All These Years (I Can't Believe I've Been Missing You)

by kissperingniall

Summary

Louis and Zayn are looking to him expectantly, terror in their eyes because Harry said it was important they talk and he’s certain from their expressions that they think he might be dying. The idea is almost laughable but Harry wouldn’t purposefully joke about something like that.

“I want to be a father.”

Seconds feel like an eternity and suddenly they’re relaxing, giving a slow laugh as the statement sinks in. Zayn palms his face with a relieved grin pushing the limits of his face.

“What a relief.”

“We thought you had cancer or something.”

Notes

I’ve been itching to write a narry kid fic and finally, I have the first part finished! whew! this is going to be a long story, so hope you stay with me.

This isn’t beta'd so if there are any mistakes, I'm terribly sorry. I try to edit while I go but you know how that goes sometimes.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

01 June

It’s around the time that Blaze turns three that Harry decides he wants one of his own. The idea is ridiculous, of course, but he can’t help the sensation of feeling jealous of Louis and Zayn and their sweet domestic life. Harry decides he’s disgusted with himself and shakes the thought away while attending to one of Blaze’s tantrums. He’s skipped over the terrible twos to the-not-my-child threes and Louis’ been in hiding all day.

“Your daddy is awful. Leaving me all alone with you.”

“No! Daddy not awful! Uncle Harry awful!” Blaze argues and Harry’s got this deep frown he can’t wipe off.

“I’m sorry, baby.” He cuddles with him, despite the toddler’s protests. Harry nuzzles his nose against his rosy cheek and kisses him wet and sloppy. “I love my little Blaze, though.”

Blaze sighs in surrender. “Love Uncle Harry.”

Finally, there’s silence in Louis and Zayn’s apartment and Harry can breathe. He recalls his earlier thought and reminds himself that this is why he shouldn’t have a child. Not to mention that he’s incredibly single and barely makes rent with his job at the bakery. Blaze goes off to play with his toys, smashing his toy car against his dump truck and giggles loudly.

Harry hears the lock in the front door click and he knows that Zayn’s finally come home. Great. Now, maybe, Louis will come out of hiding and take care of his child.

“Baba!” Blaze shouts, excitedly getting up to latch onto Zayn’s leg. Zayn smiles, lifting his son up into the air and kisses him hello.

“Was he good?” He asks Harry, holding Blaze against his hip for balance. Harry shrugs, getting up from the floor and moving towards them, petting the thick tuft of light brown hair on Blaze’s head.

“Oh, you know. The usual.”

“Tantrums?”

“Like you wouldn’t believe.” Harry’s eyes go wide with emphasis and Zayn chuckles.

“Where’s Lou?”

“Daddy hiding,” Blaze explains and Zayn gives a sigh.

“Wanna go find Daddy? Tell him that I’ll be making dinner soon and he needs to come back to reality.” Of course, the toddler doesn’t fully understand what he’s saying but he’s going to be playing hide-and-seek and he has no arguments against that. Zayn lets the frantic Blaze down and watches as he heads down the hallway, shouting “hide and seek hide and seek” while looking for Louis. It’s an easy find, since he’s been obviously napping the day away since Harry got there.

“Found you, Daddy! Found you!”
“Found me? Yes you did,” Louis’ sleepy voice sings and sounds of giggles and happiness ring about the apartment.

Zayn smiles, and there it is again: Harry’s sudden envy of their domestic life. He sighs, and it must’ve been a loud one because now Zayn’s sights are only on him. “What’s wrong?”

Harry shakes his head. “Nothing. Nothing’s wrong.”

“Bull. I know when my best friend isn’t happy. You do that whole sighing thing and then all you do is pout that puppy face you’re sporting right now.” Harry mocks offense, quickly trying to change his expression.

“Well I never.”

Smirking, Zayn wraps an arm around Harry’s shoulder and they head into the kitchen. “Talk to me? There’s something on your mind and you know it’s better to let it out than keep it building up inside.” He’s right, Harry knows he’s right, but he just can’t bring himself to say it.

Before he’s forced into anything, Louis and Blaze make their long waited appearance to the realm of the living and Blaze’s all red in the cheeks from laughter.

“Is Daddy feeling better now that he’s had his nap?” Harry teases and Louis sticks his tongue out at him.

“Dick.”

“Language, Lou.” Zayn warns, but Blaze is in a fit of giggles anyways at Louis’ potty mouth. Zayn moves to their side, playing with the little toes of the toddler and blows raspberries against his exposed stomach. “Daddy is a potty mouth. Bad Daddy.”

“Yeah, bad Daddy,” Blaze reasons, lightly leaving little smacks against Louis’ face.

“Oi, you’re lucky I love you so much,” Louis challenges, peppering Blaze’s face with thousands of kisses and Harry is blissfully domestic-out. He really shouldn’t feel so jealous but he really can’t help it.

Not that there’s anything he can do about it, to be honest.

He still remembers almost three years ago when little Blaze was left on Louis’ front doorstep, a note attached from his mother saying that she couldn’t do this anymore and all rights were given over to him. Louis had been in a fit of confusion, uncertain of what to do with this random baby. He was undoubtedly his though. With those bright blue eyes and hair practically the same cinnamon color as Louis’. Not to mention his incredible streak of bad tempers that Louis’ infamous for. It only took a matter of a couple days for Louis to really feel like taking him in was the only thing he wanted to do with his life.

It put a hold on his acting career though. He told his manager that he wanted to hold off on it till he felt settled enough with Blaze. Of course, three years goes by and he still doesn’t feel comfortable enough to be away from the little one for too long. Zayn was on board almost immediately, which shocked their little gang. Zayn was never one to be willing to have children, especially not since the lot of them were in their early twenties. But he’s been madly in love with Louis since the day they met back in June of 2010 and have been inseparable since.

Seemed only fitting that he took in Blaze as his own. He quickly became Papa and Harry couldn’t be happier for them.
Only, he isn’t really truly, happy with his life.

He’s known for a while how he wishes for change. The idea of acknowledging that he needs change is challenging enough, and Harry keeps telling himself that he’s fine with just being Blaze’s uncle, but he can’t fool himself better than anyone else.

Zayn glances at him and frowns, noticing that same expression Harry had on earlier and he gestures him over to join in on the family cuddle. Harry obliges, smiling halfheartedly while embracing the lot of them, Blaze laughing sweetly.

“Love all of you,” the little one grins and it’s the sweetest thing.

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Later, Harry’s mulling over his fourth pint of the night and Ed’s rambling off about football, a topic that Harry automatically tunes out of after five minutes. He can’t shake his thoughts from wanting to be a parent and that’s crazy, seriously crazy, because he’s barely twenty-two and who the hell would want to have a kid with him. Not to mention the simple fact that he’s not straight, so either he gets a surrogate mother or he adopts and why in the world is he thinking about this?

Sighing in aggravation, Harry tugs at his hair, and Ed’s finally realized that something’s up.

“Hey, you all right?”

“Yeah,” Harry lies, pushing his tousled hair back in place and drains the rest of his pint. “I’m fine.”

Ed’s unconvinced, asking for another beer before Harry can even protest. “You got a cig on you?”

Harry pats his pants and nods, producing a half-empty pack from his front pocket. It’s slightly smashed, but the cigarettes are still straight, a feat that he’s still in awe over. “How can you stuff your pants when they look like they’ve been painted on?” Ed remarks rhetorically. Harry shrugs and they head outside to burn one off.

They share it, passing it back and forth in silence, watching the traffic pass by the hole-in-the-wall pub they frequent on a Friday night such as this. “What’s on your mind?”

Harry sighs, having lost count on how many times he’s actually done that today, and turns towards his friend. “Just a lot of things… Unnecessary things, actually.”

“Talk to me?”

A smirk tugs at his lips, recalling Zayn saying the same exact thing not three hours ago. “You and Zayn just want me to spill all my secrets today.”

Ed laughs at that, and it’s contagious, inducing a rolling hysterical throughout Harry’s body. “Maybe it’s cuz you look so lost. Like a little puppy.”

“Shut up,” he nudges Ed’s shoulder playfully, looking over the edge of the brick wall and flicks ashes off the last of the butt before tossing it to the ground. “Just been thinking about things lately.”

“Like? C’mon, Haz, don’t be a broken record.”

Harry gives in, eyes meeting Ed’s in all seriousness. “I’m really unhappy and it’s finally dawned on
“Unhappy? What for?” The happy lad gestures towards the sky, his arms spread wide as his smile matches the motion. “The world is your playground. We can do or be anything we want! That’s the beauty of us single pringles.” He deserves a laugh at that, and Harry gives it easily. But the moment passes as quickly as it came and they’re back to square one.

“I think I want to settle down.” Harry says after a while and Ed deadpans.

“Seriously?”

“Yeah,” he casually drinks from his pint and stares out at the cloudy London sky.

“Why though? There’s so much time we have to waste on livin’. You really want to give that up?”

“Why not? I’m not really doing anything with my life. I mean, you’ve got something to live for, your music and all. You’d actually make it out there. Me? I’ve got nothing but good friends, a shitty apartment that I can barely afford the rent for, and an even shittier job at the bakery.”

“But you love your shitty job at the bakery.”

“I know,” he pauses, looking down to his worn out boots. “I know, but it’s not enough for me. I need something to need me.”

There’s that deafening silence again and Ed’s at a loss of words.

Harry’s got nothing to give him back either.

“Well,” he pats Harry’s back. “If that’s what you want, I’m going to support ya.”

“Yeah?” Harry glances at him over his shoulder.

“Yeah?” Harry glances at him over his shoulder.

Ed gives him the biggest, most genuine smile Harry’s ever seen and there’s a little glisten in his eyes. “Yeah, Haz. If you’re not happy, then go find your happiness. I’ll be here for ya every step of the way. Promise.”

“Thanks, Ed. You’re the best.”

02 July

Finding someone isn’t easy, Harry concludes after making many attempts to get a date. He hasn’t had a relationship in two years, not since Nick, and that was a poisonous relationship. It broke him, made him never want to leave his apartment again. Thinking back on those days, Harry wishes he’d never mope about over someone as shitty as Nick Grimshaw, with his cheating ways and manipulative personality. Since then, though, he’s never truly liked someone as much as he did Nick and that scared him out of his wits.

He thinks, maybe he’ll apply for a surrogate mother, and just raise a child on his own. Relationships, as lovely as they can be, aren’t worth it to him. In fact, he can’t imagine himself being with anyone for the rest of his life and that pains him, but it’s the honest to god truth.

First things first though, he needed to find a better job.
03 August

When Liam calls him one morning, he’s ecstatic, knowing what the call is about.

“Hello?”

“Hey Harry. Got some good news.” Liam’s calm and sensible voice soothing Harry instantly.

“Yeah?”

“You got the job. Are you sure you want to take it though?”

“Never been so certain in my life.”

Liam’s a record producer. One of the top rated, most successful in all of the UK and it’s only a desk job, but being Liam’s secretary is better than the minimum wage he’s been getting being a baker at that quaint bakery down the street from his apartment. It may not be his dream job, but Harry’s content with it come Monday morning. It’s hot and muggy and he feels like he’s just walked out into a sauna, but he’s content and that’s all he needs right now. The whole ordeal is sort of a secret though, since Louis and Liam have a bad past.

He feels a little guilty taking the job, but Liam’s been his friend since high school. The three of them used to be a trio, but when feelings get caught into the mix of friendships, it tends to have a knack to break friendships apart. Harry’s glad Louis found Zayn though. He practically saved his life.

Then Blaze came along and nothing else mattered anymore because Louis’ happy.

His first day on the job is simple. It’s mostly Liam’s assistant showing him the works of everything, where he needs to file the papers going in and out and how to log them properly. Then came time to show him how to set up appointments and Harry is off for his lunch break. Liam joins him.

They head down to the studios cafeteria and Harry gets himself a coffee, a scone, and a turkey sandwich. It still feels weird being somewhere new for work. That whole first day of school type jitters. Liam’s nice though. Very accommodating, asking how his day has been so far and if he likes the job or not.

“No, it’s great. It’s different. I should be careful, cuz I could get fat sitting on my bum all day.”

Liam laughs. “Just bring some healthy snacks if you get hungry. Or maybe we could go to the gym together.” It’s a very reasonable suggestion. Harry used to frequent the gym, when he was with Nick. Always wanted to look his very best for him.

Now, things are different and he recalls the slight flab to his stomach and groans around a mouthful of his sandwich. “God, I need the gym. But the memberships are so expensive.”

“I can bring you with me as a guest. For a month I think?” Liam thinks, tapping his bearded chin pensively. “Yeah, and with your salary, you could easily be able to afford it in no time.”

“Thanks. I’ll think about it,” Harry smiles and they sit there in a comfortable silence, finishing the rest of his lunch.

“How’s Louis?” It’s a simple question, but Harry can tell by the look in his eyes that Liam’s nervous.
They haven’t talked for maybe three or so years now. Not since the breakup. It’s not like they couldn’t have become friends again. Not really. Louis just didn’t want any extra drama in his life, especially not when Zayn came around.

Harry shrugs, not sure on where he should start. “He’s good,” he decides on. Keeping it simple and clean.

Liam’s quiet for a little while, gazing out the cafeteria window in thought. Harry distracts himself with a round of Candy Crush before Liam’s speaking again. “I heard he has a son.”

Harry stills, wondering how Liam could’ve heard that. Louis’ not exactly private, but Blaze is precious and he treasures him more than anything he’s ever had. Even more than Zayn. And he has every right to. Makes Harry ponder over if Louis keeps his social media private or not. “Yeah,” he offers, drinking some of his coffee. It’s black, bitter, and it warms his soul regardless of the weather today. “He’s three. Cutest little boy I’ve ever met.” He doesn’t know why he’s even bothering to talk about Blaze when Liam shouldn’t really know about Louis’ personal life, but he’s his friend and Harry’s a proud uncle and he can’t help it.

After a while, Liam nods and entertains himself with a different subject. One that Harry isn’t sure how he picked up on in the first place. “Do you want kids, Harry?”

Looking up from his phone, which has an unread text from Louis, he sighs, resting his chin on his palm. “Yeah. I really do.”

“Even though you’re so young?”

“Yeah. It’s kinda crazy, but I wouldn’t mind if I had a kid show up on my doorstep tomorrow morning. That sounds sort of bad, but like…” He waves his free hand around for emphasis on how much this topic has been looming over him.

“I completely get what you mean. I don’t know if I’d be a very good father though. You and Louis always seemed better fit for parenthood.”

Harry sits up straight in disbelief. “You kidding me? If there was ever a daddy in our little trio, it was definitely you.”

Liam blushes. “You really think so?”

“Well yeah. Always so sensible and responsible. Remember when we went to that party at the McPearson’s and you had to actually carry Louis and me to the car because we kept throwing tantrums cuz we didn’t want to leave? I mean. You could’ve just left us there to regret our irresponsible decisions the next morning, but you didn’t. You took us home, got us out of our day clothes and into our pajamas and made sure we had a glass of water and Advil for the next morning. I don’t think at seventeen that Lou or I would’ve done anything like that. But you. God. You really took care of us. More Louis than anything really, but…” the memory is still vivid. It may have been six years ago, but it really stuck out to Harry. No wonder Louis really loved Liam.

There’s a bright smile on Liam’s face and he’s so happy that it makes Harry feel warm and cozy. “Thanks, Harry.”

“Hey, I’m just being honest. But seriously. Don’t doubt that you’d be a good father when I know you better than that.” He adds before finally reading Louis’ text.

*From: Lou-ba-loo*
Can you come over and watch Blaze tonight? Plzzzzz

Harry smiles.

From: Harry

Sure! What time?

From: Lou-ba-loo

Five? Is that okay? Zayn wants to go out tonight but I feel bad for asking because I’m sure you’re exhausted from work.

Harry shakes his head, almost like he’s actually talking to Louis in person.

From: Harry

You know I’ve been craving Uncle Harry and Blaze time. You two go have fun and be in love. I’ve got Blaze handled. :) see you at five.

He pockets his phone; time to go back to work and smiles at Liam, patting him on the back cuz why not. “Thank you again for the job, Li. I’m so grateful.”

Liam returns the grin and nods. “I wouldn’t have wanted anyone else here besides you anyways.”

When Harry gets to Louis and Zayn’s the place is a disaster area. Literally, it takes all Harry can give to not freak out about it as much as Louis is, scrambling around, chasing after Blaze with a roll of toilet paper in his hand, flapping behind him.

“For the love of—Blaze! Why are you doing this?!”

“Don’t leave Blaze. Stay with Blaze!” He shouts, giggling as he continues on his rampage.

Upon closer inspection, there’s dishes piled up in the kitchen sink, toys and clothes scattered about the living room—most likely because Blaze likes to streak and throw all his clothes around—and Zayn’s nowhere to be found. Blaze still hasn’t noticed that his uncle has just walked through the door, so catching him is rather easy. Louis breathes a sigh of relief, grateful to Harry for his rescue. He slumps down on the couch, only to quickly stand when he realizes he’s sat on a dirty diaper.

“Really?! Oh god, what did I ever do to deserve this?” Louis whines in melancholy.

Harry readjusts Blaze on his hip, offering a small smile to his best friend. “Sorry, love. Having an off day?”

“That’s really an understatement,” Louis scoffs, peeling his jeans off and throwing them in a pile that he begins to build with all of Blaze’s other garments. “Zayn and I really need this night out, but Blaze is making it all the more difficult. You’d think he’d be okay with being away from his parents, but he’s so dependent it’s driving me nuts.”

The statement makes Harry smirk, and he rubs Blaze’s back. “That’s kinda the whole point of being a parent? I think? Maybe. Who knows? I’m not one.” He teases and tries to ignore the hint of
sadness he gets from his own comment.

Louis sighs, and gestures to them irritated, “How in the world do you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Get him to be calm with you. He wouldn’t even let me hold him today. He’s been so mad.”

“Daddy’s mean. Blaze mad at Daddy,” he says to Harry.

Harry hugs him, hoping to absorb his cuteness. “Daddy loves you. Uncle Harry loves you. Daddy’s not mean.”

“Daddy’s mean. Put Blaze in time out.” He argues and Harry looks to Louis curiously.

“He got into the stash of toilet paper and flushed it down the toilet. Three rolls of it. Clogged the whole system.” Blaze giggles even though Louis is visibly seething.

Harry gasps at Blaze, a concerned expression directed towards him. “That’s not good, Blaze.” The toddler can’t stand it, feeling sad about Harry being upset.

“I’m sorry.”

Louis nods, reaching for his child and Blaze finally lets him take him into his arms. “It’s okay. Just don’t do it again. Daddy spent twenty minutes plunging the toilet and that wasn’t fun.”

Blaze pouts and nods his head. “Not fun.”

“Nope.”

Harry goes around and starts helping pick up the place. “Where’s Zayn?”

“He had to stay at work late. He should be home any time now.” Louis yawns, growling at his continuously foul mood over his rotten child. “Can’t wait to go out. Just a nice dinner and a movie and Zayn all to myself. It’ll be heaven.” He starts bouncing Blaze on his hip and watches Harry clean up. “Thank you for this, by the way. You’re the best.”

Harry grins wide. “Of course. Like I said, been itching for some time with lil Blaze,” he comes over and tickles the little one, throwing him into a small fit of giggles. “And if I can give you two the night off, then hey, we all win in this situation.” Not to mention that it helps fight the urge to tell Louis how bad he wishes he was a parent, but he really doesn’t need to know that.

Not right now.

“I’m almost done here. I’ll do the dishes and start dinner for Blaze and I and you can go and shower?” Harry suggests and Louis takes the offer immediately.

“Bless you Harry Styles. You’re an absolute gift.” He hands his son over to Harry and skips off to the back of the apartment, presumably to get some clothes before heading to shower. Harry smiles, making kissing noises against Blaze’s forehead before settling him into his high chair. He coos from his perch, slapping the plastic tray playfully. Harry goes to get him a sippy cup of orange juice and dispenses a pile of Cheerios on his tray before he moves to clean the dishes.

