes.
Louis’ stomach is doing backflips. He want’s Harry to cuss like that again — preferably when Louis is down on his knees and gagging to take him all in. His body is humming all over, the same way that it did when he’d kissed Harry last week, so much nervousness and want that he’s practically trembling with it.

His tongue darts out to wet his lips.

“You can touch me if you want,” he says.

Harry’s hold on the doorknob tightens impossibly, his knuckles turning white.

“I can’t,” he says, shaking his head, “I really, really can’t.”

“Can’t,” Louis sways forward a little on his toes, “or won’t?”

Louis doesn’t plan to beat around the bush here. He’s so hard he’s starting to feel dizzy with it, and he’s so sure at this point that Harry is going to do it. That any second now he’s going to reach down and wrap a big hand around Louis’ leaking cock, claiming him for his own.

“Louis…” he murmurs now, no doubt catching onto the way Louis’ dick twitches at the sound of his voice.

Louis gets an idea then.

“C’mon, Harry,” he says, his voice purposefully soft. He reaches down to fit a loose hand around himself, watching Harry’s wide eyes tracking the movement. “It’s just you and me here. You know I won’t tell.”

He starts pumping his hand slowly up and down for Harry’s viewing pleasure, sighing quietly at the contact.

Harry gapes down at him, frozen.

Then… something breaks.

Except, it doesn’t break in a good way. Not the way that Louis wanted it to, anyway, because suddenly Harry is drawing away with a harsh breath, and his eyes are looking anywhere but at Louis, and everything in wrong wrong wrong.

Harry presses a closed fist to his forehead, scrunching up his face.

“Fuck — Fuck — I’m going,” he says, his voice strained.

Louis furrows his brows in confusion, his hand coming to a halt. “What?”

“Out. I’m going out. I can’t do this.” Harry still isn’t looking at him. “Just… just put a towel on and go, okay? I’ll — I’ll see you at lunch.”

And then he turns around and shuts the bathroom door, leaving Louis stood there with his mouth agape and his rapidly softening dick in his hand.

***

Inevitably, Harry doesn’t come back for lunch.

He doesn’t come back for the rest of the day.
A few local families come over for dinner, Isaac Dominguez included, but Louis really isn’t in the mood to entertain. He is a surly presence at the end of the table, staring down at his stuffed peppers as if they have personally offended him. He doesn't have any appetite. He doesn’t think he ever will again.

The problem isn’t just the fact that he’s embarrassed — because, let’s face it, having Harry reject him like that after he’d been so sure of himself was pretty damn humiliating — but it was the frustration of the whole thing that’s really getting to him. He knows full well at this point that Harry wants him back. So why in God’s good name won’t he just do something about it?

He’s been driving Louis insane since forever, pulling him in only to push him away again, and it’s starting to hit a little too close to the mark of what Louis is able to bear. The kiss, the suncream, the way Harry had fucking glared at Brigitte Charpentier last night: there’s no way in hell that Harry doesn’t want to take him to bed, at the very least. Yet the sting of rejection still prevails.

Louis doesn’t partake in the singing when Isaac’s older sister starts playing the piano later that evening. He doesn’t accept the wine that Dean offers him, or attempt to answer any of the questions during Trivial Pursuit. He doesn’t comment when the congregation are debating which classic movie to watch.

And when he crawls into bed that night, he doesn’t slip a hand into his boxers to touch himself. He doesn’t even want to.

Instead, he kicks the duvet down to his feet and buries his face in the pillow, and does his very best not to feel so fucking alone in all this.

***

There’s a song playing somewhere.

It’s familiar. One that his mother used to sing, perhaps.

Louis can remember her voice curling around the words like silk, waves dark hair falling into her face as she leaned over the guitar.

*Starry, starry night, paint your palette blue and grey…*

Louis would watch her from his spot on the floor, rapt and silent, the gentle melody soothing to his ears. He’d always been known as a boisterous child, but the sound of his mother’s singing had never failed to turn him from brash to passive in an instant. She had one of those voices that is so pure it never fails to make your chest hurt.

*Look out on a summer’s day, with eyes that know the darkness in my soul…*

When she’d catch his eye, Louis would always smile. He’d grin at her like it was an automatic reflex to seeing his mother’s face. And she’d smile back, slow and sweet, winking at him like there was some great secret between the two of them that no one else knew.

Louis never got round to asking her what that secret was.

When she’d sing the part of the song about swirling clouds and violet haze that *reflect in Vincent’s eyes of china blue*, Louis knew that it was for him. He’d always been his mama’s blue-eyed baby. She told him so all the time — would tilt his chin up and request to see his *zafiros*, insisting that she’d never seen a little boy with such beautiful eyes.
She’d never had a shortage of ways to tell Louis he was beautiful.

At the end of the song, Louis’ throat would always feel a little tight. He’d reach out to his mum, needing to touch her somehow, to be comforted, knowing that she would never deny him that. She’d ditch the guitar and pull him onto her lap, stroking his hair with gentle fingers as the final strains of music still seemed to linger in the air around them.

*Starry, starry night.*

Louis still wonders how many millions of stars he would have to wish upon to bring his mother’s love back from the dead.

**July 4th**

Niall hits the water with a colossal splash.

“Stop, you animal!” Cristina shrieks, shielding herself from the waves he makes, “Have some civility!”

Niall doesn’t stop, of course, and Louis is forced to watch as he swims up to Cristina and wraps his arms around her middle, hoisting her up to plant a smacking kiss on her lips.

It’s not that he’s jealous, or anything — he’s genuinely happy that his two best mates have finally got it together. He just wishes he didn’t feel like such a gooseberry all the time.

“Coming in, Lou?” says Niall, Cristina’s legs still wrapped around his middle. “The water’s lush.”

Louis shakes his head. “Pass.”

He really doesn’t feel like having fun today. Or ever again, probably.

Niall doesn’t let it go though. He releases Cristina only to wade over to where Louis is lying down beside the pool, hovering over his face and blocking out the sunlight.

“Do you mind?” Louis sighs, “I’m trying to sunbathe here.”

Niall frowns at him. “You’re no fun anymore.”

Louis grunts in response, closing his eyes again. Niall still doesn’t take the hint.

“Come on, talk to your old pal, Nialler,” he says, poking Louis’ side. “Tell me what’s up.”

Louis sighs dramatically, because this kid really doesn’t know when to give it a rest.

“Is it girl troubles?” Niall presses.

“Something like that,” is Louis’ eventual response.

Niall jumps at the chance to share his knowledge on women, of course. He prompts Louis to tell him who it is that’s got him so down, and when Louis refuses he demands to at least “know what the problem is so I can fix it and you can stop being a gloomy bastard.”

Louis groans, rolling onto his stomach. “The problem is that I’m an idiot, Ni.”
“I’m gonna need more than that,” Niall snorts, “How about we start with something I don’t already know?”

Louis pinches his ribs hard, resulting in an exceptionally unmanly shriek from Niall, before resting his head back down against the tiles.

“They’re older,” is what he starts with. He figures that he should at least give his best mate a chance at solving his pathetic issues. It’s only fair.

“Ahh, an older lady, eh?” Niall nods like he knows all about that. “I hope we’re not talking middle-aged here…”

“Try early twenties,” Louis snorts.

“Well, have you put the moves on yet?” Niall continues, “Like, have you made it obvious you’re into her?”

*God, if he only knew how obvious Louis has made it.*

“Definitely.”

“Okay. Have you done the whole flirting-with-someone-else-to-make-them-jealous thing?”

“Yup,”

“Have you had a lot of… *skin to skin* contact?”

“Yeah. Enough for me to know they’re attracted to me, at least.”

“Have you kissed?”

“Only once.”

“And?”

“And they pushed me away after about ten seconds.”

“Huh. Interesting…” Niall casts his gaze off into the distance, like he’s contemplating something immensely serious. “Very interesting.”

Louis sighs. He drops his head into his arms. A hot blush creeps its way up his neck.

“I… I might have also invited them to touch my erection.”

Niall bursts out laughing at that, and Cristina gives him an odd look from the other side of the pool.

“How did that work out for you, Lou?” he chuckles, clutching his abdomen.

“How do you think?” Louis hisses. “I made myself look like a complete *pervert*, Niall. You’re meant to be helping me, not taking the piss.”

He might as well just dig his own grave now, because death by embarrassment seems to be a likely outcome of all this.

“Hey — Hey now,” Niall gradually gets himself under control, his laughter dying down as he places a comforting hand on Louis’ upper back. “Don’t worry, Lou. All is not lost, I promise.”
Louis exhales heavily into the crook of his elbow. “…It’s not?”

“Of course it’s not. Trust me, I know my stuff.” Niall leans down close to his face, lowering his voice to a whisper. “You know what I think your love life needs?”

Louis cracks an eye open to look at him questioningly. “Go on.”

Niall grins like a Cheshire cat. “Some communication.”

And, seriously, if that isn't the biggest load of bullshit ever, Louis will eat his sock.

“You dick,” he says, slapping Niall’s chest. “I thought you were going to say something useful.”

Niall huffs indignantly. “Hey, that was useful, thank you very much,”

“Oh please, you read that in some shitty magazine, didn’t you? What was it, Womens Weekly? ‘Communication’ indeed.”

“You just hold your horses there, Lou,” Niall lifts a finger, silencing him. Louis rolls his eyes. Niall continues anyway. “You see her? That beautiful girl over there?” He points to where Cristina is floating on her back. “That’s my girlfriend.”

Louis arches his eyebrows. “Point being…?”

“Point being that I didn’t get with her by asking her to touch my dick.”

Which…

Right, yeah. That actually makes a lot of sense.

“We flirted, sure, but if you want someone to see you as an adult then you gotta act like one,” Niall goes on, pursing his lips. “And that doesn’t mean throwing yourself at people for sex.”

Louis opens his mouth in shock. “I have not been throwing myself at anyone—”

“Just take the advice, Lou,” Niall cuts across him again. “If you want anything with this person, whoever they may be, then just talk to them. I’m sure they’d appreciate it.”

Louis closes his mouth.

Deep down, he knows that Niall is right. He’s been so caught up in making himself look like a ‘grown-up’ that he actually ended up looking more juvenile than ever.

And Harry… God. Poor Harry must be so confused by all of it. All of these advances being made on him, and Louis never once stopped to question whether or not he was comfortable. Never once thought to ask if he even —

Oh God. What if Harry isn’t even comfortable with his sexuality yet?

What if, just like Louis, he’s never wanted a man before?

The realisation that he’s been an utter asshole this entire time hits him like a tonne of bricks and his heart sinks right down to his stomach.

What must Harry be feeling right now? Probably conflicted as hell. And it’s not like he has anyone to go and talk to about it either, not like Louis can with Niall. He’s out here on his own.
But the problem, the real problem, Louis knows, is this:

For all of the heady, sexual attraction that he’s felt for Harry since the start, he’s not been ignorant to the…the other things. The fluttering in his belly when Harry laughs at one of his jokes, or the kick he gets just from being alone in Harry’s company. The warm, blissful feeling he got from seeing Harry interact with Jaz and Abril. It means something more than just a craving for Harry’s touch — something that Louis was scared to admit, even to himself.

Because Harry is leaving in two weeks. Because the thought of getting to know him on more than this basic, sexual level, only to have his heart broken at the end of it, is terrifying.

Jesus Christ, he really is a child.

“Oh god, Niall,” he moans, burying his head in his hands. “I’m a mess. I’m a complete and utter mess. Why can’t I get anything right?”

“Hey, don’t be so hard on yourself,” Niall offers him a small smile. “Just get back out there and try again.”

Louis scoffs. “Right. Try again. Did you miss the part where I said I asked them to touch my dick without any pre-warning?”

“Unfortunately I didn’t,” Niall makes a disgusted face. “But I would advise that next time you take a more…gentle approach. Have you even told this person you like them? With words, I mean.”

“...No.”

Louis hates himself. He actually hates himself.

“Well then. Maybe that would be a good starting point?”

Niall’s giving him the condescending you know I’m right look, and it sucks because Louis knows he is. Niall has always possessed an inordinate amount of wisdom for someone who used to snort milkshake powder when he was a kid.

Instead of waiting for a response, Niall gives him a pat on the head and dives back under the water. He grabs Cristina’s legs and pulls her under too, and then it’s just Louis left up there in the burning heat, with regret in his stomach and an endless loop of Harry on the brain.

Something has to be done.

Chapter End Notes

Link to the song mentioned in this chapter: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxHnRhDmrk
(Check it out, it's one of my faves!)

Next chapter will be up by Tuesday 6th :)
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

WARNING: Explicit sexual content

Chapter Notes

Soooo this chapter has kind of been a long time coming, and I can only apologise for that. Upcoming exams have been getting the better of me, so writing has taken somewhat of a backseat for the past few weeks.

Anyway, I hope you like this one. As always, feedback is much appreciated.

Happy reading! :)

July 5th

It’s quarter past twelve when Louis knocks quietly on the door.

He hears rustling first — sheets being cast aside, followed by the faint creaking of floorboards. Then the door opens to reveal a sleep-mussed Harry Styles, his hair tied up in a loose bun and his torso deliciously bare. Around his hips sits a pair of navy lounge pants and, right now, they’re just about the only thing keeping Louis’ from losing his sanity altogether.

Harry’s eyes skirt around the empty hallway behind before refocusing on Louis. His brows are knitted together.

“It’s midnight,” he says disapprovingly.

“Can I come in?” Louis whispers, ignoring the statement. He doesn’t mean to be pushy or anything, but he’s determined to take this moment. If he doesn’t speak to Harry right now — with his words, that is, not his dick — then he knows this thing isn’t ever going to be put to rest. However this plays out, he isn’t prepared to endure the next few weeks without at least clearing the air between them.

Harry narrows his eyes in suspicion, but thankfully, after a few seconds of tense silence, he steps aside.

Louis slips past, closing the door behind him with a quiet click.

The room is dark, save for the silvery ribbons of moonlight that slip in through the crack in Harry’s curtain. Louis finds himself standing awkwardly in the centre, trying to ignore the scent of mint body wash and scented candles long enough to get his thoughts together, his entire body buzzing like a live wire.

Harry folds his arm, leaning back against the door. Waiting.
Louis pushes his fringe nervously from his eyes.

“I want to apologise,” he says.

Harry raises his eyebrows, silent, waiting for him to go on.

Louis takes a deep breath. “The things I’ve said over the past few days,” he stops, shaking his head, “the things I’ve done. They were wrong, and I’m sorry I went through with them. I… I know I only served to humiliate myself really.”

Harry remains quiet. Louis takes this as his cue to continue.

“The thing is — and bear with me because I’m just going to say it how it is here —” another deep breath, “I’ve never wanted a man before you came along. I’ve never — never wanted sex with someone who wasn’t a girl, and that. Well. That’s a little bit terrifying. You’re terrifying. And I wanted you. Which was why I did all of that… stuff.”

He makes an aborted hand gesture, which he hopes surmises all of the weird shit he’s done to get Harry’s attention over the last few days.

Harry clears his throat awkwardly. His eyes drop to the floorboards at his feet.

“Stuff,” he repeats. His voice is rough like gravel, and Louis feels a shiver run down his spine. “You mean, like… kissing me?”

“Yeah,” Louis nods. “Like kissing you.”

There’s another bout of uncomfortable silence after that, during which it’s all Louis can do just to regulate his breathing, because every inhale seems to be getting stuck in the back of his throat. His heart won’t stop pounding either, and Harry — Well. Harry is still looking at the ground.

“I, um…” the older man shifts awkwardly against the door, steadfastly refusing to make eye contact. “I’m the first?”

Louis nods again. “The first bloke, yeah.”

“…Right. Okay.” Harry reaches up to cup the back of his own neck, scratching at his nape. He pauses before adding, “You know — you know we can’t do that, right?”

And Louis is about to say yes, is about to nod his head a third time and tell Harry he understands and bid him goodnight before skulking off back to his own bedroom like a good boy, but — but, then again, no. No, he doesn’t know that at all. Louis wants Harry and Harry wants Louis and… is there anything else but that?

No. There can’t be.

“Why?” He dares to question. He even tilts his chin up in defiance, because goddamit this is the only chance he’s going to get to actually fight for this, and planning on doing it halfway.

“Why what?”

“Why can’t we do that?” he reiterates, standing his ground. “Sex, I mean. With each other. Why is it so… off the cards, for you?”