By the time Louis is out, Harry’s pieced the kitchen back together and there’s a small pot of macaroni noodles boiling on the stove. Blaze is preoccupied with his mess of Cheerios and some have fallen on the floor but when Harry meets Louis’ eyes, he looks so happy that it doesn’t matter.
“Wow. You’re amazing. Maybe I should pay you to be my nanny.”

Harry laughs, throwing his head back and shakes his head. He stirs the noodles and sets the spoon down before facing him again. “I don’t know if I could handle watching him all the time. He is yours after all.” He teases and Louis joins his side. There’s this look to him, one that Harry knows so well as him seeing right through his facades. “What?”

Louis shakes his head. “Nothing, you just seem… distant about something. I don’t know,” he waves it off, hoping that he’s wrong, but Harry knows he’s somehow getting it. “Ever since June. I’m not sure, you’ve just seemed off about something.”

“I’m fine. Really. Just been tired.” Harry shrugs it off, praying that Louis doesn’t continue to pry. He focuses back on dinner, straining the noodles and making the cheese sauce before mixing it up. Harry turns to Blaze with a wide smile. “You ready for dinner? I made mac n cheese.”

“Yum!” Blaze squeals, bouncing in his high chair. “Blaze likes cheese.” Harry can hardly believe he’s just now noticing his speech has improved.

“I know you do, bub.” Harry agrees proudly, serving a spoonful of it in one of his small plastic bowls. He sets it in the freezer for a few minutes and hands it over. “Eat up for Uncle Harry and we’ll go out for ice cream later.”

Blaze’s pretty blue eyes grow and he’s messily shoving the cheesy noodles in his mouth. “Ice cream! Ice cream!”

“What’s this about ice cream?” Zayn calls from the front door and he joins the others in the kitchen. Louis smiles at him, pressing a sweet kiss to his lips in greeting.

“Apparently Harry’s gonna be spoiling our rotten son with sugar tonight. Isn’t he awful?” Harry sticks his tongue out playfully before scooping a spoonful of macaroni into his mouth. He stands at the island counter, watching them exchange pleasantries with each other, and while he’s used to it, somehow it kills him on the inside. Zayn and Louis spot his expression immediately and he quickly tries to cover it with something else, but the feeling won’t go away. “You sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah. Really. I’m sorry guys. Go have fun, kay?” Harry answers, scratching the back of his head nervously. When they don’t move, he starts to lead them towards the front door. “You’re wasting precious Zayn and Louis time!”

**04 September**

It’s halfway through the month when Harry makes the absolute decision to seek out a surrogate mother. He isn’t sure how to go about it. He knows that he could apply with one of the websites, but he finds that too impersonal and doesn’t feel right about it. Not that he gets why it matters, but he wants to know who the mother is, just in case his child ever asks where their mommy is. Harry’s intentions are to still stay single, knowing that raising a child in today’s society could be difficult if his kid has two fathers. It really isn’t an issue to him, but right now, he has no one he wants to be with, and if they come along down the road, he hopes they’ll be able to accept his child too.

There’s a lot of things going through Harry’s mind and he’s completely lost train of thought while setting up an appointment for one of Liam’s clients.
“Are you listening? Hello? Anyone there?” The client attempts and Harry’s frantically returning to reality.

“I’m so sorry. What was that again?”

The client sighs. They sound Irish, but Harry can’t seem to remember their name. “I’m trying to figure out when my client is supposed to come in for studio time.”

“Right.” Harry’s got the name pulled up on the computer, his job almost halfway done while he was off in la la land. “Friday at three. Anything else I can do for you?”

“No, thank you.” They hang up and Harry leans back in his chair with a deep sigh.

He really needs to get a hold of himself. This surrogacy thing is driving him bonkers.

It isn’t until September nears its end when Harry finally tells Louis and Zayn what’s been bothering him after all of this time. He sits them down in their kitchen, sounds of Blaze giggling while he plays in the living room almost pulling Harry away from the topic at hand.

Louis and Zayn are looking to him expectantly, terror in their eyes because Harry said it was important they talk and he’s certain from their expressions that they think he might be dying. The idea is almost laughable but Harry wouldn’t purposefully joke about something like that.

“I want to be a father.”

Seconds feel like an eternity and suddenly they’re relaxing, giving a slow laugh as the statement sinks in. Zayn palms his face with a relieved grin pushing the limits of his face. “What a relief.”

“We thought you had cancer or something.” Louis remarks, leaning his head on Zayn’s shoulder lovingly and it’s adorable, but it’s too saccharine and Harry can barely take it.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence guys.” Harry smirks, crossing his arms calmly.

“Well that’s great, Hazza. We’re happy for you but, umm…” Zayn starts.

“What?”

“How are you going to become a parent? You don’t have a girlfriend or anything so, are you going to adopt?” Louis asks for the both of them, Zayn nodding.

Harry knew they were going to ask, but somehow it makes him feel anxious to answer because he doesn’t know where to start to explain himself. “Erm… it’s really selfish, but no. I really want one of my own. I thought about adoption, and I’d love the child lots, but there’s something appealing about it being of my own genes that I guess I just…”

“No, we get it,” Zayn injects. “I mean, sometimes I really wish Blaze was actually my boy too, but, he’s Louis’ and that’s enough for me. But for you, I know you’ve wanted kids for a very long time.”

“Yeah,” Louis agrees. “I wouldn’t put it past you for wanting to have your own. You could adopt one later if you really wanted to, but there’s something special about the child being your own.” He explains.

Louis is staring fondly at Blaze, and Harry’s so so jealous but he so cannot think that way and —“Ugh… I can’t do this anymore.”
“Do what?” Zayn cocks an eyebrow, seriously concerned over Harry’s exasperation.

“Pretend that I’m not jealous. I love Blaze, so very very much. But like… he isn’t enough? It’s crazy, because I’m only twenty-three and I’m really young and I haven’t even started my career or anything, but like… I need to be a parent. It’s so screwed up. I’m so messed up.”

Zayn gets up from his side of the table and scoots in the seat next to Harry and pulls him into a side hug, holding his head against his chest. “Shh… it’s all right.”

The little pitter patter of Blaze’s feet against the tile is all Harry can hear though, and he’s at his side, grabbing at Harry’s big hand, pulling lightly. “Why Uncle Harry sad?”

Reluctantly, Harry pulls away from Zayn’s embrace and looks down to the little one, giving a solemn smile. He brings him up into his lap. “Can I have a hug?” He asks and Blaze is more than happy to comply, wrapping his tiny arms around Harry’s neck, hugging him as tight as he can. Harry closes his eyes, memorizing the way his little body comforts him in the only way a parent can ever understand and he knows this feels right to him. Feeling like a father should, even if Blaze isn’t his, and even if he’s nowhere near having one of his own.

He almost wants to give up this yearning infatuation with having a kid, but try as hard as he must, he really can’t.

He thinks Louis and Zayn are able to see it written all over his face. Their expressions are soft, understanding, and they’re so supportive, Harry still isn’t sure why he waited so long to tell them. Sighing, he lets go of Blaze when he pushes from him. Harry half expects him to climb down and go back to play, but he smacks his little hands against his cheeks and smushes them together, making a fishy face with Harry’s lip. “Love Uncle Harry. Don’t be sad. Blaze want you happy.”

The urge to smile is uncontrollable. He really loves this kid. “Love you Blaze.”

“Love you too,” and he hugs Harry, like his hugs can cure all of his woes, and they almost do, almost.

Blaze climbs down and goes back to attend to his toys while Harry tries to bring himself back to reality. He really forgot that Louis and Zayn are there, but they seem okay with it.

“I think I get why you’ve been so distant these past few months,” Louis begins, a gentle smile caressing his scruffy face. “Have you decided on what you’re going to do? Are you really sure that this is what you truly want right now?”

There’s no hesitation in Harry’s answer. “Yes. I’m one hundred percent on this.” He squeaks and clears his throat, passing a nervous grin. “I’ve thought a lot about this. I’m going to find a surrogate mother. I just don’t know where I should look. I don’t want to do the online process, that’s too… I don’t know, anonymous? I want to know who the mother is.”

“I get that. You want to make sure if your child ever asks who their mum is then you’ll have an answer. Whether or not you choose to give the mother that option. But… did you want to already know the mother of?”

“I think so?” Harry answers timidly. He shrugs. “I have someone in mind. A girl I knew in uni. She was my study partner in most of my musical theory classes.”

“Kate?” Louis suddenly recalls and Harry’s nodding. “Wonder how she’s been. She used to be really good friends with Eleanor. Always at the apartment whenever she’d come over.” Zayn goes silent, and Harry knows that look. Acknowledging Blaze’s biological mother has always been a
touchy subject for him. The circumstances around her weren’t really the best ones. Louis almost doesn’t catch the fact that Zayn’s gone quiet, until he does, and he’s reaching his hand out to grasp his.

It takes a moment, but Zayn squeezes back, a small smile present.

Nodding, Harry tries to move the topic forward. “Yeah. She was always really pretty and nice. Super smart too, very musically inclined. I mean, good traits. If I wasn’t gay then…”

“Yeah. I know. But hey! Maybe she’d go for it. Ring her up!” Louis encourages.

Harry’s grateful. Seriously so. These two have been his rock for the past three years and he couldn’t have asked for better friends.

*

Three attempts at calling Kate and Harry hangs up before the line can even ring. He’s too scared to do it. Who just comes out of nowhere after years of not talking and asks “hey, want to be my surrogate mother?” no one. That’s who.

Harry sighs for the sixteenth time that day—yes he’s been counting and it’s pathetic but whatever—and builds up his courage for the fourth and final time, he promises himself. He’s going to ask her to have lunch. That’s it. Just lunch. Then he’ll go from there when he sees her in person.

He rings her up, waiting on the line this time and breathes calmly. She answers on the fifth and final ring.

“Hello? This is Kate.”

“Hey Kate, its Harry.”

“Harry?” she pauses for a moment. “Oh! Harry! Hello darling! How have you been all these years?” She sounds ecstatic and Harry’s feeling pretty positive so far.

“Great. You?”

“Oh you know, been busy with work, but that’s nothing new.” She laughs and Harry mimics it, happy that she’s happy.

“Hey, you uh, you still in London?”

“Bromley, actually, Why?”

“Wanted to see if you wanted to meet for lunch. Maybe catch up?”

There’s literally zero point one seconds before she gives her answer. “Definitely! Gosh. Is it weird if I say that I’ve been thinking about how you’ve been lately?”

Harry smiles, shaking his head. “No, definitely not when I’ve been doing the same about you.”

He can hear her smile and it warms him. He hopes and prays she won’t be weirded out when he talks to her about this. She was never one to really want kids, but they have history. A long one that
he’s not willing to remember right now.

“So, where did you want to meet up? And when?”

**05 October**

It’s the fifth of the month and Harry’s standing outside, hands tucked into his petticoat pockets and he’s beginning to be able to see his breath. England needs to not be cold, especially since it was pretty warm not two weeks ago.

After talking to Kate last week, they agreed to meet at a restaurant Kate had mentioned she wanted to try. Hawksmoor Spitalfields. He’s surprised that it isn’t too far out of the way for him, but for her, it’s at least a forty minute drive. At first, Harry protested, said they’d find somewhere closer, but Kate insisted. Argued that she needed an excuse to come to London anyways.

So he waits patiently for her, rocking back and forth on his heels, wearing his already worn out boots and he’s finally spotted her. She’s still as pretty as the day they graduated. Her wavy dirty blonde hair swishing back and forth while she walks forward confidently, her smile unwavering. Harry pulls her into a hug upon her approach and she sinks into the embrace easily.

“Wow! You’ve gotten so much taller,” she remarks, pushing her sunglasses up on her head to look him over with her golden brown eyes.

“You’re just as beautiful as I remember,” Harry compliments, taking her hand casually and they head inside.

“Hello sir,” the hostess greets with a plastic smile. “Reservations today?”

“Yes, Styles.”

She looks down at her paper and nods, grabbing two menus and leads them to their table. Harry and Kate take their places with ease and smile brightly at one another. It’s strange. Harry’s always thought that if he were straight, Kate would be exactly his type and that idea is still very out in the open to him. Since uni though, he’s no closer to being attracted to girls in that way than he is attracted to a cactus.

Kate’s still gorgeous though. Absolutely stunning, and Harry really can’t believe he’s going to ask her what he’s planning on asking.

They’re a couple hours overdue on how long they figured they’d be spending at the restaurant, but Harry doesn’t mind. Neither does Kate it seems. They’re getting on famously well, just like how things were back in uni. Except this is different. Conversation is light, but it’s refined, and filled with actual pieces of information they can both relate to. Back then, kids just tried to relate to each other. Things are far more mature than they used to be.

Harry figures, maybe he can approach her about the subject of children. Just to test the waters. “Can I ask you a personal question?”

Her eyes light up. “I’m all about personal. What’s up?”
“I’m not sure if we ever talked about this when we were in university, but what’s your take on children?”

Kate’s eyes point up at the ceiling in thought. “Hmm… Well, I think that they’re wonderful. We were all kids at one point, right? I’m not sure if I’d want to have one of my own though. I don’t know. Never really thought about it too much if I’m being honest.”

Harry pulls his phone out and shows her a picture of him and Blaze. They went to the park and he got grass stains all over his shorts, but it was okay and they enjoyed ice cream afterwards so no big deal there. The big deal though, is the look on Kate’s eyes as the image processes in her head.

“Is he yours?”

It’s flattering, but he shakes his head quick on the reply. “No, sometimes it feels like he is, but,” Harry stares at the picture, smiling brightly. “But he’s Lou and Zayn’s. Well, technically Lou and Elle’s.”

Kate’s eyes grow bigger than before and the puzzle suddenly pieces together in an instant. “That’s Blaze?”

Harry nods.

“Gosh, he’s so big. How old?” She leans forward on the table to try to see more pictures. Harry flicks to one of him, Louis, and Zayn and Kate can’t stop the growing grin on her pretty face.

“He’s three. Turns four on the eighteenth. He’s the best.”

Slowly, Kate sits back down in her seat. “You don’t sound so genuine when you say that though.”

“You caught that?” Harry chuckles sheepishly, scratching the back of his head and readjusting his long hair. “No, I really mean it. I love him so much. Love being his uncle, but…”

“I see.”

“Yeah…”

“Well, why don’t you adopt?”

Harry meets her eyes and explains his side of it, without as much emotion as he had at Louis and Zayn’s but enough so that she could really understand his cause. By the time Harry’s done giving her everything he can, she’s quietly thinking about what to properly say. Harry’s scared she’ll reject the idea he has of finding a surrogate mother. Maybe say that he’s selfish or too young, or both. Or maybe just completely write his need to be a father off and tell him to find some new dream because he shouldn’t want to have anything to do with a child at their age.

To his surprise she doesn’t say any of these things.

The mature, intelligent, very analytical Kate looks to him like he’s the sweetest thing she’s ever seen and reaches out her hand to squeeze his tenderly. “Ask me.”

“What?” He can’t believe it. Did he hear that right?

“Ask me,” Kate insists, her smile never faltering.

“Kate, will you become my surrogate mother?” He feels weird asking, but there’s this huge weight lifted from his shoulders, because she looks just as serious about this as he is.
“Yes.”

*  

“So I met with my lawyer the other day.” Harry says over preparing the party favors with Zayn. Louis is in the back room, getting Blaze ready for his big day. The idea is still crazy that today, their little Blaze is finally four and wow, next year he’ll be going to preschool. Louis keeps saying that those are bad words and they don’t use them in this house but Harry only laughs at him and waves it off.

“Yeah? How’d that go? Kate agreed to you having custody and what not?”

“Mhm,” Harry ties the little bowstring around the plastic baggy and moves onto the next, placing the treats inside carefully. “Still can’t believe she’s been so… easy about this.”

“It’s kinda crazy, but she’s sounds like she’s a really intelligent girl.”

“Kate’s always been a sweetheart,” Harry adds to the mix. “Sometimes I wonder why I’m so gay that I can’t even see her like that.”

Zayn laughs loudly, throwing his head back in hysterics. He can barely hold it in, having to grasp his side from laughing too hard. “Oh god,” he wipes a tear from his eye.

“That wasn’t even that funny,” Harry pouts.

Zayn places his hand on his shoulder and eyes him. “Harry, you’re acting like being gay prevents you from being in domestic bliss with someone.”

He shrugs his hand off, continuing his work and trying to focus his attention on the party favors. “Maybe I don’t want to be with someone.”

“Bull. I know that you want that almost as bad as you want your kid. Which, I’m proud of you for, by the way. We both are.” He’s referring to Louis, who’s rounding the corner with a very well dressed Blaze giggling in his arms. Upon sighting Harry, his chubby little fingers make squishing gestures, a signal they’ve come to learn as wanting something.

Louis lets him down to run over to his uncle and he wraps around Harry’s long leg. “Hi Uncle Harry.”

“Hi birthday boy,” he sings, squatting down to his level to poke the tip of his nose gently. “How old are we today?”

Blaze puts up three fingers and Harry shakes his head as he says, “Four.”

“Well, no one said you were the best at counting,” Harry smiles, kissing his forehead. “Wanna help uncle wrap party favors?”

“Wrap! Wrap!”

Harry had asked Zayn and Louis if he could invite Kate to the party. It’s small, just them and a few
friends and close family. There really hadn’t been an argument about it, but Harry wanted to make a
point to say that she’s a very important piece in his life right now and he wanted her to experience
things in his life. With Blaze being the biggest inspiration for him to be a father, it seemed fitting.

Louis laughed, and Zayn patted Harry’s cheek like a doting parent. “Oh Harry. We would’ve said
yes, but thank you. That was sweet of you.”

He was embarrassed to say the least, but didn’t allow himself to falter.

Kate’s smiling, watching as Blaze unwraps his presents joyfully, the wrappings billowing out around
him. Harry nudges her side and grins, receiving a mimicked reaction from her.

The whole party is easy and fun and everyone loves Kate. Not everyone knows what she really is to
Harry other than a friend, but those are things that are on a need to know basis.

Louis brings out the birthday cake and Blaze claps, impatiently bouncing around next to Zayn at the
table. He really just wants to blow out the candles but everyone wants to sing to him, so he tries to sit
still. The birthday song is sung and Zayn helps Blaze stand on his chair so he can breathe on the
 candles. Everyone cheers and claps and Blaze is the happiest kid in the whole wide world.

“He’s beautiful.”

“Yeah,” Harry agrees, watching the little one smash his hands into the cake.

“I can really see why now. He’s so… inspirational. I can tell.” Kate’s eyes are on Harry now and he
feels a bit bashful. “I’m really happy you’re doing this, Harry.”

“I’m happy you said yes, to be honest,” he admits.

They chuckle softly. It’s subtle, but there’s this look in her eyes that melts Harry and he doesn’t mind
when she hooks her arm around his and leans on his shoulder. “I just want you to be happy, Harry.
That’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

*

Harry watches as Louis dresses Blaze in his Halloween costume. He wanted to be a vampire this
year—thanks to Uncle Harry because he went on a vampire movie marathon while Blaze was
pretending to sleep and since then, the little bugger has only been interested in having little fangs to
bite things. Louis was not happy. Blaze growls up at Louis after his black waistcoat is buttoned up,
clawing his fingers in the air.

“No, vampires don’t growl. They hiss.” Louis explains.

“Blaze, look,” Harry grabs his attention, big, bright blues gazing at him in wonder. Harry stands tall,
curling his long fingers and hisses, hoping he’s coming off as intimidating and then with his fake
cape, he covers half of his face, green eyes leering at him darkly. “I vant to suck your vlood!”

Most kids might—keyword, might. Harry’s as scary as a terrified kitten—have been scared by this,
but not little Blaze. Nope. He’s a trooper and throws himself back on the floor in a fit of giggles.
Harry retaliates, crouching down to tickle him crazily. “Uncle Harry! No!” He squeals, ecstatic from
the attention. He really loves being tickled, so easy to keep happy.
Louis smiles as he watches their familiar exchange. “Did you invite Kate?”

“Nah. She’s got work so I’m just going to tag along with you and Zayn and this little monster, ha ha ha!” Harry answers, growling playfully, continuing to tickle Blaze. He then sits back up, crossing his legs and helps Blaze stand, straightening out his costume. He catches sight of one of his toys and quickly goes to it, entertaining himself while Louis and Harry sit around and talk easily.