Harry looks at him then. A warning.
“Louis —”

“I’ve told you how I feel. I’ve told you that I want you — that I’ve wanted you since you’ve got here.” Louis presses, suddenly not willing to let this go. “So what’s up? Are you — are you turned off by the fact that I’m a guy, or?”

Harry’s eyes go wide at that, almost comically so. “Jesus,” he mutters, “Of — of course that’s not it —”

“Then what is? Look, I might be young, Harry, but I’m not stupid. I know you want this as well. You made that pretty clear when you kissed me back.”

Louis stares at Harry, his heart pounding in his throat and his desires laid bare for the world to see, and he can’t even bring himself to feel ashamed.

He steps closer.

“Well I’m wrong, Harry,” he says, suddenly so full of certainty. “Just tell me I’m wrong, and I swear I’ll drop it.”

“It’s inappropriate.” Harry says, clenching his fists. The frustration on his face is painstakingly obvious.

Louis still draws closer nonetheless. “Why? Because I’m younger than you or you’re a guest of my father’s?”

“Both. Neither.” Harry pulls a face of utter loss, screwing his eyes shut and shaking his head. He huffs out a puff of air. “I don’t…” he pinches the bridge of his nose, trying to calm himself. “I don’t want to take advantage of you.”

“Fucking hell, you’re not,” Louis barks out a laugh, “not if we both want it.”

Harry looks at the ground then. He smiles ruefully.

“There’s the thing,” he says, his voice quiet. “I’m not sure that you do want it, Louis.”

Louis’ face falls. He’s never seen Harry look so painfully insecure before — all curled in on himself and fragile — and he decides then and there that he hates it, because a man so brilliantly beautiful should never feel the need to hide himself away like that. Especially not because of this.

Louis approaches him carefully.

He hears Harry’s breath hitch when he reaches out to ghost his fingers over the line of his jaw. When he leans up to lightly press their foreheads together.

“I’m old enough to know what I want,” he says quietly, searching Harry’s nervous green eyes, “so please. Please don’t treat me like a child here, Harry.”

Harry reaches up to grip Louis’ wrist, almost on instinct, his eyes snapping open. “I wouldn’t —” he whispers, “I don’t think that you’re a child, Louis — that’s — that’s not it at all —”

“Then stop talking,” Louis breathes, “and kiss me.”

There is a moment where neither of them move. They stand there in the guest room, toe to toe, breathing each other’s air for what seems like a small pocket of infinity. Their eyes are locked, and Harry’s expression looks so hopeless — a small child lost in a shopping centre, wandering aimlessly
in search of his mother. Vulnerable.

Louis holds his breath.

He holds his breath until he feels it — feels the moment that Harry kicks into action (in exactly the right way this time) and drops his hand from Louis’ wrist in favour of placing it over his cheek, thumb brushing tenderly over the side of his face.

Louis exhales. He closes his eyes.

“…are you sure?” Harry whispers, breath fanning lightly over Louis’ neck.

A quiet ‘please’ is all it takes before Harry nudges forward and catches his lips.

Their movements are soft at first, cautious, like the slightest bit of force might cause the world around them to shatter, yet the contact is enough to send a buzz of electricity humming right through Louis’ veins. He reaches out to grab ahold of the first thing he finds — Harry’s shirt, the material bunching in his fist — and releases a whine into Harry’s mouth.

Harry brings his other hand up to hold Louis’ face, caressing him gently. His tongue darts out to run along the seam of Louis’ lips, tasting, hesitant, requesting entry which Louis so willingly grants. He opens his mouth, letting Harry deepen the kiss, allowing himself to fall further into the sturdy weight of his body.

Part of Louis is still terrified. He’s afraid that Harry will push him away again, that this might end too soon. He keeps pressing himself forward, silently begging for Harry to hold him tighter, to reassure him. A chorus of small, needy whines surface from the back of his throat when Harry finally gets the memo and loops a strong arm around his waist, pulling them flush against one another.

Harry’s other hand slides around to the nape of Louis’ neck, playing with the soft hair there whilst pressing slow, languid kisses to his lips. There’s no tension about him now. He’s totally at ease, every bit as caught up in the touch of their bodies as Louis is.

That is, until Louis accidentally (on purpose) fists a hand in his hair, tugging hard.

“Fuck,” Harry growls, the noise rumbling through his chest and sending jolts straight to Louis’ groin.

“Sorry, sorry,” Louis murmurs, easing up.

He moves to catch Harry’s lips again, but is stopped when Harry’s large palm comes to rest on his chest.

“Louis,” he says — and fucking hell, his voice sounds fucked — “I’m…”

He gives Louis a helpless look.

Louis becomes aware of it then. Can feel him, hard and throbbing in the confines of his trousers, digging into Louis’ lower stomach.

Harry glances away, his face reddening.

“Sorry,” he says.

Louis is quick to shake his head. “No,” he insists, running his hands over Harry’s face, trying to bring back his gaze. “it’s fine, Harry — I mean — me too, yeah?”
He nudges his hips forward to prove a point, his own erection against Harry’s hip.

Harry’s face draws a blank.

“…oh,” he says quietly.

Louis huffs a sheepish laugh. “Teenager,” he says with a shrug.

They fall into a heavy silence, their laboured breaths the only sound in the quiet room.

Louis casts his eyes back down, smile fading from his face when he looks at the prominent bulge in Harry’s trousers.

He looks… **big.** Not that Louis’ seen many dicks besides his own, but still. It must hurt, all hard in his trousers like that. Louis would know — he’s spent the past week and a half walking around with a near-constant semi.

He looks up to meet Harry’s eyes again.

“Can I touch you?” he asks nervously.

Harry lets out a low groan, almost like he’s in pain, his eyelids fluttering closed.

“You know I can’t deny you anything when you ask me like that,” he breathes.

And fuck it, Louis’ insides light up like a fucking firework display when he hears *that.*

“Noted,” he says, a grin upon his face.

He goes to hook his fingers into Harry’s waistband, already salivating at the thought of getting him undressed, but Harry’s hands stop him again before he can.

“Hold on,” he says, nostrils flaring, “Just — just hold on a second, okay?”

Louis nods, moving back a fraction because the last thing he wants is for Harry to be uncomfortable. He looks up at the man with questioning eyes.

Harry’s brows are furrowed, and it’s clear to see there’s some sort of internal debate going on again. He runs his warm palms up and down Louis’ flank a couple of times, just keeping him there. Testing the waters whilst the gears churn slowly in his mind.

“Is this, like… a one-time thing for you?” he asks hesitantly.

Louis pauses for a beat.

Harry’s gaze burns like fire in the backs of his irises, and the words hit him like a punch.

“God,” Louis breathes out, shaking his head. “I… I don’t…”

“You don’t…?” Harry peers at him expectantly.

Louis shakes his head again. He presses his hand over Harry’s chest, looking up at him anxiously through his lashes, hoping to convey all of the words that his brain is too fuzzy to come up with. All the things he’s still to scared to say aloud, even in the midnight darkness of Harry’s bedroom.

“I don’t want it to be,” he whispers.
He means it. Fuck, he doesn’t think he’ll survive if this is the only time he gets to touch Harry, if they just have to carry on as normal after all of this is over. The thought alone makes his chest hurt, acute and sharp, right there in the space between his ribs.

He shudders.

A gentle kiss against his lips draws him back out of his thoughts.

“You’re shaking,” Harry remarks quietly, pushing a stray tendril of Louis’ hair off his face. He smiles softly. “What happened to all that blind confidence, hm?”

Louis returns his smile, blushing a little. His eyes flicker over Harry’s naked torso.

“I want to suck you,” he says.

Harry shuts the hell up after that.

In all honesty, it’s a bit of an ordeal, getting Harry to lay back on the bed. Louis must have answered the question ‘are you sure?’ about ten times before he finally gets Harry’s drawstrings undone, and even then the man won’t stop saying things like ‘you can stop whenever you want,’ and ‘if it’s too much, just tell me,’ and Louis swears to god, if he weren’t so desperate to get Harry’s cock in his mouth, he’d punch him.

“Easy,” Harry groans when Louis practically tears at the strings, giving the waistband of his trousers a near-violent tug.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” he huffs, working them down Harry’s pale thighs, “are these designer?”

“Yes, but that’s not the point,” Harry rolls his eyes, reaching up to touch Louis’ jaw. “I mean that we have all the time in the world. There’s no hurry here, okay?”

Yeah. No hurry, right. It’s not as if Louis has been wanting this forever.

Ignoring Harry’s advice, he concentrates on pulling the trousers all the way down his stupidly long legs. He discards them on the floor when he’s done, taking a moment just to sit back on his haunches and admire the sight before him.

Harry Styles. All splayed out on his bed in nothing but a pair of black boxers, face flushed and the outline of his erection visible between his legs.

Louis’ can’t help but reach and explore — to run his fingers reverently over Harry’s exposed thighs, seeking out the milky skin where the sun hasn’t been able to touch him. Harry releases a shaky exhale at the contact, and Louis actually starts to salivate when the man’s cock gives a visible twitch in his boxers.

“Louis,” Harry murmurs above him, his eyes closed and chest still heaving. “I just want to reiterate that you don’t have to — to — oh, Christ —”

Louis rubs Harry gently through his underwear, fitting his hand around the thick girth of his cock over the fabric. It’s warm to the touch, and Louis strokes him slowly from base to tip, getting used to the feeling, revelling on the quiet moan that tumbles from Harry’s parted lips.

Louis watches in awe as Harry’s ab muscles systematically tense and relax, causing the wings of his butterfly to ripple like it’s preparing to take flight. The man fists his right hand in the bed sheets, gasping when the heel of Louis’ hand puts more pressure between his legs.
Louis reckons he could probably come from this. Just from touching Hair through his briefs and hearing Harry make those soft little sounds.

In fact, he almost *does* come when Harry reaches up and places a firm hand on the back of his neck, jerking him down suddenly to hover over his face.

“Don’t tease me, Louis,” he says, his voice ragged and so, so far from the care and concern it had held not ten seconds ago.


Harry hums his approval, his grip softening to a gentle caress. He leans up to kiss Louis gently, his tongue toying with Louis own, drawing any remaining tensions from his body.

When he pulls back, there’s a strange mix of heat and tenderness in his expression.

“Do you want to take this off?” he asks, tugging on the front of Louis’ shirt. “You don’t have to.”

Louis is already nodding though, leaning up to pull his shirt over his head and sighing as the cool air hits his stomach. Opting to leave his shorts on for now, he settles back down on his knees.

Harry’s hands are on him in an instant, smoothing up over his belly and chest, tracing the faint muscle lines on his abdomen, just visible beneath a layer of softness. The touch is reverent and curious, and Louis’ hips jerk forward at the sharp yet pleasurable sensation of having his nipple tweaked, startled by the high-pitched sound that emanates from the back of his throat.

“So pretty, aren’t you?” Harry whispers, drinking in Louis’ bare torso. “Pretty everywhere.”

Louis’ entire body flushes at the praise.

He doesn’t hang about after that. He sets to work with pulling off Harry’s boxers, inching them down his legs before chucking them to lay in a crumpled heap on the floor beside his lounge pants.

And then Harry’s prick is in his face; hard and proud, pulsing hot, glistening at the tip. Louis practically whines at the sight of it, pushing his groin down hard against the mattress as he settles between Harry’s legs.

“I don’t —” he bites his lip, rocking down again. “Harry —I don’t know how —”

“Shh, shh,” Harry quickly props himself up on one elbow and reaches to touch Louis’ arm, trailing his fingers up and down his bicep. “It’s alright, baby,” he whispers, “I’ll walk you through it, okay?”

Louis almost get’s head rush when he hears that, because *babybabybaby*.

“O-okay.”

Harry rests back against the pillows, keeping his eyes trained on Louis.

“Breathe.”

Louis nods, exhaling shakily through his mouth.

Harry licks his lip. “Put your hand on me,” he says, keeping his voice low.

Louis does as he’s told. Without hesitance, he scoots closer and places his hand on Harry’s cock. It’s soft and warm to the touch, and the little hissing noise that Harry makes at the contact is all of the
encouragement he needs to wrap his fingers properly around the base, giving it the gentlest of squeezes.

“Fuck,” Harry curses under his breath. His lower stomach muscles give a twitch. “Can you wank me? Just, like, move your hand up and down. Nice and slow, that’s it — there we go — shit —”

His green eyes drift closed, lips parted as Louis starts to pump his shaft.

Louis can’t decide whether he’d rather watch Harry’s face or his dick, the velvety weight of which feels gorgeous where it slides against his palm. The only other cock Louis’ ever had a hand on like this is his own, and until this moment, he never believed that jerking someone off could feel so… intimate.

“Yeah — yeah, that’s good,” Harry sighs, his hips working lazily to meet Louis’ fist. “Oh — fuck, good boy — Jesus —”

Heat rushes through Louis’ body right down to his toes, and he feels a blurt of pre-come wet the front of his own boxers.

*Good boy.* The praise goes straight to his cock. He chokes out a quiet moan, rutting down harder against the bedsheets in search of relief.

He only realises he’s lost himself when Harry reaches out to place a tender hand atop his own, which had started to jack him off at break-neck speed. Louis blushes, allowing Harry to take over and reset the pace, rapt all at once by the way both of their hands look when they’re joined around Harry’s prick.

“That’s it,” Harry murmurs, watching Louis’ face carefully. “Just like that, sweetheart…”

Louis feels like he’s going to explode. His body is short-circuiting, and if he doesn’t get his mouth on Harry soon then he might blow a fuse and end it all before it’s even begun.

“Can I — with my mouth now?” he says in a rush of air, glancing up at Harry from beneath his fringe.

Harry’s throat bobs when he swallows. His eyes are dark. “If you want to.”

Fuck yes, Louis wants to. He wants to please Harry so much it’s overwhelming, clouding his mind in a haze, smothering him beneath the weight of it all.

Tentatively, he bows down to give a little kitten lick to the head of Harry’s cock.

“Shit,” Harry’s leg kicks out a bit, almost like a reflex, and suddenly there’s a hand slipping into Louis’ hair, holding his head down and causing him to whine and grind down hard against the mattress. “Again, baby,” Harry breathes.

Louis obeys — doesn’t need much persuading — and darts his tongue out to lick at Harry's shaft several times in quick succession. He can taste the salt of his pre-come in his mouth, and it only prompts him to situate his mouth over the head and suckle lightly, holding the base still with his hand.

“Fuck, Louis,” Harry grunts, his hips jerking upwards. “Don’t — don’t stop doing that,”

Ha, right. As if he would.
Encouraged by Harry’s hand tightening in his hair, Louis slides down to take more of him in, sputtering when Harry instinctively pumps his hips up into the heat of his mouth, but refusing to pull off.

Harry arches, shoving his knuckles into his mouth to keep quiet. Louis reads that as a good sign.

Due to the fact that he’s never blown someone before — never even *received* a blowjob before — it’s no surprise that his technique lacks finesse. He moves his head up and down Harry’s length in irregular motions, messy and quick, spit dripping down to where his hands are still clasping the base. But if the way Harry’s moaning is anything to go by, he can’t be doing that bad of a job.

“Your hand,” Harry grunts, “Can you —”

Louis beats Harry to the punch, slowly sliding his hand up to meet his mouth, working it up and down over the places his lips can’t reach. Never let it be said that Louis Tomlinson is not a quick learner.

The thing that strikes him most about this whole situation — about sucking Harry — is the fact that he’s not only getting Harry off, but getting himself off too. His own cock is absolutely throbbing where it sits in the confines of his night shorts, so much so that he can’t help himself but continue to rub up against the mattress between Harry’s spread legs, desperately trying to ease the pressure. He hasn’t even made it out of his shorts yet, and his nipples are positively aching. Not to mention the sweat — *so* much of sweat that his entire body is tacky with it.

Harry’s is too. The air conditioning is on in here, but there’s still dampness on the insides of Harry’s thigh where Louis’ free hand rests, and if he were to look up he knows he’d find Harry’s face flushed and pink, his curls falling out from the hair tie and sticking to his forehead.

“Baby, baby,” Harry is still rocking down into Louis’ mouth, but he’s tugging at his hair like he wants him to move. “Pull up, c’mon. Pull up a second.”

It’s only when Louis follows his request that he realises he’s been holding his breath.