“I’m sure Blaze will enjoy having you trick or treat with him. Gonna be a cat again this year?”

“Thought about it,” Harry muses, his dimples on display with his curving lips. “But I’ll go as a werewolf. Compliment this one quite nicely.”

“Rawr.” Blaze growls, making his stuffed lion fight with his stuffed lizard.

They chuckle at him. “Hey, so um. I didn’t mention this at the party but…” Louis pauses, looking nervous for some reason. Harry’s confused. “I just… doesn’t Kate seem a bit too fond of this birthing your child thing?”

Harry’s taken aback, quirking an eyebrow. “What do you mean?”

“Well, she’s very close to you. Not like, friendship wise, but physically. I was watching the way she looked at you at the party and she looked too fond of you. Like, fancy fond and she did have that crush on you in uni and—”

“Stop right there. We don’t need to dig up the dead.”

Louis scoffs. “Oh c’mon. Why would she agree so easily to this surrogacy? Think about it.”

“I don’t want to think about it, Louis. The fact that she agreed is blessing enough for me. She knows the terms. It’s in a binding contract. I’m not in it to be with her like that. As selfish as that sounds. She hasn’t even been inseminated yet, so…”

“Exactly. Makes it easier to walk away from this before it gets messy.” Louis bites back and Harry’s appalled.

“We are not having this conversation right now.” He gets up, storming out of Blaze’s room to head to the kitchen. It’s half three, so they have a little while before they go out to trick or treat. Harry really needs to get out of here, he can’t do this. Not right now. Not when he’s so close to having what he really wants.

Louis chases after him, though, like Harry expected. He’s in mid reach for his keys when Louis stands in the space between the door and the open kitchen. “Don’t shut me out, Harry. You know I’m not a dick for no reason.”

“But you’re being one on a subject that’s serious right now. I can’t have any doubts. I need to do this.”

“No. No you don’t.” Louis argues pointedly. “You really want a kid? You’re absolutely positive that you can handle one?”

“Of course. I take care of Blaze all the time.” Harry reasons.

“That’s different.”

“Not really.”
Louis cocks an eyebrow, curious to hear Harry fight him on this. He crosses his arms and gives a half smirk. “Oh? You really think so? You’ve watched him during the day, for every day since day one, but that’s nothing compared to the countless nights of sleep Zayn and I have lost because he was hungry, or soiled himself, or was teething, or had a nightmare.” He sighs, running a hand through his hair. “You didn’t have to go through the loss of your whole entire career because a child was dropped on your front porch. You have time. You can wait. You’re just rushing into this stubbornly because you’re lonely. And for what? Don’t tell me that you’re still broken up over Nick. God knows you shouldn’t bring a child into the mix all because you’re lonely. That’s not even a reason to want a kid, Harry. You don’t have a stable career, you live in an apartment unfit for a child, and you don’t know the first thing about really being a parent.” Louis’ counting the reasons off on his hand and Harry is astounded that this conversation is happening. It’s like talking to his mother about something he shouldn’t be doing. But he knows this is right, knows it’s right for him. “Be rational about this.” His voice is pleading at this point, but it barely fazes Harry.

All he feels is anger.

“Fuck you.” Harry’s fuming, grabbing for his keys quickly. “How dare you question my decision.” He pushes past Louis and reaches for the door knob. He looks over his shoulder and glares. “And fuck you for bringing Nick up. Such a supportive best friend you are.”

“I’m just trying to help you, Harry!” Louis shouts but Harry’s already gone out the door and shut it behind him.

Sighing, he goes to leave but pauses when he hears Blaze’s voice behind the door.

“Where’s Uncle Harry?”

“Oh,” Louis breathes. “He went home to grab his costume. He’ll be back later, kay bub?”

“Kay!”

“You excited to go trick or treating?”

“Mhm. Watch vampires?”

Harry can’t stand to hear them right now. It only makes him feel like more of a jerk about this whole situation, but Louis just doesn’t get it. Maybe at one point he did, but not now. So what if Kate liked him back in university? That doesn’t mean that she still feels the same way. No matter what, the child is his and only his and she knows he can’t actually be with her like that, so why would she bother?

Getting in his car, he presses his head against the steering wheel. Harry tries not to think about it, lights himself a cigarette that he had tucked under the visor and drags on it hard.

It’s not enough to drown out his thoughts, but it’s enough to calm him.

*  

Harry comes by later that evening, settled enough to join them for the night. Louis hadn’t apologized, but he texted to make sure he was still coming with them. Harry’s still mad at Louis, doesn’t want to give him the time of day, so he reminds himself that this is for Blaze.
The second he’s through the door, Blaze is wrapped around Harry’s leg and he nuzzles his nose into his fur covered pants. “Missed you.”

Harry leans down and ruffles his hair gently. “Missed you too, bub. You ready to go get some candy?”

“Candy! Candy!” He shouts excitedly, dancing around the small entranceway of the apartment.

Zayn appears in the hallway, dressed in some sort of zombie groom get up and Louis’ quickly at his side, wearing a similar outfit. “That again?” The question is directed towards Zayn, who seems oblivious to Harry and Louis’ fight.

“Hey, we didn’t have much to spend on new ones. Blaze’s party kind of drained our accounts.”

Harry feels bad. “Why didn’t you tell me? I would’ve tossed in some money and helped pay.”

“With what extra money you get from your job at the bakery?” Louis remarks smartly and Harry glares, biting his tongue because he still hasn’t mentioned his job at the recording studio with Liam. He sometimes gets guilty about it, but right now he could care less.

Harry rolls his eyes and turns his attention to Blaze. “All right, go get your pumpkin and we’ll go, okay?”

“Okay!” Blaze jumps up to go get his candy basket.

“Hey, did you two have a fight?” Zayn whispers to Harry, watching as Louis leads Blaze up the steps to a house. They can hear the small “trick or treat” he sings.

Harry shrugs. “Yeah. Kind of a stupid one, but not?”

“Not sure I’m following.”

“Am I going to have a crying Louis in my bed tonight? I don’t think I can handle that,” Zayn teases, but Harry knows he’s partially serious. Sighing, he shakes his head.

“No… I’ll talk to him before I leave. It really was sort of stupid. He’s not… he thinks that Kate’s doing this whole thing because of feelings she might still have for me and Louis’ just scared I’m making the wrong decision.” Harry’s been thinking about this whole debacle the entire hour and fourteen minutes they’ve been out and he’s had enough time to mull over it. “I kinda told him to fuck off because he basically told me I’m not old enough to consider being a parent.”

Zayn’s silent, and Harry knows it’s because he’s thinking about it too. Harry’s half-scared he’ll say the same thing too. “No… I don’t think you’re making a bad decision. I mean, no one really knows they’re ready to be a parent till they are one. But I know that you aren’t stupid. Sometimes you act that way…”

“Heyyy.”

“It’s true and you know it. Yet, you also know what’s good for you and what’s not. You’re eerily more mature than Louis and I and you’re so good to Blaze that I can’t not see you being a dad. Louis’ just looking out for you.”
“He always has,” Harry admits, looking down at his wolf feet. “Don’t worry, though. I’ll sit him down over a bowl of weed and he’ll be just peachy.”

Zayn’s rolling in laughter. “That’s irresponsible. But maybe I’ll allow it just this once.” He breathes easily, shaking his head. “Man, it’s been a long time since I’ve been high.”

Harry nods. “Been a long time since any of us did anything with just the three of us. When was the last time we sat around a bong and shot the breeze?”

“Hmm,” Zayn thinks about it and lights up when Louis and Blaze return. “Hey babe. When was the last time we got high?”

Louis’ eyes widen and he instantly covers Blaze’s ears. He doesn’t need to know what this kind of stuff is at his age. “When we named Blaze.” He says simply and quickly ushers the child away to the next house.

Then it hits Zayn and Harry and their saying an exaggerated “ohhhhh” in remembrance.

“Did we seriously forget that Blaze was named while all three of us were high and thought it’d be cool to call him that?”

“Haha blaze it.” Zayn smirks to the stars. “I distinctly remember the little bugger smiling when Louis called him Blaze. So it wasn’t entirely irresponsible, yeah?”

“Maybe not, but seriously fucked up.” Harry laughs.

Hours later, Harry knocks on Louis’ bedroom door. He just put Blaze to bed and Zayn went to take a shower, so that gives them the perfect opportunity to talk. “Hey.” Harry whispers and Louis looks up from his book, his glasses sitting on the dip between the bridge and tip of his nose.

“Hey.”

“Can we, uh… talk?” He’s anxious, uncertain on whether or not he should come in. Louis nods, pats the spot on the bed next to him. Harry climbs up next to him, crossing his legs and looking patiently to his best friend. “I’m… sorry.”

“I’m sorry too.”

“No, you were… you had every reason to act like you did.” Harry starts, bowing his head. “I’m sure this whole thing sounds crazy to you and you’re just wondering why I’m not being patient on parenthood.”

“Sort of,” Louis puts his book down on the nightstand along with his glasses and passes a small smile to him. “I just know that when I got Blaze, I was so scared. So nervous because what was I to do with a baby? I had barely graduated from uni and Zayn and I were nearing our first year together and it was just something I never expected to happen. Eleanor was a complete twat and I’ve still never heard from her, but it was my mistake to have had that one night stand with her. A beautiful mistake might I add because Blaze is an absolute treasure and I couldn’t have asked for a cuter son.” He pats Harry’s knee. “I’m just saying that I want you to be careful. I know you don’t want to think about anything more than you becoming a father but protect yourself. Kate’s got me nervous and I’m going to keep my eye on her,” Harry rolls his eyes. Louis squeezes his knee for emphasis. “Hey, but I won’t stop you from doing this. I’m here for you.”
That was… relatively easy and Harry’s almost surprised, but he isn’t and he’s hugging Louis because he’s literally the best and he’s stupid for being a jerk about earlier. “You’re the best, Lou. Thank you. Love you.”

“Love you too, Hazza. Now go home. It’s getting late. I’m sure you have plans to get drunk with Ed tomorrow and you need your beauty sleep.” Louis jokes.

Harry laughs lightly. “All right. I’ll text you tomorrow though. I want pictures of Blaze stuffing his face with candy.” He says as he’s heading out of the bedroom towards the front door.

When he gets in his car, his phone goes off.

From: Lou-ba-loo

> Do not allow my child a sugar rush. Danger zone.

Harry’s grinning a mile as he flits his thumbs across the screen, sending it quickly before starting the car.

From: Harry


From: Lou-ba-loo

> Oh god. You’re terrible. Don’t remind me. xx night drive safe.

06 November

Kate’s nervous. Harry’s anxious. They’re just one big mess of anxiety in Harry’s car on the way to the doctor’s. Today they find out if the insemination worked and if she’s pregnant or not. Fingers crossed.

He holds her hand on the way into the building, keeps his grip firm and supportive. It’s not just for her though, mostly for him. This is his baby and he hopes and prays it went as planned. Of course, he knows that it may not have worked and that they’ll have to try again, but he’s optimistic.

Thirty minutes into being there and Dr. Hammett comes back with the results. “Well, I’ve ran all the tests I can and it doesn’t look like—”

“Wait,” Harry stops him. “I get it. It didn’t work.”

“No, Mr. Styles. She’s pregnant,” the doctor explains, his tone firm. There’s this huge rush of relief that shoots through Harry’s body and he finally relaxes, looking to Kate gratefully. She smiles at him, the happiness bright in her eyes. “I was going to say that it doesn’t look like she’ll have any complications.”

“Oh,” Harry breathes, sinking into his seat and reaches for Kate’s hand. He needs this support. It’s almost like he’s the one that’s pregnant and he just wants to hold his child now, but that’s far off in the future. “Wow. Sorry for assuming. Just been so nervous about this whole thing.” He gestures around and Dr. Hammett nods.
“Perfectly normal. Well, if you have any questions?”

“No, we’re good for now.” Kate answers. Looking over to her, she seems anxious to get out of here.

“All right. You’ll have monthly check ups, just to make sure everything’s going well. You two are very lucky. Not everyone gets pregnant off the first insemination.”

“Wow.” Is all Harry can express once they’re in the car. “I can’t… I’m going to be a father.”

“Yeah,” Kate muses, staring out at the outside world. “I’m really happy for you.”

Harry nods, starting the car. “Thank you. Really. Thank you for doing this. You’re such a wonderful person.”

“Like I’ve said before, I just want you to be happy.”

*

“She’s pregnant! She’s pregnant!” Harry exclaims the moment he enters Louis and Zayn’s apartment. Louis’ in the kitchen, attending to a pot of boiling noodles and Blaze is on a rampage with his toys in the living room. He’s got all of his things set up like a town and he’s rolling through it like a monster and it’s absolutely endearing.

“She’s pregnant?” Louis repeats and Harry’s nodding excitedly.

“I was so scared, Lou. I mean, Dr. Hammett was going to say that she doesn’t look like she’ll have complications but I thought he was going to say that she’s not pregnant and I sort of blurted it out and got all sad but. But that doesn’t matter because I’m going to be a father.” Louis smiles and brings Harry in for a hug.

It’s a lengthy embrace and Blaze is looking up at them curiously. He decides he wants in on the hug fest too and runs over to hug Louis and Harry’s legs. “Blaze wants to hug, too.”

They’re chuckling and Louis leans down to pick him up and join in on the group hug. “I’m really happy for you, Harry. Immensely.”

“Can’t wait to tell Zayn. When’s he getting home?”

Louis steps back, holding Blaze against his hip. “Gosh you’re getting so big,” he remarks, looking to his son with a grin. “Soon Daddy and Papa won’t be able to hold you anymore.”

Blaze shakes his head and wraps his little arms around Louis’ neck, nuzzling his face into his shirt. “Hold Blaze forever, Daddy.”

“All right, Blaze. I’ll hold you for as long as you want. Only if you hold me when I get old and frail.”

“Daddy isn’t old.”

“Not yet.” He coos, glancing back to Harry. “He said he’d be late. Probably won’t be home till after
I’ve put this one to bed. If you have plans tonight then I’m sure it can wait?”

“Yeah,” Harry agrees, scratching his arm casually. “Just really want to tell him.”

*

They’re in their usual spot outside at the pub. It’s getting cold out, but Harry and Ed have become accustomed to London’s chilled air to not mind it. Even if there’s a thousand goose pimples all over their bare arms.

Ed pats Harry on the back, smiling proud. “Can’t believe you’re really going to be a father. Congrats Harry.” He’s nodding, sipping greedily on his pint and gasps, refreshed. “Have you thought about names yet? Do you want a boy or a girl?”

“I haven’t and I don’t care cuz I’ll love them anyways.” Harry answers.

“So…” Ed trails, giving Harry a sideways glance. “Kate’s pretty fit, yeah?”

“She’s pretty.”

“No. I mean…”

Harry sits up straight. “I-I don’t think that about her. She’s gorgeous yes, but I’m just not attracted sexually.”

“Didn’t she like you back in uni?”

Harry nods, he’s quiet. He’s not really up for having this conversation, but it’s Ed. He’s not trying to be vindictive or really mean anything by it. “Yep. I hate to admit it, I really do, but… it was the reason I avoided talking to her after graduation.” He watches the passing cars, opening his pack to retrieve a cigarette. He doesn’t light it though. Ed takes the stick from him and lights it, the little flicker of orange and red brightens his face for a moment before it’s dark again. He takes a drag of it and passes it to Harry. “It was just getting too hard for me to stay her friend when she kept wanting more. I wanted to give her what she wanted, I really did.” He blows smoke out to the cold air and sighs. “But I just… couldn’t be with her like that.”

“So, what made you think asking her to be your surrogate mother was a good idea for you?”

Harry shrugs. “I really don’t know for certain. Maybe because I didn’t think she’d say no? Which is bloody awful of me, because she’s going to pop that little one out and never be called mom.”

“She could. If you ever wanted that.”

“I don’t know if I do.”

“Well, Harry. I’m not sure what to say. But if you need someone to distract her, I’d be more than happy to volunteer.” Ed offers and Harry’s all smiles.

He scoffs, “You just want to date her.”

“And what’s wrong with that, huh?”
He has a point there. Maybe it wouldn’t be a bad idea after all to get them together.

07 December

Christmas morning is huge in the Tomlinson-Malik household.

They all meet up at Louis’ mum’s house, preparing to celebrate the happiest time of the year and Louis’ twenty-sixth birthday. Except, something’s missing and its Blaze’s adoptive papa and Harry’s worried that Louis isn’t taking this well. “Louis, sweetie, can you help me chop these carrots?” Jo is calling from the kitchen and Louis passes Blaze over to Harry, an apologetic look in his eyes before he gets up and goes to help her.

He’s off kilter. Knows how depressed Louis is right now, doing his best not to show it. Zayn will be there later, but work is always keeping him late and it’s hard for them. Harry doesn’t know how they do it, to be honest. If he was with someone and had to spend all day with his little one and needed that extra hand, he’d probably go crazy. Makes him sort of wonder how he’s going to survive as a single parent. He’s certain that his mum will be there or Gemma. He just hasn’t told them yet.

The thought is too scary for him to think of.

So when Anne and Gemma enter the Tomlinson’s house, he’s suddenly startled. “Geez mum! Scared me.”

“Oh, you’re such a baby,” Gemma coos, leaning down to give him as much of a hug as she can since he’s seated on the floor, Blaze between his legs and playing with his stuffed lion. “Merry Christmas.” She adds, passing him a gift and pulling out a bigger present for Blaze to open.

He kisses her cheek and then his mum’s when she leans down to hug him as well. “Merry Christmas to my bestest girls.” He chuckles and Gemma’s rolling her eyes.

“You’re such a sap. Where’s my favorite adopted brother?”

She’s talking about Louis and he points to the kitchen with his eyes. Gemma ruffles his hair, receiving a deserved glare as he goes to fix it.

Anne cards her fingers through his long tresses and sighs. “You should get a haircut.”

“Nah.”

“All right,” she kisses the top of his head before joining him on the floor with Blaze. “Merry Christmas, Blaze. Sorry I missed your birthday, but I have two presents for you to buy your love.”

“Mum,” Harry whines, but Blaze isn’t having a care in the world about it. He has three presents in his lap and that’s all that matters to him. He observes the way she watches Blaze, the softness to her face and how much her expression suddenly pains him and he doesn’t understand why. “Something wrong?”

Anne is quiet, unresponsive, until the silence is unbearable. “Is it selfish of me to wish he was really my grandchild?”

It hits Harry that she’s been wanting this for a while now. With Gemma being twenty-eight and still
without kids and him almost twenty-four, he doesn’t rightfully blame her. He’s about to tell her that he’s going to grant her wish but Blaze squeals when he unwraps one of his presents. It’s a Captain America action figure and it’ll go nicely with his Iron Man one he got for his birthday. He’s more than excited.

“Who’s that?” Harry asks.

“Captain America.” Blaze accentuates with a smile.

“That’s right. You’re so smart,” Harry pets his hair back and Blaze careens into the touch.

Harry meets Anne’s eyes and she melts into the way Harry is with the little one. “Why can’t you be a father? You’re so good with children.”

He gulps, the words literally on the tip of his tongue, but the door to the kitchen is swinging open and Louis’ fuming. Harry frowns, wondering what’s got his best friend in a tousle. “You okay?”

“No. Zayn’s not coming.” Louis bites, throwing his hands in the air in a huff. He lifts a confused Blaze into his arms and sighs, holding him close. “I really wish he’d get a better job. I can’t do this anymore.”

Anne takes this as her cue to get up and join the others, knowing that this isn’t a conversation she should involve herself with. Rightfully so, too, because the second she leaves, Louis looks less like he’s going to murder someone. He leans against the back of the couch and nuzzles into Blaze’s little neck, keeping him close and all the little boy can do is cuddle back into him, his little arms barely making it all the way around his neck.

Harry gazes up at him, unsure on if he should say something.

“I can’t do this all by myself, and I know that Zayn tries to makes things better for us three, but it’s unbearable. I’m sick of going to bed by myself at night and waking up in the morning to an even emptier bed.” He’s on the verge of tears, Harry knows it and the moment Blaze wants to wriggle out of his *embrace, Harry takes him, asking if he can go play with his toys in the playroom.

“Daddy, okay?” He’s staring up at him with big blue eyes that copy Louis’ and he pats his tiny hands against his leg, telling him that it will, in fact, be all right.

It’s heartbreaking. Their little language between each other is so sweet and full of love and they’re the closest father and son Harry’s ever known. Louis softens, tenderly carding his fingers through Blaze’s gentle tresses and smiles sadly. “I’ll be okay. Go and play, all right, bub?”

“Okay,” he does as he’s told and gathers his unopened presents, hauling them away to the playroom next door.

Finally alone, Harry stands next to Louis, leaning his shoulder against his and sighs. “If you want to vent, I’m sure no one will blame you.”

That’s pretty much Louis’ breaking point and he’s curled up to Harry’s side, crying into his chest, fingers gripping at the thin fabric of Harry’s shirt and they stay like that for a while. All Harry can do is rub his back and let him cry it out.

Time drags by and it’s all he can do not to join Louis. He could never stand to see or hear him cry, it’s literally that awful because he’s the happiest, bubbliest person Harry knows, but he also knows that Louis is human. He can only take so much before he breaks down and Harry can’t blame him for feeling this way.
“Is he… at least coming down tomorrow? I-I mean… they’re letting him miss out on Christmas and I can’t believe that, but would they really keep him from his family?”

Louis shakes his head in uncertainty. He sniffs. “I don’t know… I just want him here. Missing my birthday is one thing, but Christmas… we’ll only get so many Christmas’ like this before Blaze has grown up and probably won’t want to have anything to do with his parents because teenagers go through that phase, but like… I just… it’s so hard. I don’t know what to do anymore.” He pulls away from Harry, not once looking him in the eyes and bows his head down, little droplets of sadness falling from his cheeks. “I-I’ve been thinking lately that… That I should end things with him to save the trouble of him doing it later.”

Harry’s heart practically drops to his gut and he’s in front of Louis, all wide eyes and worried. “No no no. Please don’t… please Lou.” He’s rubbing his hands up and down his arms and urging Louis to face him. When he does, Harry can’t stop himself from crying either. “He loves you. I know it’s hard, but he does all of this for you and Blaze.”

“Yeah… I know but… we’re fine on money right now. I don’t know why he needs to stay and work all of those extra shifts.”

“There’s gotta be a good reason.” Harry mumbles, pulling Louis into his arms and holds his head against his chest.

They don’t say much else to each other, but Harry does hold Louis until his tears are dry.

*

It’s late, Harry knows that much. He’s so comfortable in bed with Louis and Blaze cuddled up to him like a little family, but there’s this annoying noise waking him and it’s coming from the nightstand next to Louis. “Lou…” He whispers lowly, trying not to wake Blaze up. “Lou, c’mon, wake up. Your phone is going off.”

He shakes him awake and his sleepy eyes open slightly to glare at him, but he turns over anyways and reaches for his cold phone, answering it quietly. Harry urges himself to fall back to sleep, pulling Blaze closer to his chest.

“H-Hello?” There’s a passing silence and a sigh. “Zayn, it’s late.”

Harry opens his eyes, barely hearing the sound of Zayn’s voice on the other end. He sits up in bed, tucking Blaze into the covers to keep him warm. Damn these Doncaster winters really bite.

“Come outside.”

“Zayn, it’s cold and I—”

“Come outside, please.” He pleads and Louis gives another sigh, sitting up to duck his feet into his slippers, getting up to grab his coat before he leaves the room. Harry scrambles carefully to his feet, wincing at how cold the tiled flooring is and he finds it so unnecessary but the thought quickly subsides when he recognizes Zayn’s figure out front. His arms are wrapped around himself as he shivers in the cold, his legs almost half way hidden by the thick blanket of snow.

Harry quietly heads downstairs, tugging his jacket over his arms and shoves his feet into tall rubber
boots before sneaking out front, watching their exchange. Louis is standing on the front steps, waiting for Zayn to come up and meet him. As far as he knows, neither of them have noticed he’s there. It’s too dark out anyways.

“Louis…” Zayn starts but Louis’ already shaking his head.

“How dare you.”

“Wait, I—”

“No, you wait.” Louis’ voice is hushed, trying not to wake up the entire house. He tucks his hands into his coat’s pockets and glares. “I can excuse you missing my birthday, but not Christmas. Zayn, I’m sick and tired of waiting around every day for you to come home all to go to bed by myself and wake up just the same. I’m not sure you really even come home. Just…” He closes his eyes and lets out a deep breath. “Just tell me. Are you… cheating on me?”

Harry feels his own heart drop as fast as Zayn’s jaw, eyes wide and completely speechless. All he can do is shake his head profusely.

“Then why in the world aren’t you ever home?!” Louis shouts, crying at this point and Harry hates this. He wants to deck Zayn, he’s so angry at him, but he knows Louis would just stop him. “I know Blaze isn’t your responsibility, but what about me? Aren’t I a priority? Doesn’t this relationship mean anything to you?”

Zayn rushes up the steps and wraps his arms around Louis, burying his face into his trembling neck. “You mean everything to me, Louis. Everything.” Louis doesn’t hug him back, but he doesn’t push him away either. Eventually, Zayn pulls away and slowly lowers his body to his knee and Harry’s sucking in his gasp because he’s still not sure they’re aware of his presence and he feels like he’s sort of intruding on their moment, but he can’t move his feet. Zayn’s eyes are soft as he gazes happily up to Louis and Harry can’t really see his reaction from this angle, but he seems just as speechless as he is. “I know I’ve been very busy lately. But it wasn’t without a good reason.” He tucks his hand into his pocket and reveals a little black box.

“Zayn…”

“We’ve been together for so long, Louis, and I love you and Blaze with everything I have. I’ve been thinking about making everything more… binding and well…” He smiles nervously. “Will you marry me?”

“You’re such an idiot,” Louis chokes out but he’s letting Zayn put the ring on his left finger. He lifts Zayn to his feet, grabbing his face and kisses him deeply. “Of course I’ll marry you. Every day, for the rest of our stupidly domestic lives.” He’s crying, but Harry knows he’s happy and that’s all he cares about. Silently, he ducks back into the house and sighs with relief. He’s happy, far too happy for Louis, but he slides up the stairs to his room.

He’s not surprised when ten minutes later, Zayn and Louis are climbing into bed with Harry and Blaze, their strange little family finally reunited.

“Merry Christmas, Harry.” Zayn and Louis smile at him, and he gives it back easily, reaching across Blaze to squeeze Louis’ shoulder.

“I’m so happy for you two. So, unbelievably, happy.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

“Skateboards don’t have brakes.”
“No? Man, I thought it was like one of those razors. You know? The scooters back in the day.” Harry laughs, getting to his feet with the help of the stranger.
“I don’t need a childhood flashback haha,” he’s looking him in the eyes now, but he’s relatively shorter than him and it’s sort of endearing if he’s honest. “I’m Harry.”
“Niall. You sure you aren’t hurt?”
“Yeah. Pretty sure,” he looks around his body, twists it around to glance at his bum.
“Bum’s a little sore but it’ll be all right.”

Chapter Notes

This isn't beta'd so if there are any mistakes, I'm terribly sorry. I try to edit while I go but you know how that goes sometimes.

I would like to thank HotforCurlyStyles for informing me how to properly write ravioli. I like being accurate for the most part and I was truly embarrassed that I hadn't realized I was putting it in context wrong.
Besides, ravioli is absolutely delicious and I like how things seem to be in a better perspective than they did once before.

Additional Notes: I edited this part, made it a bit longer. Hopefully I was able to meet expectations with Niall and Harry’s initial relationship at the beginning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

08 January

Stepping off the bus onto Main Street, he breathes in the cold January air of London and smiles. It’s been ages since he left, but now he wonders why he ever decided that anywhere but here was home. Adjusting the strap of his duffel bag on his shoulder, he traverses through the crowded sidewalk and glides up the stairs to his apartment. His key feels familiar, like an old friend come to visit, and he slots the object into the lock, ghosting the door open. The place is stagnant, having been absent from life since exactly a year ago today. It still smells of him though, the last remnants of his cologne he’d put on before he left to get on that plane to go to the States.

He moves through the silent room to his kitchen and sighs, knowing he’ll have to go out tonight for something to eat and will make a trip to the store before he hits the sack. Even still, that doesn’t matter. After being away for so long, he knows he’s where he needs to be, and is finally ready to settle down.

The only issue? He’s utterly, depressingly single. Of course, there were a few birds here and there,
but nothing too serious. He knew there was no point in actually staying in a real relationship with them, but he had fun and made memories.

Now, though, things seem eerily empty. Like something is definitely missing and it’s the way his apartment echoes his quiet breaths, and barely illuminates his life that he can just tell.

Problem is, he barely knows anyone in London anymore. He could always ring up his old pal Ed, but it’s been almost three years since they even exchanged a word. He probably changed his number already, but, maybe…

Pulling out his phone, he scrolls through his contacts and finds his number, exhaling a deep breath before allowing his thumb to hit call, and he waits.

Four rings and it goes to voicemail, and he’s about to hang up when he hears the familiar sound of his high school friend. “This is Ed. Leave a message.” And the line beeps.

He leaves a short message, stating that he’ll be at their old hang out and if he wants to join him for some grub and a couple pints, he’d love the company.

Setting the device on the counter, he runs an exhausted hand through his hair and decides to go for a quick shower before he heads out for dinner. Thankfully, he left a bit of shampoo and there’s a stock of soap bars under the sink.

Bottom line, he’s not going to smell like an airplane full of sweaty people and that’ll be the best thing he’s thought of all day.

*

Into his second pint of Guinness, his phone goes off and it’s a text from Ed saying that he’s on his way and can’t wait to see him. Smiling, he sips gingerly at the glass and waits patiently, letting the waitress know that he’s going to have a guest join in a few moments.

When Ed steps through the doors, he’s grinning from ear to ear at the sight of him. Ed approaches the table, and he embraces him, missing the way it felt having a real person in his life. “Wow, Niall. It’s been years. How have you been, mate?”

“Oh, you know, just… busy.” Niall shrugs and they take their seats. The waitress comes around a few minutes later and flashes a grin at Ed.

“No Harry today?”

“Nope. He’s stuck at home babysitting. I’ll have my usual, Rebecca.”

“Of course, darling.” Rebecca winks and heads back to the bar to retrieve Ed’s usual pint of Murphy’s and continues her cheesy grin that Niall automatically sees through. When she walks away, he leans in and whispers, “She wants to fuck you, mate.”

“No way,” Ed’s eyes widen and he’s clearly checking her out. “Too bad.”

“Why?” Niall leans back casually.

“I uh… started dating someone.” He answers nervously, a little blush creeping up his usually red
cheeks.

“Oh yeah?” He hates how easily he’s envious of him. Wants to go throw up his jealousies because there’s no reason for him to desire a relationship as much as this. “What’s she like?”

“She’s really cool like,” he smiles genuinely, his face appearing to brighten at the thought of her. “Super smart, really funny. Pretty. No. That’s not enough to describe her. She’s fucking gorgeous, man. I feel so lucky she even decided to give me a chance.”

“What’s her name?”

Ed looks up, and even his eyes are smiling. “Kate.”

Niall nods in approval. “Always liked that name. Nice, man.” He leans across the table and lightly bumps his fist to Ed’s shoulder. “Happy for ya.”

“Thanks.” Silence falls over them, but it’s not awkward. Just two blokes enjoying their beers and listening to some good tunes from the house band. Niall remembers when he was just a just a teenager trying to make it big singing in bars on the weekends and struggling to get his demos out. Somehow along the way, he was found and the next day he was on a plane to the States to record his first EP, then when that launched into millions, his first album. He just got done recording his second, and now his record producers are trying to get him to sign on for a world tour. He only had two breaks from the small tour he’d been on in the US and the idea of a world tour definitely isn’t something he cares to think about right now.

Ed cuts into the silence. “What about you? Have you someone?”

“Nah.”

“Not looking or?”

Niall smirks, shaking his head. “No, I’m looking, but… I had a bit of a revelation in the States.”

“Oh?”

Nodding, he glances around to see if anyone is paying attention. Most likely not since they’re seated in their own corner of the world. “So I met someone, super fun and energetic, wanted to just have a good ol’ time, right?”

“But?”

“But he decided that he wasn’t as serious as I wanted to be, and well, yeah,” Niall tries his best to ignore the shocked expression Ed is shooting him, because wow. Yeah. He just came out and everything feels incredibly awkward. Okay, so his pint is empty. Maybe smiley Becky wants to give him more. Niall gestures his glass to her and she nods, passing him a cold one. “Thanks, Becky.” She gives him a strange look but suddenly realizes Ed’s glass is just as empty and takes it upon herself to go and get another. “Well, I’m gonna go have myself a fag. Wanna join me?”

Niall gets up immediately and he can hear Ed stumbling behind him.

He rests his elbows on the freshly stained wooden fence and lights up, pocketing his lighter. It’s got to be around eight at night, the sun having retired for the day with the half-moon taking over the night shift. It’s not a snowy day, but still a bit nippy and Niall involuntarily shivers at a sudden chill.

“You can’t do that.”
“Do what?” Niall grins, keeping his face from his friend.

“That. You can’t just change the subject like that. You’re not the first friend who’s come out to me.”

“No, I bet I’m not.” Niall acknowledges, flicking the butt of his burning stick of cancer and sighs, ducking his head down nervously. “You’re just the first friend I’ve come out to.”

There’s a pause, but Ed’s at his side, arm around Niall’s shoulders and he’s reaching for the cigarette. “Well,” he inhales death and blows it out silently. “No matter what, you’re still Niall and that’s all I can ever ask for.”

“Thanks man. Means a lot.”

**

“No! I don’t wanna!”

“You need to go.”

“I don’t want to.”

Blaze stomps his feet at Louis, scowling. “I wanna go!”

“I don’t want you to go!” Louis cries, throwing himself under the covers of his bed.

Harry rolls his eyes. “You’re being a big baby about this.”

“Nuh-uh.”

“Louis,” Harry warns, ripping the sheets from the bed and onto the floor. Blaze takes this moment to roll around on them, giggling up a storm. Harry smiles at him before focusing back on his stubborn best friend. He smacks his bum, eliciting a squeak from Louis.

“Heyyy.”

“Get up. You’re taking your son to daycare and we’re going to go meet with your manager.”

Louis shakes his head, shoving it back into the pillow. “I’m not goin’!”

Harry eyes Blaze and leans down, palms pressed to his knees to meet the little one’s stare. “You’re braver than your daddy is, Blaze.”

“Yeah! Daddy’s scared!” Blaze coos from his perch on the floor. Louis sits up on the bed and peers over the edge to glare at his son.

“Am not.”

“Are too, daddy.”

“I’m not scared. I just love spending time with my little boy.” Louis argues and Harry settles on the bed with him, rubbing his back soothingly. While he may be acting childish, the idea of being without Blaze for a whole day where he couldn’t just be there has always been a scary one, and
Harry knows that’s his number one anxiety.

“I know, but he’s going to be going to school soon and daycare would be good for him. He should be interacting with other kids, making friends and all that.”

“I’m the only friend he needs,” Louis huffs and Harry sighs.

“C’mon, love. It’s not like he’s eighteen and leaving the nest yet. You’ve still got time. But maybe a little time apart from each other will be good?” Louis gives him a look. “No no. Don’t look at me like that. I’m meaning that if he’s not around you all day, when he comes home, he’ll be extremely excited to see you, just like he gets with his papa.”

“Papa’s home?” Blaze perks up and Harry laughs.

“No bub. Sorry. Do you have everything you need in your backpack?” Harry asks.

Blaze nods enthusiastically. “Yeah!”

Harry turns to Louis expectantly. “He’s excited to go.”

Without a word, Louis gets to his feet and moves over to pick Blaze up, hugging him for a while before looking him in the eye. “You really want to go to daycare?”

“Yeah! Daycare sounds fun.”

There’s a small tear that rolls down Louis’ cheek and Harry saddens a bit at that, but it’s bittersweet; the moment a parent begins to learn how to let go a little. Louis’ smacking a big kiss to Blaze’s cheek and he’s giggling and everything seems right in their little world again.

*

Harry waits in Louis’ manager’s longue room. It’s not so bad, but it’s been thirty minutes and he’s getting hungry. He pulls his phone out and entertains himself with texting for the meantime. Wow, I feel like a teenager.

From: Harry

> I could go for a really good burger right now.

From: Kate

> Ughhh don’t talk about food right now. :( 

From: Harry

> Why what’s wrong?

From: Kate

> Can’t stop throwing up

From: Harry
Morning sickness?

From: Kate

More like, all day sickness. Wish you were throwing up instead. It’s YOUR baby.

Harry laughs a bit at that. If male pregnancy was possible then maybe he wouldn’t mind it being him, but that’s weird and he sort of feels bad now.

From: Harry

I’m really sorry :(! do you need anything?

From: Kate

No. I’m staying home today. Ed says he’s coming over in a bit. Thanks though.

From: Harry

Well, if you need anything from me, lemme know, okay?

It’s been a few weeks since Kate and Ed started dating. He thought he was at least half-joking about liking Kate the last time they talked about her, but these recent events have shown otherwise. Harry can’t express how relieved he is that Ed’s stepped in to help her through this, especially when he knows the child is Harry’s and that should be awkward but somehow it’s not.

It also keeps Louis’ theory that Kate’s just in it because she likes Harry in the bin where it belongs.

09 February

Harry can’t believe he missed his mum’s call. Cursing to himself, he listens to her voicemail, asking if he is still coming down for his birthday. Smiling, he calls her back, “Hey mum. I’ll be there.”

“Good! I have a huge dinner planned, okay? Bring whoever you want.” Their conversation is pretty short lived since Harry’s only on his lunch break and he has thirty minutes left to go get food and eat.

The other day, he and Kate went for their first ultrasound. Seeing the little one was surreal. Harry couldn’t believe that it’s so tiny and the doctor explained that it has fingers and toes now and before Kate knew it, she’d be able to feel the baby. Harry’s excited, and Kate’s excited for Harry. He can tell she hates the whole pregnancy thing, and feels absolutely horrible about it, but then she’ll reassure him that it’s okay and that nothing matters as long as he’s happy.

He really likes Kate. She’s seriously the nicest friend he’s ever had.

Then came the question of asking Kate to meet his mum. At first, she seemed nervous at the thought but soon agreed to it. When he gets off of work tomorrow, he’s going to pick her up and they’re going to drive to Cheshire for the evening.

Now he’ll finally get to tell his mum about her future grandchild.
Niall follows his manager, Bressie, into the big building with large, compensating windows. Bressie’s having a trite about something Niall can’t be bothered with, off in his own little world. He’s so lost in his thoughts that he doesn’t even notice the guy before he bumps into him, knocking all of his papers to the ground.

“Oh shite! Sorry man,” Niall curses, bending down to help him gather the scatter pages. The other hums in a response, allowing him to shuffling what he has into the other’s pile. Before Niall can properly get a good look at him, the man’s off and running down the hall in a hurry. All he catches is a glimpse of chocolate brown curls bouncing as he runs.

Turning back to Bressie, he eyes his first record producer and smiles at the familiar face. “Niall! So glad to see you’ve returned to us.”

“Liam,” Niall breathes, bringing him in for a long, overdue hug. “How have ya been?”

“Great actually, despite missing my favorite singer,” he jokes into his ear. “You ready to start recording?”

Niall pulls away and shrugs. “I guess? I don’t know, mate, been pretty exhausted since I got back.”

“Oh shut up, it’s been a month,” Bressie steps in and Niall smirks. “All you’ve done is sat at home playing video games and eat pizza every night like a fat ass.”

“Well, why not? It’s my free time, I can spend it how I want to.”

Liam laughs at the both of them. “You bicker like an old married couple. C’mon, let’s go to my office, we’ll discuss how you want your next album to go.” They follow him back to his office in the back and Niall, for whatever reason, takes notice of the empty secretary’s desk with a curious picture frame featuring a smiley, wide eyed brunette posing with a little boy with the bluest eyes he’d ever seen.

**

“No way.” Anne is awestruck, glued to her chair, completely in disbelief at the information Harry’s just given her.