He inhales sharply the moment that Harry’s cock is out of his mouth, coughing and gripping harshly onto Harry’s thigh. Harry doesn’t seem to mind though. He’s stroking his fingers back through Louis’ hair, touching his face and telling him over and over again to *breathe, just breathe sweetheart, you’re okay, you’re doing so well for me, making me feel so good*, and before he knows it Louis is bucking his hips forward and coming straight into his shorts, stuttering through the long, hot pulses of his orgasm.

Harry sits up as soon as he realises what’s happened. He presses his palm directly against Louis’ crotch, massaging him gently through the aftershocks, and Louis thinks he might actually have another spontaneous orgasm right on the heels of his first, because shit, *Harry is touching his cock.*

“You’re so beautiful,” Harry whispers, pressing his forehead against Louis’ temple as he comes down from his high, lips ghosting against his cheekbone. “So beautiful.”

“Ngh,” is all Louis can manage in reply.

He feels euphoric as the last shocks of his climax run through him. He feels heavy and light at the same time, like he’s simultaneously floating through air and sinking down into a bath of warm treacle. He feels sated. He feels…

He feels Harry’s cock nudging against his leg; still achingly hard.
“Please,” Louis rasps, pushing his hand feebly against the centre of Harry’s chest, trying to get him to lie back. “Wanna take care of you.”

Harry kisses his cheek before obliging. He reclines back against the mattress, opening his legs around Louis, smiling up at him softly. It’s almost shy, the way he looks now. All glassy eyes and wet lips, half-lit in the pale moonlight, gazing at Louis with all of the tenderness in the world.

“Take it easy, okay?” Harry whispers. His tone is warm, but his expression is earnest. “I’ll come even if all you do is kiss it.”

Louis whimpers at his words, stopping to nuzzle into the crease of Harry’s thigh. He can feel the heat of Harry’s prick against his cheek, and it’s almost too much to bear.

As soon as Harry’s hands find their way back into Louis’ hair, he’s pretty much done for.

“Oh — oh, yes,” Harry groans through his teeth when Louis sinks his mouth down him again.

He takes it slower this time, bobbing his head to a silent rhythm, his hand gently toying with Harry’s balls. He knows that Harry is close when his thighs start to tremble, and he loses control of the little thrusts his hips are making into Louis’ mouth.

“Good boy,” he’s panting, “Such a good boy for me, getting me so close — gonna make me come, aren’t you? Oh, shit — that’s it baby, keep doing that — oh — oh god —”

He grips Louis’ shoulders hard, pushing him up just in time to coat his face in streaks of come, arching right off the mattress and digging his heels into the bed.

Louis can’t breathe. His jaw hurts, and there’s spit on his chin and Harry’s come all over his lips and stickiness in his shorts, and his body won’t stop fucking shaking. The sensory overload is so intense it washes over him hotter than Andalusia in the midst of July, buzzing out all over his skin and curling in his stomach, leaving him light-headed and weak.

In the next instant, he is being pulled up to lay on top of Harry’s torso with strong arms around him, and a voice in his ear praising him continuously, telling him how wonderful he is, how good he just made Harry feel. The only thing he feels capable of doing at this point is to turn his face into the crook of Harry’s neck and take deep, calming breaths.

“Let me clean you up,” Harry murmurs after a minute or two, kissing behind Louis’ ear. “I’ll get a washcloth, hold on —”

“Don’t,” Louis curls into him more, seizing his bicep with anxious fingers. “Please, just stay.”

Harry relaxes back against the bed. He rubs Louis’ back between his shoulder blades, the silver crucifix resting between their chests.


That’s how Louis eventually falls asleep. Slick with sweat, wrapped up in Harry’s arms and breathing into the dip of his collarbones.

The nighttime stretches on around them, none the wiser.

***

Someone, somewhere, is being far too loud for this time of the morning.
From some unidentifiable room of the house emanates a series of dull thumps, accompanied by a distant voice calling out a string of words which Louis’ tired brain is far too sleepy to distinguish right now. And instead of trying to, he mentally shrugs his shoulders and opts to ignore it.

He’s so warm, is the wonderful thing. Not in the unbearable, sticky sort of way that he’s been used to over the past few weeks, but the sort of warm that equates to sinking down into a hot bubble bath after a long day, or being wrapped up in a fluffy blanket whilst it’s snowing out.

He snuggles down further under the bedsheets, seeking out the source of heat and burying his face up against it.

Skin. There’s skin here. The mild scent of vanilla soap coupled with something more earthy and masculine assaulting his nose. Louis’ arm reaches out almost instinctively, encompassing the human furnace laying beside him and nuzzling into a firm chest. He sighs contentedly.

As his awareness continues to grow, and the facts gradually start to fall into place, Louis comes to the conclusion that he is completely naked. He doesn’t actually recall taking off his shorts last night, but he supposes that at some point the whole dry-come-situation must have become a bit uncomfortable, so in hindsight, it makes sense.

Realisation two is that his cock is laying hard against his thigh, but really, that was to be expected. Teenager and all that.

Above him, Harry lets out a small groan from the back of his throat and shifts a little in his sleep. The arm he has around Louis pulls him closer into his side, which leaves him half splayed across the man’s muscular body — not that Louis is complaining.

Draping a leg over Harry’s, he settles back down and smiles softly to himself.

Louis doesn’t think he’s ever felt quite so comfortable as this in his life. His body is loose and limber, and there’s a deep, intense sort of satisfaction in his bones which he suspects comes as a byproduct of waking up next to Harry. The sheets are soft around his body, and the air is heavy with the scent of citrus and bodies and freshly baked churros, indicating that Valentina had deemed this a ‘special morning.’ And Louis had to agree with her there, because this — finally being in Harry’s arms, recalling the feeling of having Harry’s cock in his mouth last night — is pretty fucking special.

Louis makes a mental note to buy Niall a drink at some point, and silently thanks the Good Lord for sending him such a useful little leprechaun.

Harry lets out another quiet groan, his head lolling to the side.

Louis cracks an eye open to peer at him. He takes in the mess of chestnut curls sticking up at odd angles and the light dusting of stubble across Harry’s jaw. His lips are parted slightly, breathing out small puffs of air which fan lightly over Louis’ forehead, and his tanned chest is beautifully bare. Below the sheets, Louis can feel that the rest of his body is much the same.

Gently, Louis lifts his hand from Harry’s abdomen to push a few wayward curls from his face.

The contact is enough to stir Harry from his slumber. Within a few seconds his eyelids are blinking open to reveal a pair of sleepy green irises, staring right back at Louis with an unreadable expression.

Louis retracts his hand, smiling bashfully under the intense weight of Harry’s gaze.

“Hey,” he whispers, not wanting to break the fragile atmosphere that’s settled around them.
Slowly, Harry’s lips curve up into a soft smile to match Louis’ own.

“Hello there.”

His hand comes up to the back of Louis’ neck, gently carding through the baby hairs growing at the base, causing Louis to squirm with happiness. Harry continues to look down at him fondly.

“All good?”

Louis nods. He doesn’t really trust himself to form coherent sentences right now.

After what appears to be a moment’s deliberation, Harry leans down to kiss Louis’ temple, sweet and delicate.

“Good,” he says.

The pair of them watch each other quietly for a few minutes, Harry’s fingers stroking through Louis’ hair, the touch so soothing that Louis’ eyes start to droop again. If it weren’t for the fact that his parents might worry, he would consider staying right here for the remainder of the day. There’s really no need to be anywhere else. Not when he’s tucked into Harry’s side, blissful and relaxed, sharing these lazy touches as the sunlight slowly creeps in.

At some point, Harry’s fingers find his crucifix pendant. He tugs gently at the small silver cross, lifting it for inspection.

“It was a gift,” Louis mumbles, his eyes still closed. “I got it when I was baptised.”

Harry continues to study the pendant, turning it over gently in his palm. “Who gave it to you?”

“Father Manuel, our priest. He gave an identical one to my mother when she was baptised.”

Louis can sense the shift in tone when he mentions his mother. He knows that Harry won’t ask, not yet anyway, because he’s too polite to go prodding people for information. Instead, he returns the pendant to lay against Louis’ chest.

“It’s beautiful,” he says.

Louis huffs a small laugh. “It’s just a crucifix.”

“Yeah, but,” Harry adjusts his position slightly, cupping the back of Louis’ head so as not disturb him, “it’s not about what it is or what it’s made of. It’s your faith. It means something to you and that’s important.”