“Way.” He passes along a photo with the ultrasound printed across it. “Mum, I’m going to be a father.”

“I thought you were…” She trails, looking between Harry and Kate before her eyes fall to the picture in her hand. She’s already getting teary-eyed and Harry thinks this is the one time he’ll let her cry. That and the day his child is born.

Harry glances to Kate and smiles. “No, I still like guys, mum. But Kate’s a special kind of friend to me. The kind that would do anything and not think twice about it.”

Kate’s grinning from ear to ear, her bright eyes staring fondly to him. “What can I say? I aim to
“Please,” she jokes. Anne places a hand over her mouth and she sobs happily.

“I can’t believe I’m going to be a grandmother. Oh my god, Harry. Thank you. You’ve given me a gift on your own birthday you nut.”

“I love you too, mum.”

He gets up and moves around the table to hug her. It’s almost bittersweet because he’s doing everything backwards. His mum always imagined him getting married in the summer and having a kid by the following spring, but this couldn’t have been a better surprise.

“I’m going to love this child so much, I can’t even imagine how beautiful they will be. You two are such a sight for sore eyes right now.”

“Mum, you’re so cheesy.”

“Oh shush.” She waves off, still staring at the photo like it’s the best thing she’s ever seen. “Let me have a few more minutes with my grandchild, okay?”

Harry laughs lightly. “Okay, mum.”

*

“So my mum’s got Blaze for the night, we should be all set to get stupid,” Louis announces, setting his phone down on the island counter with a smarmy smirk on his face. Harry and Zayn are seated on the stools, leaning against the countertop casually. Blaze is giggling in the other room, presumably playing with his stuffed animals as usual. “This is… no. This has to be the best night out. We haven’t had one to ourselves in so long. Even Zayn’s birthday was a lamefest.”

“Heyyy.” Zayn mocks offense. Louis rolls his eyes and leans in for a kiss.

“I thought it was fun. Got to celebrate it with my favorite men.” Harry entertains, drinking from his water bottle as he awkwardly tries not to stare at his best friends making out like no one else is present.

Louis finds a spot on Zayn’s lap and grins. “Well, birthday sex had happened thanks to you tucking Blaze in early that night, so it wasn’t that lame.”

“Keep your disgusting domesticated stories to yourself.” Harry states to which he receives a swift punch to the shoulder. Smirking, he rubs the inflicting area and eyes them.

“You going to look for someone while we’re out?” Zayn asks nonchalantly around the bottle of his Corona. Louis keeps himself busy with twirling a finger around a lock of his fiancé’s hair.

Harry shrugs. “I don’t know. Maybe? I’m not really looking.” And he’s not. Really. The idea has crossed his mind a dozen times in the past couple of months. With Louis and Zayn’s recent engagement and Ed and Kate’s recent decision to be together, he’s once again the most single guy in his group of friends and it’s sort of depressing. But then he looks at the ultrasound of his baby and those thoughts fade away with practiced ease.

“Don’t you want to maybe settle down with someone before the baby’s here, though?” Zayn
continues.

“Not really? I don’t know. It’s not exactly a priority to me. Being with someone is fun, yeah, but it’s hard work and having a baby on the way is enough for me to deal with right now.”

“Have you found a new apartment yet?” Louis changes the subject and Harry’s grateful.

“Still looking. You’ll be the first to know when I’ve found it, darling.” Harry winks and Louis giggles like a little schoolgirl.

Zayn rolls his eyes. “I can’t figure out if I’m the one dating Louis or if it’s you sometimes.”

Louis’ mum comes over to pick Blaze up at seven, leaving the three of them to get ready before heading out for the night. No one drives, deciding to fork in the money for a cab because honestly, they’re going to get so fucked up that they won’t even remember tonight. Which is okay. It’s been four years since any of them had the luxury of spending a wild night out that they’ll probably get into shenanigans that responsible adults probably won’t want to remember the next day anyways.

Thankfully, Harry requested tomorrow off so he’ll be able to nurse his inevitable hangover.

**

Niall realizes that Liam’s too far gone when he spills his drink reaching for the newest row of shots that Bressie’s just brought over. He knows it’s not really his place to stop him, since he’s not going to stop anytime soon, but that’s different because he can hold his own. Liam on the other hand, is almost like that freshman at a frat party, having his first experience partying with his friends and looks about two steps away from puking.

“Ya sure yer good, mate?” Niall asks after a while of watching Liam moan against the table.

“Yeah. Go have fun without me. I’ll be good here,” he belches. “Jus… go have fun, kay?” Niall nods, rubbing Liam’s back soothingly as he starts to get up. Bressie’s already started for the dance floor, joining Niall’s other friend, Amy, and is calling for him to come join them.

“Okay. I’ll be just a few feet away. Holler if ya need me, all right?” He reassures, getting a nod from the poor sod. A few feet away from the dance floor, he looks back and sees a pretty girl trying to chat Liam up and he prays that she won’t get puked on.

**

When Louis procures three little white pills from his back pocket, Harry’s eyes grow ten sizes. At least it feels that way. Zayn shrugs and takes the ecstasy from Louis like it’s not a big deal at all. But it is because, first, how in the hell did Louis even find someone to sell him the drugs in the first place. Second, he’s supposed to be a responsible parent and being in possession of drugs is illegal and what kind of message is he sending his child for the future.
Harry realizes he’s overthinking this way too much, not recognizing himself, because he’s really not this sensible. That’s Liam’s job. Err, well it was before he left their little trio back in uni. ANYWAYS. He looks to Louis curiously.

“C’mon, Haz! Take it. Have fun. Go crazy, do what you wanna do because you’re twenty-four-fucking-years-old and you’re only young once. Once you have that kid, you’re going to age ten years in the first three months.”

“Thank you. The father of the year award goes to you.” Harry remarks sarcastically. Louis grunts.

“You want it or not?”

Harry shrugs. He might as well. Taking the little pill, he pops it into his mouth, swallowing it down quickly and heads to the bar to get himself a water because he knows he’s going to need it. “Can’t believe you brought drugs to the club. How clichéd of you.”

“Shut up. You’ll thank me in ten minutes.” Louis smirks, takes his, and then pulls Harry and Zayn to the dance floor. “Been looking for a bloke for ya, by the way.”

Harry groans, throwing his head back dramatically. “C’mon Lou. I can do that myself.”

“Ah, but you aren’t trying.” Louis brings his hands up to Zayn’s neck, scratching his nails into his messy hair and bites his lip, keeping his eyes directly on his fiancé’s. Harry ignores them, knows them too well that they’re going to start making out and that’s not how he wants to spend his birthday. Maybe he should just find some bloke and have a good night. All of this takes the right amount of time for the initial high to finally hit him and he’s seeing the world in a bit of a haze but it’s all right because it feels good.

Harry envelops himself in whatever the DJ has decided to play, ignoring the rest of the muted world. He sways to the beat, easing himself into the drop, allowing his body to flow into the climbing sound, reaching higher and higher towards the heavens before he falls again. And again. And again. Keeps rising and falling until someone finally catches him, their unfamiliar hands sliding over his hips. Usually he wouldn’t warrant anything like this, doesn’t do well with strangers, but he’s too far gone at this point to bother with his morals.

Instead, he leads the stranger’s hands with his own, linking their fingers together and the stranger breathes hotly against his ear, a smile pressed to Harry’s skin and he shudders. Turning around to face his admirer, he’s caught off guard by the seemingly familiar look to his bright blue eyes, yet he doesn’t recall him.

He reminds him of a bunny somehow. The sweet look to his face, big round eyes and fluffy hair. Then there’s this look in his eyes that’s filled with adventure and it’s exciting Harry all the way down to his dick.

“Hey,” Harry whispers, hands carding up the back of bunny boy’s hair, leaning his body close enough that they’re grinding against each other.

“Hey,” bunny boy smiles.

Harry doesn’t know how, but when bunny boy presses a kiss to Harry’s lips, he’s completely engrossed in his touch, and there’s a lightness to the way he maneuvers around his mouth with a precision that seems too practiced, albeit natural. It’s an enigma and Harry decides it’s too much to think about when he should be focusing on figuring out how to get his hands into bunny boy’s pants because he wants something, someone to touch him like he hasn’t been before.
Where else should he look than to a complete stranger with pretty eyes and a pink, utterly wrecked snogged face?

Something hits Harry between bunny boy sinking his lips down his dick in the bathroom stall at the end, and the sound of Louis calling his name from the inside of the club every time someone comes in for a wee, that he shouldn’t be here. His hand is twisted around a tuft of bunny boy’s fluffy hair and he’s so so close that it’s painful thinking that he shouldn’t be enjoying this.

But he is and it’s so so wrong.

Yet he can’t seem to pull himself away from bunny boy’s mouth.

Harry ruts up when the blonde’s tongue flicks up the underside of his shaft, his left hand pumping at the base and his right finding its way down towards Harry’s hole and oh god, he’s really going to fuck some stranger in a bathroom? He blames it on the ecstasy, because normally he would never allow himself to go this far with a stranger and okay, wow. Harry moans softly at the sudden intrusion, but it’s welcome and he wants bunny boy to add another finger but he’s not been prepped and it stings a little, and he’s too close to have full blown sex anyways.

Moments after he’s spilled himself into bunny boy’s mouth, Louis’ voice is very loud inside the bathroom and Harry’s well aware that he’s been caught.

“Harry Edward Styles! You naughty boy! Getting head in the bathroom. I know it’s you. I see your stupid boots underneath the stall.” Louis screeches from outside the stall and Harry groans, head resting against the side of the stall as bunny boy looks up to him with an embarrassed red face.

Harry whispers “sorry” to him, because he really did want to return the favor, but knows that it’s time to go home.

What time is it anyways?

With a sigh, Harry’s buttoning up his pants as he gets to his feet, the blonde doing the same. He runs a shaky hand through his messy hair and slowly opens the stall door, greeting Louis with a sheepish grin. “Ooh, well at least he’s cute, what’s his name?” Louis remarks shamelessly and Harry’s palming his face awkwardly.

Bunny boy doesn’t say anything and Harry doesn’t blame him when he’s quickly escaping the bathroom.

He’s coming down from his high and all he wants is a bottle of Jameson before he conks out for the night.

Louis frowns. “Aww. He must not have liked you very much to not meet your best friend.”

“I don’t like you very much right now either,” Harry grumbles, heading back out into the club scene, meeting up with Zayn at the bar. “Your wife is the absolute worst cockblocker in the history of cockblockers. Why do you not have him on a leash?” Harry mumbles and Zayn bursts into a fit of laughter.

“That’s for later,” he winks and Harry thinks he might throw up.
Harry wakes up the next morning, quickly running to his bathroom to retch his guts out. He can barely remember the events from last night, but he’s certain that it was fun enough if he’s feeling this sick.

Today’s going to be a long, quiet day of nursing himself.

10 March

Harry’s barely rolling out of bed on a Sunday morning in mid-March when his phone erupts in the obnoxious ringtone Louis had set for Kate. It’s some Taylor Swift song that he can’t remember the name to, and he still hasn’t figured out how to change it, but for now, it works because he always knows it’s her. “H-Hey,” he mumbles, voice laced thick with sleep.

“Oh my god, Harry. You’re not going to believe it.” Kate exclaims.

“What?” He sits up on the bed, crossing his legs casually as he yawns.

“I felt the baby kick.”

He’s instantly awake the second it registers. “What? Really?”

“Y-Yeah. It’s so marvelous. I was just watching the telly with Ed, eating a banana and all of a sudden the little one kicked and I think they like bananas, Harry.”

“Yep. Definitely my kid,” he laughs. Harry looks to the alarm clock. It’s barely nine. “Hey, is it all right if I head over?”

“Wanna feel your baby kick?” Harry can hear her smiling and it’s the best wakeup call he’s ever received.

“I’ll bring bananas.”

11 July

Harry waits and waits and waits and it’s been hours, he’s sure, but he doesn’t want to look at the clock. Ed’s at his side and a few hours later Anne, Louis and Zayn show up. “Where’s Blaze?”

“My mum has him. We’re here for you, okay?” Louis answers, sitting next to Harry and reaches for his hand. Anne does the same thing, sitting on the other side. Harry nods, smiling small because he’s grateful. He wanted to be in there with Kate, but the doctors said she requested to be alone. It’s sad really. He kind of figured she would’ve wanted him to be there to the very end, but as of late she has been a bit standoffish the closer the time came for the baby to be born.

Now, here they all are, waiting for the doctor to come out and say his child has been born. Harry
can’t control the impatient step of his feet, clicking against the tile every second. His hands are shaking and his heart is racing and he feels like he’s going to burst. He just wants to see his baby so desperately, hold them, kiss them and welcome them to the world.

He just wants to finally be a father.

“IT’s okay,” Anne whispers, kissing the side of his head supportively.

But it’s not okay. It’s not, because he wants his kid now. That sounds so selfish because he should be worried about Kate and he is, but this is the one thing he’s wanted since Blaze was born and he doesn’t know how much longer he needs to wait.

Sighing, he looks over to his ginger haired friend across the waiting room. “How long has it been?” He reluctantly asks because he doesn’t want to know how long he’s been here for but he needs to know.

Ed sighs and digs into his pocket for his phone. “Seven hours.” He gives quietly, looking just as worried as Harry feels.

Soon. He hopes. Soon he’ll be with his child and he can finally start his life.

July 31st, 2015, 1:34am, and little Alexander Oliver Styles is born. The second he steps into Kate’s hospital room and sees her holding his beautiful baby boy, he’s absolutely infatuated with him. The nurses already cleaned him up for Harry so the moment Alexander is placed into Harry’s arms, he can’t believe that this little guy is his. Looking to Kate, he smiles gratefully. She looks so exhausted but she’s smiling despite that, her beautiful brown eyes as bright as ever.

Harry cradles Alexander close to him, nuzzling his cheek softly with his own and sighs relieved. “Thank you. Thank you so much. This means the world to me. You’re amazing,” he says all in one go, afraid that he’ll never find the words to truly express how he feels about everything she’s done.

“It’s really nothing, Harry.” Kate returns lightly.

But it really is everything. He knows she'll never accept more than what he can give her, but he wants to return the favor somehow. Grant her the most selfish wish she has if only to make her as happy has he is. Harry reaches out and squeezes her tired hand, then kisses the crown of her head softly. “Really. You’re truly the best. You’ve given me something that I couldn’t give myself on my own and for that, it’s the most sacred gift I will cherish.”

The doctors allow Harry a little while longer with Alexander and Kate before they need to be left alone to rest.

In a couple of days he can take Alexander home.

Harry has a busy couple of days ahead of him.

12 August

News that Harry has a child spreads like wildfire. He’d completely spaced and told Liam at the last
second that his baby was being born a couple days ago. He can still remember the very confused look on Liam’s face when he shouted it as he ran out the front entrance. The moment Harry comes back in to get some papers so he can work from home, Liam’s bombarding him with questions.

“Why haven’t you been answering my phone calls? I’ve been so worried. What do you mean your baby is being born? What the hell Styles? Talk to me.”

Harry’s overwhelmed, mostly because everyone in the office is staring at them, but he needs to have this conversation in private. “Can we go into your office and talk, please?”

Liam runs his hand through his hair and sighs. “Yeah.” He leads the way to his office, settling down in his chair and waits for Harry to close the door and join him at the desk.

He’s tense, but it’s because he has a moving truck full of furniture and baby furniture that his mum kept in storage since Harry outgrew them when he was a babe. He’s just anxious to get to his new apartment. Has to pick Louis up first but still.

Harry’s excited.

"I'm sorry I forgot to tell you. I went through with a surrogacy. Do you remember Kate?"

It takes Liam a moment but the recognition is clear as day in his eyes the second he remembers. "From uni?"

"Yeah. She uh... Was my surrogate mother for my son.” He gets this precious little smile on his face thinking about Alexander. "I guess... I just got so caught up in things that I forgot to mention it till the last minute."

Liam's flustered, Harry can easily see that. He feels bad because he's one of his childhood friends but they aren't that close. It just seemed almost irrelevant to tell him. "Wow, Harry. I'm so happy for you.” Liam smiles reaching out across the desk fondly. "Do you have any pictures? What's his name?"

Grinning, Harry reaches into his pocket for his phone and pulls up the picture his mum took of him holding Alexander minutes after he was born. He passes the devices along happily. "His name is Alexander Oliver. Cutest little baby I've ever seen. Of course I'm biased." He laughs.

The smile that spreads across Liam's face is a proud one. "He's beautiful, Harry. I can tell he looks just like you.” There's a warmth inside of Harry that makes him bubble up with joy. Liam continues to stare at the picture, looking so happy for him. The same expression Louis had when he first laid eyes on Alexander. "I'm proud of you for doing this. It's going to be a lot of work though. Can you handle a baby and working here?"

"I'm certainly going to try. Louis says he's going to help me, and of course mum and Gemma but..."

"If you need time off I understand. I have temps that can take over if you decide to go on leave. I'm assuming that you're the only one with parental rights?"

Harry nods. "I would appreciate it."

"You've been here almost a year Harry, and you're the hardest worker I've had. Despite our history, if I was just your boss, I'd still give you the time off. I'm not that much of a dick.” He laughs.

"Thank you. Thank you so so much Liam. Words can't express how grateful I am."
"Of course. Did you get that apartment?"

"Just about to move everything in today, actually."

"Send me pictures when you've got everything all set up?" Liam asks and Harry knows their little talk is almost over when he begins to stand from his chair.

Harry nods, "Definitely. Maybe I'll have you come over in a couple of weeks when I'm ready to have the world see Alexander?"

"I would love that, Harry." Harry goes to leave, his hand on the doorknob when Liam gets to his feet and clears his throat. "Oh and congratulations, you're going to make a great father."

Harry smiles, a blush forming on his dimpled cheeks. "Thank you, Liam."

*

It's barely even noon when they get to his new apartment. Louis can barely believe his eyes when he steps into the wide entrance way that leads directly to the living room. The walls are white with beige wall liners and a similar colored carpet. He moves into the kitchen with the light granite countertops and splays his body out over the island and groans.

"It's so beautiful, Harry. God I'm jealous. I might just bring Blaze over and have him live here forever." Harry laughs from down the hall, moving into the kitchen to smack Louis' arse. "Heyyy."

"Hey yourself. Get your own apartment then." Harry smirks, watching Louis slide reluctantly from the island and pout his bottom lip.

He caresses the counter top and stares at it before he bothers to look Harry in the eyes. "How'd you even afford this working at the bakery, though? I mean... It's a shite ton of money I'm sure and I haven't even seen the rest of it."

Harry gulps. He knew he'd eventually have to tell Louis he's been working for Liam but right now he's seriously not ready. He thinks about making up some sort of believable lie, but too much time has passed and he knows him better than that. He also knows that Louis knows him better than that. So much so, he can just tell that Harry's lying.

Sighing heavily he leans his arms against the island and looks Louis right in the eyes, full seriousness. "I'm going to be honest with you. You probably won't like it, but I want you to look at it from a different perspective than your own. Okay?"

Louis stares at him skeptically, but he nods anyways. "Okay."

"So about a year ago, before I decided on what to do so I can be a father, I was looking for jobs. I searched for maybe three months? I don't know. It was definitely a while. Anyways," he pauses, noticing that impatient get-to-the-point look Louis is giving him. "I called Liam, looking to see if he had any leads. Then he said he had a position open for a secretary job if I wanted it. So I went in for the interview, and a few days later he called and said I had the job if I wanted it."

Louis takes the information in and a flash of anger, then confusion and understanding wavers through his expressions within a matter of seconds. “I… see...” He clasps his hands together, staring
at the space between his arms on the counter and nods. “Makes sense… Sounds like that job would pay much more than at the bakery. No wonder you haven’t been coming over after work smelling like a damn pastry.”

Harry smiles half-heartedly because he knows Louis is forcing himself to say this.

It’s been almost five years since Louis stopped talking to Liam completely, and one would think that the mention of him wouldn’t phase the guy, but it really does.

Harry can’t rightfully blame him either.

The bastard cheated on him point blank and was caught in the act, and in their own damned bedroom to add to the damage he’d caused. One really doesn’t get over that. Especially not when Louis seriously and wholeheartedly thought Liam was his one. They’d been together since they were basically kids.

“I’m… I’m really sorry, Lou. I didn’t want to tell you that I’m working for him because I didn’t want to hurt you. I don’t know if I made it better or worse not telling you till now, but nothing’s been exchanged between him and me about you except when he asked how you were.”

Louis looks up instantly, eyes wide and body showing all signs of pure curiosity.

“H-He did?”

“Oh, mate.”

“Wh-What’d he say?”

Harry shrugs, uncertain about this sudden urge for Louis to figure out anything about Liam. “Does it even matter? I mean… unless you’re going to try and talk to him I…” Harry shuts up when Louis gives him a look. “I told him you’re happy. Then he said he heard you had a son and from there we moved onto other things.”

Louis’ silent, leaning back to stand up straight and ponder over the information. “I’m uhh… Gonna go get some stuff from the truck, okay?”

“Okay.” Harry follows after him.

He loves his new apartment, but it’s on the top floor, which is only one flight of stairs but the haul up to his place is an exhausting one. Regardless, they manage to get everything inside within a few hours and Harry’s pulling items from boxes when Louis finally speaks up. It’s been nothing but small talk all day and Harry’s grateful, unsure if he can handle any other thoughts except his anxious ones for Alexander to come home tomorrow.

“I’m going to go get Blaze from my mum’s. I can come back with him and Zayn and we can all order some takeout?”

Harry smiles at the idea. “Sure. I’ll see you after a while?”

“Yeah.” Louis reaches for his keys on the counter. “I’m going to take a cab though. You sure you’ll be fine unpacking things by yourself?”

Harry scoffs. “Of course. I’ll put on some Arctic Monkeys and jam out like we did when we moved into our dorms.”
The memory is a fond one of theirs and Louis’ smiling softly. He goes to leave when Harry stops him, an afterthought on his tongue instantly.

“Hey, here’s some money for the cab and whatever we get is on me, kay?”

“I don’t need charity, Haz.” Louis bites back but it’s tender, not really meaning to be anything but a casual retort. But Harry has known for a while that Louis and Zayn have been struggling. Louis won’t admit it, but Zayn told Harry once that since Louis went back to work, he hasn’t been offered any acting gigs and it’s really put a dent in their bank account. Blaze going to daycare really hurt them but they needed him to interact with other kids and Harry just wants to help them so badly, but he can’t because he knows Louis won’t let him. He’s too proud for that.

“It’s not charity, Lou. It’s thanks for today.” Harry reasons and somehow, that’s enough for Louis to accept the money he’s extending out to him.

“Thank you.” He says small, but he’s grateful and Harry wants to just pull him into a big hug and hold him for a while. “I’ll be back in about an hour or so? Zayn should be home pretty soon from the office.”

“Okay. See you soon. Love you!” Harry calls as Louis walks out the door, hollering back his “love you too”.

Harry turns and faces his newest project, wondering where he should start. “Okay Styles.” He places his hands on his hips, determined. “Let’s get down to business.”

An hour and a half later and the sun is setting when Louis returns with Zayn and Blaze. Harry’s in high spirits, having set up his living room, Alexander’s room and part of his own. Louis had called twenty minutes prior, saying he wanted Paya’s tonight so Harry happily ordered their takeout and patiently waited for his return. He has Mulan in on the telly, since he got “I’ll Make a Man Out of You” stuck in his head and desperately needed to watch it.

Blaze rushes into the apartment, completely in awe over how spacious it is. “So big! Is this Uncle Harry’s place?”

Harry lifts him into his arms for a hug and nods. “Yep! And you’re welcome over anytime you want.”

“Yay!” Blaze exclaims, wrapping his little arms around Harry’s neck.

“When do you get Alexander?” Zayn asks, setting Blaze’s bag of toys down next to his shoes at the front door. Louis is the last one in, closing the door lightly, rubbing his stomach.

“I’m so hungry. When’s the food gonna get here?” He whines, taking Blaze from Harry and setting him down in the living room. They both settle onto Harry’s leather couch with a content sigh.

“Soon,” Harry answers Louis and moves towards the kitchen, gesturing for Zayn to follow him. “I’ll be at the hospital at nine to get him. Kate’s so ready to go home, she keeps texting me about how much she hates the food there.” Zayn laughs along with Harry and eyes the kitchen. He’s blatantly impressed if his raised eyebrows mean anything.

“Bet you’re excited.”

“Extremely. But I’m scared too, ya know?” Harry scratches his forehead, staring at the floor for no
reason. “It’s so much responsibility and like… I’m ready. I’m really prepared for it. Mum went with me this morning to get all the things I’ll need for Alexander, but… it’s…”

“Overwhelming?”

Harry scoffs, adding a light hearted chuckle. “That’s an understatement to how I’m really feeling, but I guess that works.”

“Well,” Zayn leans against the counter, eyeing Harry firmly. “I know you’re going to be a wonderful parent. You basically helped us raise Blaze, if I’m being honest. For the most part, it was you and Lou always taking care of him because of work. So I know you’re going to do well. Of course, Lou and I are here for you if you need any help. I can’t stress that enough. It’s the least we can do for everything you’ve done for us.”

That actually helps lift a weight off Harry’s shoulder. It’s not much, but it’s something and he’ll take that. “Everyone’s been so supportive of this. I mean, barely a year ago this was just an idea and now here I am, an actual father and I’m really going to do this and… I’m just in awe of everybody. So when I say thanks, I seriously, down to the bottom of my heart, sincerely mean it.”

Zayn moves over and gives Harry a long hug. “I know, mate. I’m so proud of you. I really am. Lou too. As much as he won’t say it.”

Harry laughs, nuzzling his chin on the crook between Zayn’s shoulder and neck. “I know I know. Thank you so much.”

*

They always say the first night home with your baby is the hardest. Harry doesn’t really believe that. Well, not until two forty-three in the morning when he wakes up to the sounds of his little boy crying from the other room. Harry tiredly gets from his bed as fast as he can, shuffling into Alexander’s room. Pulling the screeching child into his arms, he softly shushes him, rocking him back and forth in his cradled arms. It takes some time, but when he starts gently humming a random lullaby, Alexander finally quiets down. Slowly, Harry lowers the sleeping babe into his crib, kissing his temple tender and smiles at how peaceful he seems. Only a few days old and he is the entire world in Harry’s eyes.

*

Harry never thought it possible. Really. Who runs out of diapers at one in the morning? Unprepared parents do, that’s who. He swears, Alexander is a poop machine. Has to be, because there’s no way he could’ve gone through a whole month’s supply in two and a half weeks. It’s not possible.

He rings Louis up, feeling dreadful for waking him up at this hour, but he really needs to go to the store and he doesn’t know what to do with this crying baby while he’s panicking himself. He’s been cooped up in this godforsaken apartment for weeks and he needs some fresh air.

“No… No, Harry. Calm down. It’ll be okay. Give me fifteen and I’ll be there, kay?” Louis says
calmly, the sleep in his voice very obvious.

“I’m so sorry. I feel so bad.”


“Kay…” Zayn’s sleepy voice is barely heard on Harry’s end, but the guilt seriously settles into his stomach then and he can’t control the profuse “I’m sorry”’s that stumble out of his mouth.

“Harry, chill. I’ll be there before you know it.” Louis reasons, hanging up before Harry can apologize again.

“Okay.” Harry murmurs, staring at his screaming child. He’s not hungry, he’s already pooped in his last diaper, and Harry refuses to try and put him to sleep when he’s not even in his kit properly.

“Please, baby. Please be quiet?” He begs, but Alexander isn’t having it. Groaning, Harry grips his hair like a vice, prepared to tear the follicles from his scalp if he has to.

It doesn’t seem like much time has passed when Louis shows up, seemingly out of breath at Harry’s front door, with a random diaper in hand. “I ran from the street. Here,” he passes the diaper over, moving inside the apartment. Louis throws his keys on the counter and heads to Alexander’s room. He’s not crying anymore, but he’s not happy either. Harry joins them and dresses Alexander’s bare bum with the diaper. “I knew I had some diapers left over, but there was only one left.”

“I’m gonna go to the store,” Harry mumbles, securing the flaps to the cloth and lifts Alexander into his arms to cradle him. Hopefully, he can just rock him to sleep so that Louis doesn’t have to do much while he’s gone for a little bit.

“Oh. You sure you don’t want me to go instead?”

Harry shakes his head frantically. “I’m going mad, Lou. I haven’t been outside in ages and I just need a cigarette badly.”

“That’s so unhealthy. Hope you haven’t been—”

Harry cuts him off. “No. I haven’t had a single cigarette since I brought him home. I’ve been trying to quit, really, but…”

“Yeah,” Louis nods, reaching for the baby to continue rocking him to sleep so Harry can get going. "Took Zayn a while to stop, and I know he still does from time to time. Anyways, I’ve got this taken care of. Should be out like a light fairly soon. Go get stuff done.”

“Thank you,” Harry whispers, kissing the side of Louis’ head. “If you wanna crash after he does, you’re welcome to my bed.”

“Can we break it in when you get back?” Louis winks and Harry rolls his eyes.

“In your dreams, Tommo.”

Tesco’s has a few patrons here and there, but Harry doesn’t bother looking to them as he heads straight down to the baby aisle. He can’t really help that he takes so long though, enjoying the feeling of being away from his child for just a little bit. There’s that nagging parent Harry in the back of his mind, but he ignores him and continues about his business.
Finding the proper diapers, he grabs the biggest package, knowing he’ll have to come back within a week, but it’ll get them by for a little bit. Heading back out into the pathway, Harry is staring at a picture message Louis sent him of Alexander sleeping soundly and Louis smiling proudly.

*From: Lou-ba-loo

> Told ya he’d be out soon! See you soon xx*

Harry smiles, pocketing his phone before starting towards the front of the store.

“Whoa whoa whoa! Watch out!” A voice calls and Harry doesn’t even know he’s off his feet and on the floor until the shrill pain shoots from his back to his bum. “Oh shite! Are you okay?” The voice asks and Harry slowly sits up, eyeing the tossed bag of diapers across from him before meeting the eyes of his assailant. “Oh god. I’m so so sorry. I was just testing it out and I couldn’t get it to stop and… are you all right? Do you need to go to the hospital?”

Harry wants to say something, but he’s lost in the sea of ocean blue eyes and stunned by pretty pink cheeks, and wow. He’s absolutely beautiful, actually. He shakes himself out of it and finally answers. “N-No, I’m okay. What were you testing out?”

The man lifts up a skateboard and everything pieces itself together properly. “I think the brakes are broken.” He inspects the board and Harry smirks.

“Skateboards don’t have brakes.”

“No? Man, I thought it was like one of those razors. You know? The scooters back in the day.” Harry laughs, getting to his feet with the help of the stranger.

“I don’t need a childhood flashback haha,” he’s looking him in the eyes now, but he’s relatively shorter than him and it’s sort of endearing if he’s honest. “I’m Harry.”

“Niall. You sure you aren’t hurt?”

“Yeah. Pretty sure,” he looks around his body, twists it around to glance at his bum. “Bum’s a little sore but it’ll be all right.” Harry then reaches for the diapers and smiles at Niall kindly. Suddenly, his blue eyes seem to realize what Harry’s holding and Harry can just see the question Niall’s wanting to ask. “You wouldn’t think your two week old son would go through a month’s worth of diapers, but he did and I’m wondering why he poops so much when he drinks milk.” Harry shakes his head, readjusting his curls back and smirks.

“Like a poop machine?” Niall entertains and Harry’s surprised he bothered to say anything in the first place.

Harry chuckles, scratching the back of his head. “Yeah, pretty much.”

“I love kids. They’re the best.”

“Yeah?”

Niall shoves a hand in his pocket and nods. “Yep. My nephew’s going to be two soon, but I took care of him a lot when he was first born. I had to go away for work so I didn’t see him for a while after that, but when I came home, wow, couldn’t believe he’d grown so much.”

“Kids grow up so fast. My best mate, his kid is four and he’s as tall as here,” Harry gestures to mid-way between his knee and hip. “He’s going to be tall, I can just tell.”
“I’m not ready for Theo to grow up.” Niall mentions, scratching his head nervously. Wait. Nervously? What could Niall be nervous for?

Harry’s about to reply when his phone starts ringing and it’s Louis. “Hey Louis, something wrong?”

“He shat his diaper again. Harry I could use those new diapers right about now.”

Eyes widen and panic sets in again. “Shit, okay. I’ll be home in a little bit.” He hangs up and Niall’s still there and for some reason Harry feels like he knows him. “Hey umm... it was really nice meeting you, Niall. I really gotta get home.”

“Yeah. I understand. Baby duties and all.”

“Yeah.”

“Okay.”

Harry nods and starts towards the front again. He’s all checked out by the time Niall stops him.

“Hey, this seems really odd, but I don’t think seeing you again was just a coincidence.” What? Again? “So umm... can I give you my number? On the off chance you’d want to maybe get a coffee or something?” Harry has to stop himself because Niall is seriously asking for his number and now he’s all flubber and shaky hands, realizing that Niall was flirting with him the whole time and. Wow.


Niall’s timid appearance fades into a surprised happiness and he does a little jump. “Awesome. Oh, congrats, Harry. A baby is a blessing.”

“Thank you, I’ve never been happier.”

*

"You have a date?" Ed asks. Him and Kate had come over a week later. The only issue with the surrogacy is that Harry really needed her to supply milk for Alexander. Just for a little while. Soon he’d start him on baby formula.

Harry has Alexander in his lap, nursing him with a bottle and Kate's busying herself with paperwork from her office. "Yeah." Harry smiles.

"That's fun. Who's the lucky guy?"

"It's just a date, Ed." He points out. But the thought of Niall left him feeling anxious and excited. He hasn't had a date since Nick and it's sort of overdue. "But his name is Niall. He's really funny. Pretty cute too."

"Well," Ed nudges Harry's shoulder. "I hope it goes well. You got a babysitter for Alex?"

Harry nods. "Yep. My mum wanted to have him for the night. So Niall and I will actually have dinner here."

Kate looks up through her reading glasses. Apparently she’d been listening the entire time. "Really,
Harry? You're inviting him over on the first date?"

"Sure," he shrugs. "He and I have been talking nonstop for a few days. I think I trust him enough to come over and try my cooking."

"That's so... You trust too easily. That's all I'm saying." Kate remarks, tending back to her paper.

"I think I'm on her side with this. Why don't you enjoy a night out with him instead? Then if there's a second date, you can invite him back here." Ed suggests and Harry considers it.

"I guess I could change the plans a bit." He reaches for his phone pulling the teet of Alexander's empty bottle from his lips and sets it on the coffee table. He kisses the top of his head before typing out a text to Niall. He's still not sure what made him decide to try and date someone, but Niall seems genuine enough. Who knows. It might turn into something he never thought.

From: Harry

> Change of plans. Wanna go out instead?

From: Niall

> Sure! Maybe next time for homemade dinner?

From: Harry.

> Definitely. Anything in mind?

He waits for Niall's reply but doesn't sit around his phone. Getting up he brings Alexander to the couch and smiles at the sweet baby, still incredibly enamored by the fact that he's his. His eyes are still blue, but he can see a hint of green in them and signs of a gentle dimple when Harry gets him to smile. For the most part, he's a replica of Harry except for the soft tuft of dirty blonde hair. Although, he himself had blonde hair when he was a babe so Alexander could grow up to have that typical Styles chocolate brown.


"You two are so sickening. I think I'll throw up."

Harry smirks. "Whatever. Alex and I don't need you. Do we Alex? Yeah. Uncle Eddie is such a meanie." Alexander giggles and Harry looks to Ed, eyebrows raised and a wide grin directed to him. "See, Alex agrees with me."

"Cuz he doesn't know his father is just a huge dork."

Kate snorts and smiles to her boyfriend.

"Heyyy, don't encourage him."

She shrugs. "Sorry, love. But you are a huge dork."

"Bullies! The lot of you." He turns to Alexander and pokes his nose. "If you ever get bullied, tell me and I'll beat up that kid, I'll make it look like an accident."
Ed and Kate laugh. "You couldn’t hurt a fly even if you wanted to."

Harry throws his hands in the air, easily amusing the baby. "Out! Outta my house you meanies."

Chuckling, Ed gets to his feet and kisses the top of Harry's head, ruffling up his messy hair with a grin. "We should get going anyways. Better tell me how tonight goes, all right?"

Harry nods. "I suppose I can do that."

Kate gets up too and hugs Harry, poking Alexander's nose playfully. "By darling. Oh and Harry?" She pauses, raising her eyebrows at him maternally. "Have fun. Don't do anything we wouldn't do."

"All right. All right." Harry muses, watching them leave. Once they've gone, Harry lifts Alexander up, looking at the time on his phone and decides it's time for a nap. "Wanna sleep with daddy?"

Alexander coos, just to respond to the sound of Harry’s voice and it's enough for him.

Lying in bed, he smiles at the message Niall had sent.

From: Niall

> Anywhere with you will make me happy. :)

Anne comes by at six to pick up Alexander. She melts at the sight of him, tempted to kiss him all over.

She does anyways.

"You're the cutest, the sweetest, and the..." She pauses, pulling him away from her body with a scrunched up nose. "And the poopiest baby I've ever met! Oh jeez! Harry what are you feeding him?"

Harry pops his head out from the bathroom. "Just milk! I don't know. Was I like that when I was a baby?"

Anne ponders the thought, heading into Alexander's room to change him. "You know, I don't really think so. You were constipated a lot though. Made you fussy."

"Thanks mum." Harry mumbles before turning the hair dryer on to mat down his bangs before he ties a plaid designed scarf around his head. After inspecting his face for a couple minutes, he moves into Alexander's room and joins them. She's already done changing his diaper and has him settled into her arms, rocking him slightly. "You sure you'll be fine with him tonight? I'm nervous about him being away from the house."

"He's three weeks old, Harry. He needs to be out in the world with germs."

Harry feels like his heart has dropped three stories. "Oh god."

"What? Germs are good. It helps them develop an immune system," she reasons. He knows she's right, but he can't help feeling like he needs to safeguard him from the infectious world. "Harry, don't worry, I raised two kids, I know what to expect."

"Okay, thank you."
"No need, love. You’ve given me the best thing a mum could ever want. A beautiful, healthy grandchild that lights up everyone’s world the second they look at him. That’s thanks enough. Okay?" Anne tries, looking him firm in the eyes. “Do you have Alex’s night bag all set?”

“Oh, yeah,” Harry goes to Alexander’s closet and pulls the bag out, passing it over to her. She handles it with one arm, readjusting a tired looking Alexander. “All right, bub, I’m going to leave you at nana’s tonight. I’ll see you in the morning, kay?” He kisses Alexander’s temple, petting back the soft tuft of hair fondly. “Call me if anything happens, okay?” Harry says to Anne now and she nods.

“I know, I know. Everything will be fine though. You just have a good night. God knows you deserve a date.”

“Thanks mum.”

“Stop that,” she nags, pointing a finger at him as she heads out. “See you in the morning, love.”

“Kay, bye. Love you.”

“Love you too.” And she’s gone, leaving Harry alone in his too quiet apartment. It’s so strange that it doesn’t feel peaceful. Harry looks at his phone and decides to head out as well, rather than going mad in his own apartment.

* 

Amusement parks have always been Harry’s guilty pleasure. The bright lights, the thrilled screams coming from within the park as you enter it, the smell of food stands. Breathing it all in, Harry feels twelve again, prepared to spend all of his money at the various mini games just to win that stuffed unicorn he wanted as a kid but never succeeded. Gemma did once though, handing the stuffed animal over to Harry, smiling as she watched his face fill with the innocent joy and excitement just from the prize.

Harry can’t wait to one day bring Alexander to one of these. Can’t wait to see how bubbly he gets from the little things surrounding them.

He spots Niall standing in line, waiting for Harry to show up. He’s actually a few minutes early, so he’s surprised to see him already.

“Hey.” He greets, heart racing when Niall recognizes him under the fluorescent glow of the multi colored neon lights placed around the park ground, and flat out smiles the biggest smile Harry’s ever seen. He’s dressed in a white t-shirt with a denim overshirt, jeans and white Supras and usually Harry would think he’s very dressed down for a date, but somehow it really works on Niall. His blonde hair is a fluffed up mess and Harry just wants to play with it.