Louis turns his head to kiss Harry’s chest, just below the nipple, before settling back down on his chest.

“I’ve never thought about it that way before,” he admits.

Faith has always played a large role in Louis’ life. Before Louis had even properly experienced the devout Roman Catholic culture of Spain, his mother had introduced him to the beliefs and traditions. Growing up, Louis had always said his prayers before bedtime. He’d always gone to Mass, whether it be in England or Spain. He’d followed the rules and celebrated the festivals and been welcomed into the Catholic community with nothing but kindness and open arms.

And now?
Now he doesn’t know.

These days goes to Mass, he says his prayers, and then he goes home. He doesn’t kneel by his bedside before going to sleep anymore. Nor does he carry much regard for what the Lord demands of him apparently, because this, sleeping with a man, is just about as sinful as it gets in the eyes of the church.

In which case, why doesn’t he care that much? Surely he should feel ashamed right now. Yet the only thing he can bring himself to feel is… content. He feels cared for. Like Harry’s got him, one hundred percent.

“What about you?” he finds himself asking, even though he already has a hunch about the answer. “Are you religious?”

Harry shakes his head. “Not really. California’s pretty liberal with that kind of stuff, I guess. Everyone just does their own thing.”

Louis wonders what that’s like. It’s not that he doesn’t adore Spain with every fibre of his being. But maybe he could like America too, if he got to know the ins-and-outs of it.

He sometimes wonders if maybe there could be more to life than this constant two-way trip between London and Seville. The incessant switching between rain and heat, apples and oranges, tea and sangria. He knows full well that there are infinite other cultures out there — has heard thousands of stories from other expat kids about their home countries. Countries that don’t have tapas or guitars or the Roman Catholic church ingrained into their heritage. Perhaps one day Louis will even pluck up the courage to go out and see them for himself.

He’s about to ask Harry to tell him more about his own life back home, but is cut off by a sharp knock at the door.

“Harry?” Valentina’s voice calls out.

“Shit,” Louis breathes, his eyes snapping open. If he was having trouble waking up before, he's certainly not now.

“One second!” Harry yells back, his voice strained. He sits up quickly, bringing Louis up with him in the process, his face adopting an expression of sheer panic. “Um —”

“Bloody typical,” Louis hisses under his breath. He’s already scrambling to get off the mattress. “You know, if we were in England, knocking on someone’s door before ten in the morning would be unspeakable,” he drops down onto the floor and crawls, rather unceremoniously, under the bed. “But the Spanish have to be so bloody open, don’t they? Always so over friendly —”

“Please stop talking,” Harry beseeches him.

Louis snorts, kicking a couple of storage boxes out of the way to make room for himself. When he finally settles down on his stomach, he can’t help but shudder at the cool press of the floorboards against his naked body, absently wishing that he’d brought the comforter down here with him.

(Despite the discomfort, however, it has to be said: there’s something a little bit thrilling about hiding under the bed to evade being caught. As summer romances go, this one is ticking all of the boxes thus far.)

Above him, he can hear the sound of sheets rustling, which he assumes is Harry arranging them to cover his lower half. He clears his throat with a cough.
“Come in,” he calls.

Louis has to shove a knuckle in his mouth when the door swings open. He can see Valentina’s brown Huarache sandals as she stands in the threshold, barely a few meters from where he’s laying.

“Late start today, Harry?” she says pleasantly.

Louis is helpless to control his grin.

“I, uh — I’m afraid so.” Harry laughs, a touch nervous. “Sorry about that.”

“Oh, do not worry yourself, cariño, you take as much time as you need,” Valentina assures him, her accent sweet and doting. “I only came to ask if you have seen Louis this morning?”

Louis envisions that Harry is shaking his head right about now.

“Sorry. I haven’t seen him since yesterday.” The man pauses before adding, “Perhaps he’s gone out with Niall?”


Louis rolls his eyes. He loves Valentina to death, of course, but he has a strong suspicion that she still believes he’s twelve years old.

“I was thinking about going into town this morning,” Harry tells her. “I’ll let you know if I see him out and about.”

“Yes, you send him my way if you do. I need to have words with him.”

“Oh? Is he in trouble?”

Valentina hums disapprovingly. “Not yet. But he certainly will be if he does not get back here a ritmo galopante. His sister is due to arrive just after lunch, and she will be very upset if Louis isn’t here.”

Louis’ eyes widen. He has to resist the urge to silently smack his head against the floorboards, because of course. It’s the fifth today. Ana’s flight touches down in SVQ at two o clock, and Louis had promised, hand-on-heart, that he would help Valentina get everything ready before her arrival at the house.

“Is there anything I can do to help out?” Harry asks.

Louis rolls his eyes again, because Harry is really going out of his way to show him up right now.

“No, no, you carry on, cariño. Go into Sevilla for the morning. Relax. Give Louis a smack on the head from me if you see him.”

Harry laughs, clearly amused. “Don’t worry, I will do.”

*What a bloody suck up,* Louis thinks fondly.

Valentina closes the door behind her when she leaves, and a few moments later, Harry’s face appears over the side of the bed.

“Everything okay down there?” he asks, grinning like a beautiful, smug bastard and practically inviting Louis to jump him.
Which he does. Skitting out from under the bed, Louis launches himself onto Harry full-force, tackling him back down onto the mattress and mercilessly ruffling up his hair.

Harry laughs, boyish and loud, the sound reverberating through his body.

“Hey — *hey* now, take it easy, tiger.” He catches Louis’ wrists, pulling them down against his own chest in an attempt to cease his motions.

Louis, not willing to give in that easily, continues to writh the on top of him. Unable to free his hands, he leans down and sinks his teeth playfully into Harry’s shoulder, growling.

Harry chuckles. “Someone’s excited this morning.”

Louis continues to bite him. He bites his shoulder and his collarbone, and the side of his neck. He tugs at his wrists in Harry’s firm hold. He squeezes Harry tight between his thighs, wriggling and kicking, provoking in any way that he can, vying for some kind of reaction.

Harry must know exactly what he’s doing though, because he doesn’t budge an inch.

“You after something, babe?” He asks, quirking an eyebrow when Louis closes his mouth around his nipple.

Louis only sucks harder in response. There’s no doubt in his mind that Harry knows exactly what he’s after, nor is there any doubt in his mind that he’ll be denied this time. Not after last night.

He makes a low noise around Harry’s nipple. His cock is back to full hardness already, and he has no reservations about rubbing himself back and forth over Harry’s hip to ease the pressure.

Harry slips a hand down to cradle Louis’ bare arse, the other coming up to stroke his cheekbone.

“Gonna get off like that, are you?” he asks, casual as anything. “Rubbing up on me?”

Louis whines, releasing Harry’s nipple from his mouth for a moment in order to breathe. His lips stay where they are, parted around the wet nub, panting hotly. He shakes his head.

“No?” Harry punctuates the question by squeezing Louis’ arse. “You sure? Because you seem to be heading that way.”

Louis screws his eyes shut, focusing all of his energy on changing the short, sharp jerking motion of his hips into slow, hot drags, back and forth over the left V of Harry’s abdomen. His cock slides wetly over the warm skin, already slick with his pre-come, the sensation causing him to whimper.

“Look at you,” Harry says lowly, pushing Louis’ fringe from his face. “Got yourself so worked up already. Wouldn’t take much to make you come at this point would it?”

Louis makes an unintelligible noise of agreement. He starts biting gently at Harry’s nipple again.

Harry smiles down at him, equal parts fond and amused. “I think that’s quite enough of that.”

In one smooth motion, he takes Louis’ upper thighs in his hands and flips them over, leaving Louis pinned beneath him on the mattress, breathing heavily.

“*Harry,*” Louis mewls, breathless, staring up at him with wide and pleading eyes.

The pad of his thumb smooths gently across Louis’ jawline. He leans down to kiss him slow, tongue sliding over his bottom lip and easily into the younger boy’s hot, open mouth.

Winding his hands into Harry’s hair, Louis responds to the kiss with hunger, needy little whines escaping the back of his throat as Harry snakes a hand down between them. He almost comes right then and there when Harry’s fist closes around his leaking cock, the sensation of someone else’s hand touching him there still so shockingly new.