“Hey!” Niall says back, pulling him away from his thoughts.

“Been waiting long?” Harry asks and Niall shakes his head, both of them settling into the line.

“Nah. Only bout ten minutes.”

Harry gulps. If he hadn’t shown up early, he would’ve been waiting for almost thirty minutes and
that gets him flustered because he’s so sweet to him already. Harry wonders what he did to deserve someone so easy going as Niall to develop any sort of interest in him.

“You’re pretty early.” Niall remarks and Harry almost stills, but shakes it off.

“Yeah,” he scratches the back of his head. “My mum came over and picked up Alexander and I’m not used to the apartment being so quiet.”

The line moves a little. “Yeah, I definitely get that. For a time there, I lived with my brother and his wife before I got my own place and found it eerie to be by myself for the first time in a while.”

“I got so sick of being by myself actually. My old apartment was kinda shite so it was a blessing when I found this one.”

“Got it for your kid?” Niall asks and Harry nods. He loves how easy it is to talk to Niall about Alexander without him feeling weird. It’s very unexpected if Harry’s honest.

“I’ve done a lot of things just for Alexander, actually.”

Niall only smiles at that, passing a twenty pound note over to the cashier at the park gate, paying for both of their entries. “Good t’ know that you’re a dedicated father.”

“You didn’t have to pay for—”

“None of that, okay? Everything’s on me tonight.” Niall states and Harry nods obligingly. “I asked ya on the date, you’ve done enough to just be here.”

“Okay,” Harry grins easily and Niall takes his hand, entwining their fingers like they were meant to be that way. Niall’s hand is a bit calloused, but it’s gentle and Harry can’t seem to keep his eyes off of him as they traverse around the park. He doesn’t see anything else but him and he doesn’t know why he ever would want to.

“Hey, wanna ride the roller coaster?” Niall asks around a bite of his cotton candy, ripping a piece off and offers it to Harry.

He isn’t really listening to him, but he takes the sugary offer, licking his lips as Niall drags him off somewhere. It’s not until the rides about ready to leave the station when Harry realizes he’s seated in a middle car of the scariest rollercoaster in the park. Terrified, Harry squeezes Niall’s hand tighter, recognizing that they haven’t separated since they entered the park.

Niall notices his tension and grimaces. “Harry, you’re squeezing too hard,” he starts to pull his hand away but Harry refuses to let go, panic settled onto his blanched face. “Shit, you all right?” Niall’s eyes are wide in comprehension to the situation and Harry’s shaking his head profusely.

“Scared. Of… rollercoasters.”

“Crap! Hey! Wait, don’t—!” But it’s too late as the car starts up the ascending chain and Harry’s got his eyes shut tight. “Just… it’s okay. Breathe, Harry. Breathe.”

Harry wishes it would help, but it doesn’t, and he lets go of Niall’s hand, gripping at his shoulder restraints instead, keeping his eyes closed and praying it’ll all be over soon. The rush of the ride drops his heart to the pit of his stomach, adrenaline pumping through his veins and he can barely breathe and he wants to cry, scream, something, but nothing comes out.

The ride goes on for what feels like an eternity.
“Harry. Harry, babe. It’s over.” Niall’s murmuring softly into his ear, trying to get him to remove his tight grasp on his shoulder restraints. Slowly, Harry opens his damp eyes, meeting Niall’s instantly. The shoulder restraints release and he’s quickly rushing into Niall’s open arms, removing both of them from the scene. Niall settles them down on a bench, away from the crowd as he can get and looks over Harry’s face worriedly.

“I feel like the biggest twat in the history of twats. I’m so sorry, babe. I didn’t know.”

“I-It’s okay…” Harry breathes, pressing his forehead against Niall’s shoulder and finally breathes. “You didn’t… know.” His hand is trembling on his thigh and he urges it to stop, but the limb refuses.

A rough hand makes its way around Harry’s and squeezes tenderly. He looks up at Niall and smiles half-heartedly. With his free hand, Niall wipes away a stray tear from Harry’s puffy red cheeks and smirks sweetly. “Is it bad that you look so beautiful right now?”

Harry shrugs.

“Well, you do. So fucking gorgeous.” Harry tucks his head into the crook of Niall’s shoulder and rests there, trying to gather himself so they can go enjoy the rest of the night.

*

Harry took a cab to the amusement park, so Niall takes him home. His Range Rover is comfortable, and Harry briefly wonders what Niall does to afford something as luxurious as this, but his thoughts get cut off when they’re parked in front of the apartments. Sighing, Harry looks at his feet then to the stairs that lead up to his second floor flat. He doesn’t want the night to be over with, honestly. It’s almost midnight but it doesn’t feel like they’ve been hanging out for very long.

“I really enjoyed tonight, even though that happened.” Niall says softly.

Turning to face him in the dark of the vehicle, Harry nods with a smile. “Yeah. I had a lot of fun. Urm… Walk me to my door?”

“Thought you’d never ask.”

Niall gets out and walks over to the passenger side to let Harry out, reaching for his hand. They head up the stairs slowly, and all Harry can think about is the way Niall’s fingers feel against his and how he doesn’t want to let go, ever.

He hasn’t liked someone this easily in a very long time, and he’s not sure if he should kiss him or invite him in or just let him go for the night and maybe they’ll have another date. Stepping up to the door, Harry reaches into his pocket for his keys, hesitantly fumbling with them as he ponders over what he should do. Niall squeezes his hand, diverting his attention.

“I really like you, Harry. Like… a lot.”

“You’re okay, I guess.” Harry jokes and Niall titters, shoving him gently. “Yeah, okay, I really like you too.” He returns bashfully, cheeks a hot red. Niall’s face is rosy and Harry just wants to grab him and kiss him. “Can I… Can I kiss——” Niall doesn’t wait for Harry to finish his question, standing on his tip toes to press a kiss to his lips, hands traveling up the expanse of his neck and wraps his arms around Harry. Leaning down into his lips, Harry settles his hands onto Niall’s tiny hips, pulling him
closer to him. It’s nothing elaborate, but Harry knows when a kiss feels right.

This feels better than right.

It’s almost sinful.

Pulling apart, they’re breathless, foreheads pressed together and arms still caging them to each other.

“I’ll call you in the morning?” Niall asks and Harry’s not even sure why he bothers because the answer is always yes.

“Okay. You better,” he breathes, bringing their lips together for one more kiss. “Drive safe.”

“I will.” They reluctantly separate, leaving Harry awkwardly waving to Niall as he hops down the stairs in twos, reaching his still running Range Rover. “Sweet dreams, love.”

“Sweet dreams,” Harry smiles, ducking into his flat once he can no longer see Niall’s running lights.

*

Niall is true to his word and calls Harry the next day. Harry feels sort of bad, though, because he’s in the midst of changing Alexander’s diaper but the brat is kicking his feet every which way and refuses to let Harry wipe him clean. “H-Hold on, Niall. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

Harry puts the phone down on the dresser next to the changing table and quickly gets Alexander to stop kicking, holding his feet up and wiping his dirty bum with his other hand. “Naughty child. Are you going to do this every time I change you?”

Alexander smiles up at him and he’s groaning. “My child is a menace. Great.” He refreshes the diaper on him and pulls the giggling baby into his arms before reaching for the phone again. “I’m back.”

“Sounds like you have your hands full there.”

“A bit. He’s usually well behaved, but I guess his Uncle Lou is rubbing off on him and he’s turning. Niall what am I to do with a mischievous child?!” Harry exclaims animatedly.

Niall laughs loudly and Harry blushes, heading into the kitchen to retrieve a juice pack for himself. He stabs the box with the little straw and suckles on it. “Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad. Sounds like fun.”

“Maybe for others. I don’t know what to do with him lately. He’s such a brat.”

“You love him.”

“Of course.”

“So, what’s on the agenda for today?” Niall asks after a while and Harry thinks, settling Alexander
on the floor with him in the living room and grabs a stuffed bear, placing little kisses all over Alexander’s face.

“Taking care of Alexander, napping, lazing about. The usual father son stuff.”

“Did you maybe want to do something tonight?”

“Tonight?”

“Yeah.”

Harry ponders the thought. It’s only been a day, but he wants to see Niall again. He wants Niall to meet Alexander too but maybe that’s still too early. “I’m not sure, what’d you have in mind?”

“Maybe we could eat and watch a movie.”

“I have to be out in public again?” Harry teases.

“Or you could come over?” Niall suggests and hmm. Harry never thought about that option.

He smiles. “Are you going to cook for me, Mr. Horan?”

“Could be a possibility.”

“Sounds good. I’ll call for a babysitter and come over later. What time?”

“Seven? I promise you’ll be back home at a respectable hour.” Niall jokes and Harry laughs.

“Okay. See you later then.”

They hang up and Harry’s sitting there, staring at the beautiful child lying on the floor before him and he wonders how he got so lucky. Blessed with this darling baby and a boy who seems too perfect to be true.

Louis comes over at six thirty, Blaze hiding behind his leg shyly. “Honey, I’m home~” Louis sings at the front door and Harry lets out a loud chuckle from the bathroom where he’s currently tying another scarf around his hair.

Harry removes himself from the bathroom and greets them. “Why’s my little Blaze hiding?” He asks the child, but he doesn’t say anything. Alexander is in his bouncer, jumping away at the song that’s playing and its darling.

“He’s shy about the baby.”

“Aww, don’t be shy, Blaze. Alex is a sweetheart. You’ll love him.” Harry coos, kneeling down to meet Blaze’s eyes.

“He’s tiny.” The four year old comments and Harry nods.

“Yeah, but he’ll grow up big like you and you’ll be the best of friends.”

“Would you like that, Blaze?” Louis asks and there’s a small nod from him. “Go say hi then.” Slowly, the child peels away from his father’s leg and hobbles over to the bouncing baby and presses one of the various buttons to play a new song. Alexander’s loud giggle echoes throughout the room.
and Blaze seems to melt. From there on, it’s like nothing else matters to him and he’s pulling his toy bag from Louis’ hand to open and offer several of his own toys to the baby. Harry’s surprised when Blaze yanks his prized stuffed lion from the bag and presents it to the baby.

“Yep. Best friends.”

Louis smiles. “Our children are precious.”

“Definitely. How do I look?” Harry extends his arms to show off his current outfit. It’s casual, for Harry. The loose shirt he’s wearing is only buttoned up to the middle, showing off the tattoos on his chest and the airplane and cross necklaces he wears on a daily basis. His black jeans are skin tight and he’s sporting his favorite boots.

“You look nice, Harry. Niall will fall for you on the spot.”

“Don’t tease.”


“Thanks. Oh and thank you for coming over. I’m sorry if I ruined your night.”

“Nonsense! Zayn’s stuck at work as usual, Blaze and I had nothing better to do. Besides, it’ll give them some time to bond. Blaze is used to other kids but not babies, so it’s going to be a learning experience for him. Just have fun and don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

Harry’s lips flat line and he rolls his eyes. “That limits things to nothing, Louis.”

“Shut up. Go! Away with you!” Louis shoos him and Harry’s laughing on his way out, but not before kissing the top of Alexander and Blaze’s heads.

“I’ll be home at midnight the latest, okay.”

“All right. We’ll be here.”

*

Niall’s apartment is out of the way but it’s in a nice neighborhood and the steps leading up to his loft are particularly anxious. Harry’s trembling, he realizes, taking each step carefully as he wills himself the confidence to be here. It’s not Niall per se that has him nervous. No. It’s the idea of being over at a new place with someone he barely knows and is unsure that he’ll choose to be with.

Even still, he’s very much so excited about the whole thing.

Harry takes in a deep breath before knocking on Niall’s door. Within seconds, the door is opening quickly, revealing the bright blue eyed boy with a smile that could kill. He’s breathtakingly casual, and looks so sexy even though he’s just wearing a white v-neck with denim jeans that hug his legs. Niall’s hair has been pushed back in the way that Harry just wants to play with it even though it must’ve taken him a while to do.

“Hey,” he murmurs softly, seemingly taken back by the way Harry looks.

Suddenly he feels overdressed and longs to go home and change into something less revealing.
It’s a little too late for that.

“Hey. You look great,” Harry ends up returning and Niall’s rosy cheeks appear to burn darker at the compliment.

“You too.” It’s meaningless conversation, but it’s so easily said as Harry moves into the apartment, admiring the walls filled with pictures and awards.

Wait, awards. What for?

He approaches a framed platinum vinyl, reading the plaque in sleek gold. “Presented to: Niall Horan in recognition for reaching a million records sold.” Harry looks to Niall then back at the record then back at Niall. “A million records? You’re a musician?”

“Guilty.” Niall smiles bashfully, stepping closer to Harry to nudge his arm against his. It’s a subtle touch, but it’s enough to send chills throughout Harry’s body. “I’m not surprised you haven’t heard of me before though. I’m mostly popular in the U.S. than anywhere else.”

“I listen to music all the time though. Why haven’t I heard a single...” He trails, recalling a certain catchy song that played back in 2011. “You did What Makes You Beautiful, didn’t you?”

“Yep. Although, it’s sort of an overrated song. They didn’t really let me write my own songs on the first album. Gave me more freedom on my second and this third one, I’ve written almost every song on it. Not excluding help of some writers and friends. You know Ed Sheeran?” Niall asks and Harry’s eyes widen.

“Know him? I went to uni with him. Don’t tell me, Little Things? He gave that song to you?”

“Yeah!”

Harry shakes his head in disbelief. He really doesn’t believe that this Niall is the Niall that Ed wrote with. “Why have I never made this connection before? I feel so stupid.”

“Don’t,” Niall encourages, smiling widely. “I’m actually really glad to hear that you really didn’t know who I was. Makes things more... intimate between us, ya?”

Harry can’t help the smile that stretches across his face. “Definitely.”

“You hungry? I was just about to dish out dinner before you knocked.”

“Starving.”

They sit down and eat, talking about Niall’s years on the road and what it was like experiencing the different countries he’s been to. Harry’s so surprised, so enamored by the sheer fact that Niall is so culturally adept. He can’t deny that it’s incredibly attractive. Nor can he keep the want of hearing him sing just to him to himself.

“I’d love to sit and listen to you play one day. No pressure. It’s just... I’m such a fanatic for music. I majored in it after all.”

“Oh yeah?” Niall murmurs around a bite of his Shepard’s Pie. Said it was his mum’s recipe and he wanted to bring a bit of Ireland into Harry’s life. The thought is sweet, and it’s incredibly delicious. A talented musician and a phenomenal chef, Harry must’ve found the perfect guy.
“Yep. Music engineering though. I haven’t found a job doing it, but I’m a secretary for a producer so maybe I’ll get there one day.”

Niall grins. “I know you will. I believe in you, Styles!”

Harry only laughs and they finish dinner before retreating into Niall’s living room to laze in front of the telly and watch a movie. Niall picks out *The Vow* under Harry’s request, says it’s so cheesy that it’s sort of perfect. Niall laughs, but complies with it anyways and puts the DVD in.

They’re hands deep in a bag of potato rings and midway through the movie when Niall asks what Harry’s family is like.

“My mum divorced my dad a while back. It was all right though because they’re still such good friends and Robyn, my stepdad, is super cool and helped me pay for uni and all. I have an older sister, Gemma. She’s the best. Extremely supportive, really nice and has never let me down for any reason.” Harry chuckles a bit. “She was the first person I came out to when I was about fifteen. I thought she’d push me away but she didn’t and convinced me to tell my mum when I felt ready enough. Hell, I was shocked that any of them would support me becoming a father at this age, but they were more than thrilled. I couldn’t ask for a better family.”

Niall’s smiling that genuine smile he always flashes Harry whenever he’s being honest and it melts his heart. He repositions himself on the couch, tucking his legs under him as he cuddles in towards Niall. Like it’s completely natural for them, Niall pulls Harry into his side, sliding his arm over Harry’s shoulders and rubs his thumb across his skin softly. Harry can’t get over how calloused but gentle his hands are, and lying his head against his chest, he takes in the way he steadily breathes and how fast his heart races. Niall smells of cinnamon and it reminds Harry of Christmas day at his mum’s.

After a while of silently watching and ignoring the subtle sounds of crunching down on the potato rings, Harry looks up at Niall curiously. “What about yours?”

Niall stares at him confused. “My family?”

“Yeah.”

“They’re… not much to talk about, really. My brother and his wife are really the only family I talk to now. Me mum and da kinda stepped out of the picture when I told them I was to be a singer.”

Harry twists his body around to really look up at him, his feet hanging over the edge of the cushion. “Why?”

“They have this family business, it’s just a restaurant, but… they wanted me to run it when they got too old to do it and I said no. Basically end of story. They cut me off and the last I saw them was Greg and Denise’s wedding. They didn’t say much to me then, either.”

Harry frowns. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have—”

“Don’t worry about it,” Niall says, caressing Harry’s cheek with his thumb and smiles lightly. “It was years ago. It’s nothing to feel sad about. Besides, I learned that family isn’t about who you’re related to, it’s who relates most to you and will be there no matter what.”

“Deep words, Horan. You sure you’re ready to come to the dark side?” Harry smirks, hoping to lift the mood.

“Styles, you’re suggesting that you’ve crossed that threshold, but I fail to find you there.” Niall teases
and Harry shoves him lightly.

“Hey!” But he laughs briskly.

Niall pulls Harry up and tickles his sides, causing him to jump in his spot. “Ohhhh so you’re ticklish are ya?”

“No,” Harry crosses his arms, jutting his chin up like a child.

Grinning, Niall ducks down and quickly titters his fingertips across Harry’s torso and has him in an instant fit of laughter. They’re writhing about on the couch, hystericis echoing throughout the flat when they pull away with a content sigh, staring into each other’s eyes like nothing else matters. Niall grins, returning to the potato rings and the movie.

Harry does the same, jutting his hand inside the bag but stops when a potato ring gets stuck to his finger. He pulls it out and examines his hand, “Huh, that’s never happened before.”

“Yeah?” Niall reaches into the bag and grabs one, sliding it down his own finger and twiddles them at Harry. “Now we’re married, ya?” he’s joking, but it instantly has the idea stuck in his head and Harry’s blushing from head to toe. Slowly, Niall’s soft chuckle fades when he notices the bashful look on Harry’s face and he’s mirroring the same look. “Wow, sorry, that as a bit. Much.” Niall sucks the potato ring off and eats it, discarding of all the evidence.

“It’s okay,” Harry murmurs after a while, moving to reach for Niall’s hand.

Niall glances down at their entwining fingers and back up at Harry, “I’m going to kiss you, if that’s all right?”

“Okay.”

He leans in, lips barely brushing Harry’s before they’re pressed, bodies inching closer. Harry pushes into the kiss, pressing Niall back against the couch slowly. Hands fumble awkwardly about each other’s bodies, but they figure out where they need to be touching, Niall’s arms around Harry’s neck and Harry’s hand’s cradling his back and cheek.

It’s chaste but it’s intimate. Niall doesn’t pressure him, a comfort Harry has never experienced in any relationship he’s ever had. He doesn’t even try to go further than what he’s given permission.

His whole concept is sweet and fun and everything Harry’s ever wanted in a relationship. Hopefully, that’s where things lead.

**

“So tell me how you met this guy?” Ed asks Niall mid sip of his pint, eyeing him curiously as the blush speckles across Niall’s face instantly.

Niall plays with the condensation on the glass, having not taken a drink of his beer since it was set in front of him. “I’ve met him twice actually. I don’t think he remembers the first time but the second was at a Tesco’s. I ran him over with a skateboard.”

“Smooth.”
He chuckles nervously. “Yeah. But he’s great. Super sweet, tells the shittiest jokes but they make me
laugh anyways. He’s cute.”

“Sounds like a keeper.”

“Don’t tease. How’s Kate?”

“She’s busy. She gets so involved with her work, which is great because I’m not always around. She
just had a kid a while back.”

“Yours has a kid too?”

Ed shakes his head. “No no. She was a surrogate mother for our friend. But the baby is the cutest
little fucker ever.” Ed looks to Niall, eye wide. “Wait. What’s his name?”