Harry holds him gently for a few seconds, getting Louis used to the feeling. When he starts jerking him it’s slow and light, the touch barely there, yet still so overwhelming that Louis is panting and spreading his legs within the first five seconds. Harry is clearly experienced in this field. He knows just how to build Louis up with his hand, stroking and twisting, varying his pressure, so easily getting Louis’ thighs trembling with the effort of holding back.

“I could blow you if you want,” Harry whispers hotly against his ear. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you, sweetheart? I could return the favour from last night. Make you feel so good with my mouth, have you coming so hard —”

Louis cuts him off with a strangled cry, clutching Harry’s shoulders and thrusting wildly into his fist as he comes over his stomach.

Harry works him through it, gently squeezing his prick as Louis trembles through the last strains of his high. He’s looking at Louis with wondrous eyes, like he can’t quite believe how responsive he is, coming just from his hand and a few choice words.

Louis can’t quite believe it either, in truth, but he feels too high and floaty right now to be embarrassed about it. That can wait until later.

Harry kisses him slowly when Louis’ done, cupping his jaw and tilting his head back against the pillow.

“Was that okay?” he murmurs.

“Mm,” Louis hums, smiling against his lips. “Very okay.”

They make out lazily for a couple of minutes, the all-encompassing weight of Harry’s body keeping Louis’ back pinned to the mattress. Harry’s large hand roams down Louis’ side, grabbing his thigh and hitching it up around his hip, the hard line of his cock suddenly pressing up against Louis’ groin.

Louis arches his hips up, revelling in the way Harry furrows his eyebrows and groans at the friction.

“Baby,” he croaks out, nuzzling into Louis’ neck and breathing hard.

Louis doesn’t waste time in worming his hand down between their bodies to give Harry a few quick tugs. The feel of him is hot and heavy against his palm, twitching when Louis strokes him just right, coaxing a bead of pre-come from the tip.

All of a sudden Louis’ mouth goes dry, his tongue too big clumsy to form words. He knows he wants Harry right now. It doesn’t take a genius to deduce that much. His entire body is pounding with the ache of desire, muscles twitching and breaths coming out in short bursts, legs already spreading in confused anticipation. But his brain is still too hazy to formulate the right question.

What comes out instead, in a broken rush of air, is, “Harry — do you — um — condoms?”

Harry’s erratic thrusts into Louis’ fist begin to slow down.
“What?” he mumbles into his neck, back expanding with every breath.

Louis swallows, his throat clicking, and takes a moment to gather his thoughts before trying again.

“Condoms,” he repeats. “So you can, like — put it inside. If you want.”

This is followed by a brief (yet terrifying) period of silence. It probably lasts two and a half seconds altogether, but that’s still enough time for Louis to convince himself that he’s an idiot, and that there must have been some sort of misunderstanding here because, clearly, Harry doesn’t want him in that way.

Blushing, he removes his hand from Harry’s cock.

“Sorry,” he mumbles quickly, looking away. “You don’t want that. Sorry.”

Harry lifts his head from Louis’ neck, staring at him with a pinched brow.


Louis hums in response.

“Louis. Look at me please, sweetheart.”

Reluctantly, Louis turns his head.

He’s met by Harry’s lips, tender and warm as they move against his own.

Louis exhales shakily through his nose, and manages to relax somewhat as Harry’s hand slips between the back of his head and the pillow, cradling him close.

When Harry pulls back, he keeps his forehead pressed lightly to Louis’, staring him dead in the eyes.

“I want you,” he whispers lowly, the words causing Louis’ stomach to coil. His eyes are dark and glinting, pupils dilated almost to the point of swallowing his irises whole. “I want you in every way, Louis. Have done ever since I saw you.”

Louis nearly dies right then and there, because the idea that Harry’s actually been feeling the same this whole fucking time is enough to make him feel like he’s about to burst into spontaneous flames.

“But,” Harry cups the side of his neck gently, “that being said, I’m not about to rush anything that doesn’t need to be rushed.”

Aaaand there it is.

Louis drops his gaze to his chest.

“No fucking. Got it,” he mumbles, sounding much like a spoiled toddler who’s been denied a sugary snack.

“No fucking yet,” Harry corrects. Crooking a finger under Louis’ chin, he tilts him back up to meet his gaze. “Sex — especially penetrative sex — is a big deal, Lou. You know that. If we’re going to do this then we’re going to be responsible about it, and that means waiting until we’re both good and ready. No exceptions.”

Louis can’t help but pout. “In case you hadn’t noticed,” he grumbles, “I’ve been ‘good and ready’ for at least two weeks now.”
Harry laughs softly, shutting him up with a brief kiss, and Louis kind of hates how instantly passive it makes him.

“If you can wait for two weeks, I’m sure you can manage to wait a little longer,” Harry tells him firmly. He leans down to drag his lips over Louis’ pulse point, pressing a series of tiny pecks into the skin below his jaw. “I want to do this right, Louis. I know you’re not a child, but you’re still young. I don’t want to push you too hard, too fast, and have you resent me for it later.”

There’s something in the way he says that which makes Louis’ heart clench. He’s not used to this by any means, and for some reason, he didn’t think that Harry was capable of being so… caring. He’d expected sex with Harry to be fast and hot, brazen like the quality of his speech, an in-and-out operation.

Instead he’d been met only with tenderness and reverent touches, the constant drawl of Harry’s syrup-smooth voice in his ear checking that he’s okay, making sure it’s good for him. So far from what he’d grown up being taught regarding what ‘homosexual acts’ entailed.

Harry wants to take care of him.

Harry wants to take care of him, and Louis trusts him to do that.

Unsurprisingly, that’s all the encouragement he needs to duck his head down under the covers, wriggle in between Harry’s legs, and finish what he started.

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Ana arrives at the house mid-afternoon, just as the one o clock heatwave is beginning to subside.

She steps gracefully out of the taxi in one fluid motion, her heels clicking against the tiles. You could’ve spotted her from a mile away — all chic and tall, wearing a canary yellow blouse and smart jeans, a python leather Versace handbag dangling from the crook of her elbow. Her hair is shorter than it was when Louis last saw her; what once were gentle brown waves have been shaped into a sophisticated bob cut, the effect of which is equal parts charming and professional.

Louis doesn’t hesitate in clambering out of the pool and jogging over.

“Oi, Ana. Over here.”

She lowers her sunglasses to peer at him.

“Alright pint-size?” she greets with a sunny smile.

(Yes, that’s really what she calls him. It’s a long-standing nickname. He’s always been small for his age, okay?)

“You need a trim,” Ana says, reaching out to tug on a strand of his wet fringe when he’s close enough, “You’re starting to look like one of those bloody Afghan dogs. I’ve got scissors packed somewhere if you want me to fix you up?”

Louis slaps away her hand playfully. “Later. Gimme a hug first.”

Ana wrinkles her nose as he wraps his wet arms around her, but embraces him back all the same. She smells clean, like coconut butter, and her bracelets jingle as she pats his back.

“How are you, brother dearest?”
“Eh, same as ever really. What about you? How’s the summer reading going?”

“Ugh, don’t even get me started. I got three pages into Roman Law in Context before my brain started to melt.” She hands the taxi driver a few crisp bank notes. “Perhaps you could read the rest aloud to me while I sunbathe? Help your big sis out, yeah?”

“I’ll consider it.” Louis snorts as he takes her bag from the trunk.

Ana turns and stands with her hand on her hip, shielding her eyes from the sun as she looks up at the house. “Where’s the old man then?” she asks, “Not that I was expecting a bloody welcome party or anything, but it’s strangely quiet around here.”

“They’re out in the orange grove. Sancho’s caught some sort of viper, I think. He’s very excited about it.”

“Oh, I see.” She hoists her handbag up over her shoulder. “And the Yank…?”

Louis forces himself to ignore the flash of involuntary heat that runs through him at the mention of Harry.

“He’s still in town getting some research done. Should be back for dinner though.”

Ana squints hard up at the top-floor windows, like she’s expecting to see Harry leaning out over one of the balconies wearing a stetson and waving a star spangled banner.

Judging by the expression of mild disappointment upon her face, she sees no such thing.

“What’s he like?” she asks.

Louis shrugs, busying himself with manoeuvring the suitcase towards the stone steps.

“He’s nice.”

“You like him, then?”

“Yeah, he’s alright.” Louis tactically avoids meeting her eyes. “Pretty smart, I guess.”

He’s also got a pretty cock, but Louis refrains from saying that. His sister doesn’t need to be in possession of that kind of knowledge.

“Smart, eh?” Ana hums contemplatively, narrowing her eyes. “Smarter than me?”

Louis throws a smile over his shoulder. “No one’s smarter than you.”

The two of them make their way inside with Ana’s luggage, heading through the entrance hall and up the stairwell.

“Nothing much has changed then,” Ana comments as they ascend. In passing, she stops to admire one of the artworks on the wall. A watercolour, painted by their mother, depicting the orange grove in the height of Summer, the trees heavy with ripe fruit. She slides her finger over the glass frame protecting it, grimacing at the way it comes away covered in dust.

They continue on their way up, making it to the third floor where Ana’s room is situated. It’s easily the largest of all four (being the favourite child has its privileges), and has the benefit of being East-facing, meaning that it’s almost always flooded with natural light. The walls are a tasteful duck-egg blue in colour, complemented by the white bedspread and furniture, and everything is pristinely kept.
and well organised, just the way Ana likes it.

“Home sweet home,” she sighs wistfully, setting down her handbag on the bed. Crossing over to the window, she draws back the transparent veil to look out over the patchwork hills of the Andalusian countryside. “God. I forgot how isolated this place is. I bet the Yank is going bored out of his mind.”

Louis doesn’t say anything to that. Instead, he kneels down next to the suitcase and tries to stifle his smile.

For the first hour or so, the two of them busy themselves with unpacking Ana’s things — mainly an abundance of flashy clothes — and Louis resolutely bites his tongue when she insists that her textbooks be placed on the shelf in alphabetical order, still too buzzed off her arrival to complain.

The common observation, of both friends and other family members alike, is unusually close for siblings who didn’t do a whole lot of growing up together. Whilst Louis spent his informative years at Westminster, Ana had been all the way over in Hertfordshire, and purchasing a train ticket between the two would have eaten up a large portion of their allowances. Not to mention the fact that finding the time to see each other was a task in itself; between being deputy head girl, captain of the hockey team, and a straight-A student, Ana never had a whole bunch of free weekends left over.

Louis never resented her for it, of course. He’s always been proud of his big sister. He only wishes they’d had a little more time to just be kids together.

“I need a beer,” Ana announces, standing in the centre of the room with her hand on her hips. “A beer and a nap.”

Louis has to agree that a beer and nap sounds pretty perfect round about now. He’s still feeling a little tired after last night (and yes, the memory of it is still making his belly do weird-happy-things), so it doesn’t take much persuading on Ana’s part to get him down to the kitchen.

“Is this Estrella Damm stuff beer or lager?” Ana is asking a few minutes later, holding the fridge door open and squinting down at the bottle in her hand. “And is it even any good? I never can tell when it comes to —”

“Hold it still, Sancho!”

The sound of raised voices are drifting in from the patio. Both Ana and Louis look up towards the back door, matching expressions of intrigue on their faces.

“I’m trying! ¡Deja de moverte, por el amor de Dios!” Sancho’s gruff voice responds, out of breath like he’s physically exerting himself.

Ana quirks an eyebrow. “Well. That sounds interesting.”

Temporarily forgetting about the beer, the pair of them make their way over to the back door and peer out through the glass.

Sancho is standing on the patio and fumbling around with a large metal rod, around the end of which a large, grey snake has wound its body. He’s got its head trapped lightly between his thumb and forefinger, but it doesn’t seem to be doing much to prevent the agitated serpent from putting up a fight.

A few feet away strands Dean, Patricia and Valentina, all three of them shouting at Sancho like they’re watching a sports game. Dean has his camera poised in front of his face, smiling and snapping pictures like this is all jolly good fun, even requesting that Sancho turn and give him a smile.
at one point.

“Jesucristo,” Ana mutters under her breath. “Sometimes I think you and I are the only sane ones left, Lou.”

Louis nods sagely. He has to agree with her there.

***

Harry doesn’t make it back until dinner, and when he does, the house is in complete disarray.

After the excitement whole snake debacle wore off, Patricia inevitably got into one of her sulky moods again for whatever reason. Louis’ father’s attempts to placate her were all in vain, only serving to add fuel to the fire, and Valentina’s obvious disapproval of her attitude has resulted in an explosive argument, cueing the rest of them to flee the immediate vicinity, asap.

Louis can safely vouch for the fact that when two Spanish ladies get into an argument, it isn’t pretty.

Currently, Louis, Harry, Ana and Dean are sat at the table beneath the arbour, quietly sipping gazpacho from their spoons. The intense shouting match unfolding in the kitchen provides an uncomfortable backing track to their silence, and it’s really all Louis can do not to burst out laughing into his soup.

He doesn’t though. That would be impolite. And Louis is nothing if not the epitome of good manners.

From the opposite side of the table, Ana clears her throat.

“So, tell me, Harry,” she says, breaking the silence as she reaches for the Rioja. “How are you enjoying your stay so far?”

Louis can tell that she’s only just holding it together herself. It’s almost imperceptible, but the little upward quirk in the corner of her mouth betrays her. Louis knows his sister better than anyone.

He smiles around his spoon.

“Oh, immensely,” Harry responds, nodding. If Louis isn’t mistaken, there’s an amused glint in his eyes. “The scenery is breathtaking. And the people here are just so…”

The sound of a breaking china echoes from the kitchen, followed by a string of offensive Spanish expletives.

“…civil.”

Ana nearly snorts her wine right back into the glass, and Harry’s dimple threatens to pop.

Dean looks between them with pursed lips.

“Mmm, I know exactly what you mean,” Ana nods along, placing her glass down and dapping at her mouth with a napkin. “We have a very open culture here in comparison to other European countries. Very laid back.”

Another loud thump as something is hurled with force at the kitchen wall.

“Oh yes,” Harry agrees, “there’s definitely more of a sense of courtesy here. Mutual respect. It really makes me realise what the US is lacking.”
Louis pushes the sleeve of his sweatshirt over the lower half of his face, doing a god-awful job of hiding his grin.

Harry catches his eye for a second, smirking.

“I honestly don’t know how you manage it over there, Harry,” Ana says, her voice comically incredulous. “I sure couldn’t. American society seems far too uncouth for me.”

Back in the kitchen, Patricia screeches something about Valentina minding her own business and keeping her fat nose out of things that don’t concern her.

“Couldn’t agree more,” Harry says sagely, “Manners are not our strong suit by any means.”

Valentina dares Patricia to make one more comment about knowing her place. Louis reckons she is most likely brandishing some sort of kitchen appliance. Perhaps a spatula, if he had to make an educated guess.

“I blame the parents,” says Ana.

By now, all three of them are biting back laughter.

Harry continuously meets Louis’ gaze as he’s speaking, his eyes dancing with mirth, skin flushed a beautiful golden-pink in the late afternoon sunlight, and Louis stomach still swoops every time their eyes lock. Harry just looks so wonderful like this. All relaxed and happy off a few glasses of red wine, concealing these adorable little huffs of laughter behind his hand.

Louis aches for him. He literally aches.

He can tell that Ana likes him too. If she’d been sceptical beforehand, it didn’t take much to change her mind. All Harry had to do was turn the superficial charm on for five minutes, which was apparently hilarious enough to earn him a hug and a ‘you’re not all that bad, Yank.’

Harry’s attempts at telling her that he’s actually from Cheshire were futile. In the end, he was simply forced to give up and go along with it.

At some point, Dean gets up to see if there’s any chance of breaking up the fight yet. Louis thinks he may have been spurred on by the mention of his mother. Some venomous comment from Valentina about how much she preferred her to Patricia, or something of the like.

Louis doesn’t want to dwell on it.

Instead, he focuses on Harry.

Harry, who is currently lighting up a cigarette as he speaks animatedly with Ana about American law, sucking in the smoke with hollowed out cheeks and causing a subtle throbbing sensation between Louis’ legs.

He tenses at first, when Louis’ feet find his under the table.

It’s only for a moment though. Then his ankles are locking around Louis’, securing him in place. Anchoring him down.

Their little secret.
Here. Have some groovy Sevillian music, free of charge: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSDl8w3wR2E

Next chapter will *hopefully* be up in a couple of weeks x

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