“Harry.” Niall answers, finally taking his first long swig of his pint.

“Styles?”

“Yeah. How’d you know?”

“No way.”

“Oh,” Niall realizes, putting the puzzle together. “How the fuck did I not notice till now? He
mentioned you last night.”

“Did he?” Ed smiles.

“This isn’t weird or anything is it?”

“No! Definitely not. Harry’s great! Best lad I’ve ever known besides you.” Ed claps him on the back
in encouragement. “He’s a keeper for sure, really.”

Niall grins widely, bowing his head bashfully. “Our little circle is so weird.”

“Wanna know the weirdest part?”

“Hmm?”

“Kate was Harry’s surrogate.”

“Oh.”

“Yep. Have you met Alex yet?”

Niall shakes his head. “Not yet.”

“Are you sure you’re ready to be with someone that has a kid?” They’re moving outside to their
usual spot to light their usual cigarette. Niall thinks it over. The idea seems simple enough, but he
knows it’s not. The whole situation is very new, Harry’s so new to him. Throwing a kid into the mix
could be a big thing for the both of them, and Niall’s not sure he is ready. All he knows is that he
wants to try with Harry, regardless.

“I have to try, right? I like him a whole lot. I’m not just going to lose feelings because of a
preexisting factor.”
Ed drags from the cigarette first, passing it over to Niall nonchalantly. “Good answer. I know we’ve been friends for a long time Niall, but Harry’s been my best mate since uni. If anyone deserves the world, it’s definitely him. I think you could be the one for him too, if things pan out properly.”

Niall’s heart is racing. It’s only been two days, but he wants to see Harry again. The night is still young, but he knows he shouldn’t bother Harry when he’s got Alexander for the night. “I really like him. He’s so genuine.” He pulls on the cigarette, exhaling the smoke slowly.

“He’s one of a kind, there’s no denying that.”

Niall calls Harry the next day, searching his barren fridge for the carton of milk he could’ve sworn he still had.

“Hey,” Harry answers with a smile.

“Hope this isn’t a bad time?”

“Nah, Alex is playing with his toys. Just fed him. I’m not really doing much. Was hoping you’d call today.” Harry explains more than a normal human would and it’s precious. Niall’s just frustrated because he cannot find the damned milk and he really wants to eat his cereal like now, but it looks like he’ll be eating it dry.

“I can’t get you out of my head,” Niall remarks and Harry’s laughing lightly.

“I didn’t know I took residence there. Maybe that’s why my apartment is a mess.”

“You’re jokes are contagiously stupid, Styles.” Niall teases.

“You still laugh at them. Don’t know why you’re complaining.”

Niall smiles, pulling a few Cheerios from the bowl and munches on them. “I’m outta milk.”

“That’s the worst. Alex goes through three gallons a week. He refuses to drink the formula I bought him.”

“Sounds like we both need to go grocery shopping.”

“Sounds like it.”

Niall gets an idea. “What would you say to me picking you up and us three go to the store?”

“You sure? That’s not too much?” Harry sounds uncertain and Niall feels a little twinge in his gut.

“Only if you don’t mind. If not, I can make the trip on my own. I don’t want to pressure you into introducing me to Alex.”

“Ohhh. So you’re just using me to get to my kid?” Harry jests and Niall can’t help the fact that his smile is growing wider.

“Could be. You’ll never know for sure, will ya?”

“Probably not. Well, I suppose it’s not a bad idea. But only if you’re ready.”

Niall nods profusely, remembering that Harry can’t actually see him. “Yes. I’m ready to meet the
Niall stops at Harry’s house, fumbling with his car keys nervously. This is it. This is really it. It couldn’t have been an easy decision for Harry to allow someone as important as his son the ability to meet Niall. He feels pretty important if he’s being terribly honest with himself. They’ve only had two dates and seen each other three times total, albeit, their many conversations through text message or over the phone don’t particularly count.

Yet, he knows Harry sort of well enough to know that this is a big deal.

He’s up the steps to Harry’s second floor flat, reading the apartment numbers on the door to take in the memory of this place. He barely remembers the 213 on the door, but he certainly recalls having their first kiss here, on this very spot and he’s already hot in the face. Niall goes to knock, but stops when he hears the incessant wailing on the other side of the door and Harry’s attempts to coo Alexander into calming down.

He knocks after the chaos inside seems to have fizzled out, and Harry’s opening the door, face flushed, hair disheveled and a red faced baby in his arms. The second Harry recognizes Niall, he’s making weak attempts at fixing his wild hair, pushing his long bangs from his eyes and smiles at him.

“H-Hey. Just got here?”

Niall shrugs, returning the smile wholeheartedly. He can’t really keep his eyes off of either of them. Harry’s messy look is unsurprisingly sexy and Niall just wants to wreck him even more, but then little Alexander is so sweet, the spitting image of his father and Niall thinks he’s fallen in love. “You could say that. You sure today’s a good day for you?” He’s asking, looking to the cranky expression on Alexander’s face that has Niall’s heart dropping because he’s so adorable and he just wants to see him smile.

Maybe he has the same dimples Harry does.

“Yeah.” Harry says almost breathless, readjusting his hair again with his free hand before tucking it back underneath Alexander to readjust him in his arms. “Sorry, Alex has been fussy since this morning. He hasn’t had his nap yet.” Harry steps to the side to let Niall into his apartment.

Niall slides inside, glancing all around at how domestically perfect Harry’s flat feels. It’s lived in, very homey, completely unlike his own and strangely enough he’s more at ease here. It’s only been like a minute and now he’s embarrassed. Scratching the back of his head, he clears his throat.

“That sounds perfect actually. Give me a few minutes, I’ll go put him to bed.” Harry states hurriedly, heading down the hallway to put Alexander down.

Niall observes the decorated walls, scanning over the various pictures of Harry and his friends and family. There’s a few framed pictures seated on the end table next to the couch and they’re all of Alexander, posing in those perfectly adorable baby poses that parents go get professionally taken. He can’t help but smile. He was right, Alexander has Harry’s dimples.

“Sorry about that. Thank you so much.” Harry breathes, returning from the hallway and greets Niall with a hug. “I wasn’t going to put him down until after we got back from the store, but he was getting so cranky and you’re a life saver.”
Niall laughs into the embrace, rubbing his hand up and down Harry’s back to soothe him. “I’ve done nothing. If anything, I’m sorry for having to make you wait to put him down for a nap.”

Harry pulls away, leaving his hands firmly placed on Niall’s hips and shakes his head. “No no. He needs to be awake for quite a few hours. He’s been keeping me up all night the past few days. I’m trying to get him on a proper schedule so I can go back to work soon.” He sighs exasperated. “So, what do you want to watch?”

Niall’s eyes flit over to the telly and he hums in thought. “Not sure, anything you feel like babe,” Harry smiles, squeezing Niall’s hips lightly before bouncing down onto the couch, grabbing at the remote and animatedly searches for something to watch. Niall joins him, nonchalantly pulling Harry into his arms for a cuddle, something so casual for them, and it should be strange, but it really isn’t.

Not twenty minutes into Keeping Up With The Kardashians—why Harry watches this bull is beyond Niall, but it was his choice—Harry’s completely conked out, snoring softly against Niall’s shirt. He smiles endearingly down at him, brushing back stray curls from his face. Long, brown eyelashes kiss the top of his high cheeks, and his plump lips look even more kissable, and Niall notices just how mature Harry actually looks. Then he sees the way he’s curled up to him, big hands fisting at the fabric of his shirt and legs tucked underneath him, mix-matching socks decorated in silly patterns. It reminds him of a child.

Harry’s just one big child-like father and Niall’s completely gone for him.

Slowly, Niall starts to nod off, Harry in his arms, the telly just a background noise for him. If this is what domestic bliss is all about, Niall wouldn’t mind doing this for the rest of his life if he could.

They wake up to the sound of Alexander crying. Harry’s quickly on his feet, half-tripping over nothing as he scrambles to hush his child. Niall stirs from his nap, rubbing his eyes and giving a small yawn that he doesn’t bother covering. He can hear the faint sound of Harry singing to Alexander and Niall’s impressed. He didn’t know he could sing.

He gets to his feet, shuffling quietly towards Harry’s voice. Niall’s rubbing at his eyes still as he watches Harry and Alexander and their father-son exchange that only they can understand. It’s a mix of wide and excited expressions, pursed lips and spit bubbles being blown out of wet lips. That’s mostly Alexander, but Niall can see how perfectly they fit.

It makes him wonder what it’d be like to be a father. Theo has always been a bit of an inspiration in Niall’s life, but he never really made him want to be a dad. Theo’s always going to be Greg and Denise’s and that’s okay because while he’s a cheerful little one, he’s also a big brat when he’s cranky, throwing things here and there and making all sorts of messes in his wake. Definitely takes after his father in that sense, the mischievousness that Greg always had as a child that Niall never really possessed until he got older.

Harry smiles down at his son, glows when he meets Niall’s eyes and walks over to him. “Hey buddy, I want you to meet someone. He’s really special to me, so be nice, yeah?” Harry coos to the babe, and Alexander giggles at the sound of his father making a baby voice. Niall’s handed Alexander, his tiny hands clinging firmly to his shirt and he’s smiling at his sweet face, admiring chipmunk cheeks Harry had to have had when he was a baby.

“Hey there, it’s lovely to meet you, little one.” Niall greets softly, smiling when Alexander allows him to reach for his hand, the baby curling his small fingers around Niall’s thumb.
“I think he likes you,” Harry nervously says, leaning in to press a quick kiss to Alexander’s temple as he plays with Niall’s thumb. It bounces up, down, left, right, whichever way Alexander commands it and Niall can only laugh. This, in turn, causes Alexander to laugh, his blue eyes squishing as his cheeks bubble up cheerfully, slight dimples indenting them.

“I think I like him too.” Niall returns, meeting Harry’s eyes once more and the sudden sigh of relief he lets out tells Niall just how nervous Harry actually has been about introducing him to Alexander. Rightfully so, too.

The moment seems ruined the second Alexander upchucks on Niall’s shoulder and Harry’s eyes grow ten times their normal size. Quickly, he removes the baby from him, settling Alexander in his crib before hurriedly coming back with a dry washcloth to wipe the ick from his shoulder. “Oh god, oh god. I’m so so sorry, Niall. That’s definitely not something anyone wants to happen on a sort of date, and oh god. It’s ruined.” Harry mumbles frantically, wiping at the fabric and Niall’s laughing.

“It’s not ruined, Harry. It’s okay.”

“No, the shirt. It’s ruined. Shit, I’m sorry. I’ll buy you a new one.” Harry clarifies and Niall looks at the stain on his shirt, completely unfazed by what’s just happened.

“Oh,” he peels the shirt from his chest and inspects it. “We’ll just throw it in the wash. I have tons of shirts, so don’t worry. Babies get sick sometimes after waking up or eating, so it’s fine.”

Harry takes the soiled shirt from Niall and heads down the hall to throw it in the wash, Niall presumes. He’s so anxious about it that Niall finds it cute. If it was anyone else, they wouldn’t care this much, he thinks. It’s probably true too.

Out of all the people Niall’s ever met in his entire life, Harry Styles has to be the most genuine human being to walk the earth.

Harry returns to the room, a clean shirt in hand and he passes it over to Niall shyly. “Just until I’ve washed your shirt. I’m really sorry.”

“If you let me kiss you, will you stop apologizing?” Niall asks cheekily, a deep red flushing straight across Harry’s face and he’s slowly nodding.

So he kisses him, hand wrapped around the small of Harry’s back, and it’s crazy, but he has to push up on his toes to reach Harry’s lips. Harry leans down, giving Niall the leverage he needs and it’s a perfect representation of how easy it is with him. The give and take and give back that he’s always needed in a relationship, and if Harry’s got a little one, well, what does that matter anyhow when Niall's certain he'll come to love anyways.

13 September

It’s the first night Harry’s had Niall stay over for any reason. They’ve been dating for a month now and he feels so lucky to have him in his life. He’s great. Funny, extremely nice and genuine, easy going. Just an all-around wonderful person. Introducing him to Alexander was so simple. Niall instantly took to the babe, knowing exactly how to interact with him and the little one seems to like him just as much. He just fits in so easily and Harry doesn’t know why anyone ever felt nervous
about having someone new around Alexander. Although, no one’s met Niall yet. That’s for tomorrow.

But tonight, tonight is all theirs.

“Don’t you wish we’d met as kids?” Niall says, voice sounding very sleepy, eyes closed and hand wrapped around Harry’s.

Smirking, Harry chuckles. “What? Where’s this coming from?”

“I was just thinking. If we’d met as kids and grew up together, would we have ended up like this?”

Shrugging, Harry buries his cheek against the pillow. “Not sure,” he yawns. “Maybe?”

“Ohkay.”

“You all right?”

“Yeah, just…” Niall bites his bottom lip and Harry’s concerned. “Don’t worry bout it, ‘m tired.”

Harry wants to pry, but he won’t. Niall’s usually an open book, but he knows when not to try and get information from him when he doesn’t want to tell it. Harry’s not sure how Niall would even react if he did, but he isn’t willing to find out. When he’s ready to say whatever he wants to say, he will.

“All right, sweet dreams.”

Niall smiles, “Sweet dreams,” and leans in to press a longing kiss to Harry’s lips before nuzzling into his pillow, their hands still entwined.

Not even ten minutes into their attempt to sleep does Alexander wake with a screeching cry and Harry’s groaning. He moves to get up and go take care of him, but Niall’s on his feet, shuffling over to Harry’s side of the bed and kisses his forehead. “I’ve got this. Go back t’ bed, love.” And sure as shit, Niall goes down the hall and into Alexander’s room. Harry can hear him softly whispering to the baby, singing him to sleep like Harry does and even he succumbs to his beautiful melody.

Slowly, Harry falls back to sleep, dreaming of what it’d be like to have a family with Niall.

Harry wakes up before everyone else. It’s not even six, but he can’t sleep anymore. Shuffling from the room, he shuts the door, heading down the hall to the kitchen to make himself a cuppa. He opens the fridge, searching for ingredients to make for breakfast. At least he can be the domestic boyfriend and cook Niall a proper morning after spread.

Except. They aren’t official yet.

Sometimes it really seems like they are with having Niall over almost every day, helping Harry take care of Alexander and then at night they can settle down on the couch and watch films together until sleep starts to overcome them. Every night before though, Niall would go home.

Last night really was a first for them for anything.

Fixing up the rest of his coffee, he taps the stirring spoon lightly along the rim of the cup, setting it down as he brings the hot mug to his lips. He sips gingerly at it, relishing the bit of warmth from it.
It’s nearing the end of September and it’s starting to get a bit nippy. Looking down the hall, he notes the peaceful silence and figures he has at least twenty minutes before Alexander wakes up.

Louis’ been trying to get him to stop, but Harry can’t shake his cigarette addiction. He’s brought himself down to three a day, which is a fraction of what he used to consume, but it’s not enough for Louis. Stepping out onto his balcony, Harry sets his cuppa down on the brick wall, lights his stick and watches the sunrise.

He’s dragging down the last of the cigarette when the door opens and Niall’s sleepy form is stumbling out of the flat. “Hey sleepyhead.” Harry coos softly. Niall rubs the sleep from his eyes, yawns and scratches his stomach.

“Mornin’.” Whoa. Harry’s never heard his accent so thick before. Must be the morning still trying to settle in. “Alex is still sleepin’.”

“I know. It’s an absolute blessing. I didn’t think you’d be awake till later though.” Harry whispers, reaching for his cup and sips at it. Niall wraps his arms around Harry’s waist and rests his chin on his shoulder, staring out at the east coast.

“Felt lonely without you.”

“Corny much?”

Niall kisses his shoulder and smiles against his skin. “You know it’s my only good trait.”

“You have more than that, I’m certain,” Harry quips smarmily.

“Oh yeah? Like what?”

“Well,” Harry sets his mug down and turns his body in Niall’s embrace, holding his face gently. “You’ve got a charming personality, the most genuine smile I’ve ever seen, it’s a bonus that you can sing. Even more of a bonus that you’re incredibly attractive. I’d have to say that I’m absolutely lucky.”

“Then we’re both lucky,” Niall mumbles along Harry’s lips, breathing him into a longing kiss. He pulls away suddenly, though, realizing something. “Sorry, morning breath.” He bashfully admits, covering his mouth.

Shrugging, Harry passes his coffee over. “Drink some and give me another kiss, yeah?”

Niall doesn’t seem to have an issue complying to that.

Louis, Zayn and Blaze come over around one. Harry’s almost done preparing lunch for everyone and Niall’s in the bedroom with Alexander, dressing him from his bath.


“Just some ravioli. Homemade sauce, but the ravioli are store bought.”

“As long as it isn’t that Chef Boyardee crud people try to pass off as food,” Louis scoffs from the kitchen’s archway.

Harry laughs. “You’re just mad because that’s all you could afford in uni.”
Louis shushes him. “We don’t discuss those dark days.” Blaze comes running down the hall and crashes into Harry’s legs in a hug.

“Hi! I’m an airplane!” He exclaims then zooms around the kitchen with his arms stretched out like wings.

“That you are!” Harry snickers, returning to his sauce.

Louis chases after Blaze, “Hey, be careful. Don’t break anything.”

“I won’t daddy.”

Seconds later there’s a crashing sound and Louis’ groaning angrily. “Gosh darnit child. I can’t take you anywhere anymore.”

“I’m sorry,” Blaze sobs and Harry shakes his head, just another day with the Malik-Tomlinson’s and the whole family is reunited after weeks of being apart.

“So, is he here?” Zayn asks.

“Mhm. He’s getting Alex dressed. He’ll be out in a sec.” Harry pulls the colander from the sink and sets it inside the empty pot, dishing out five bowls and pours sauce over each one. He goes over to the fridge and pulls the mozzarella out, meeting Niall’s smiling face as he’s moving down the hall with Alexander giggling in his arms. Harry smiles back at him, bringing all the plates out to the dining table and takes Alexander from Niall and grabs his bottle from the counter, offering the teat to his lips. “Drink up, baby. I know you’re hungry.” Alexander drinks from it, his little chubby fingers barely able to grip the bottle. “All right, lunch is ready. Lou, Blaze, come and eat.” He calls, sitting down next to Niall, continuing to nurse the little one.

Louis and Blaze return from the living room and settle into their seats. Upon spotting Niall, he pauses and Harry’s struck with confusion.

“You all right, Lou?”

Niall seems just as shocked, mouth gaped and his forkful of ravioli paused between him and the plate.

“Yeah, Haz.” Louis says after a few moments, seating himself but warily keeping an eye on Niall. “I’m guessing you’re Niall?”

Niall shoves the ravioli in his mouth and chews quickly, gulping it down. Harry watches their awkward exchange, sort of on edge.

“The one and only.” He takes a drink of his water and continues eating his food.

There’s an unspoken tension at the table, despite Blaze making all sorts of noises and plays with his food. Louis keeps staring at Niall and it’s everything Niall can do not to meet his eye. Harry looks to Zayn for an answer but he shrugs, returning to his food.

Harry nibbles here and there on his lunch, making sure Alexander drinks the full bottle, patting his back to burp him.

By the time lunch is done, Zayn and Niall are clearing the table, Louis and Blaze are back in the living room playing with his toys, and Harry’s putting Alexander down for his afternoon nap. Whatever animosity is in the air, Harry needs it to go away fast.
He joins Louis on the floor, crossing his legs and watches him and Blaze play for a few moments. “What’s going on?”

“What do you mean?” Louis plays off and Harry scoffs.

“Stop, don’t beat around the bush. Just tell me what’s wrong? Do you know Niall?”

“Sort of,” Louis gives, handing Blaze’s stuffed lion over, finally looking Harry in the eye. “You remember your birthday and how we went to the club?”

“Yeah? I can’t remember anything after we got there though. Why?”

“You uhh… You hooked up with Niall in the bathroom,” Louis admits, turning away from him.

To say that Harry’s startled is a complete understatement. “I what? Oh my god. No way that happened.”

“I kinda caught you red handed. I think, maybe Niall doesn’t remember either or…”

“No, wait.” Harry thinks back to when he met Niall at Tesco’s. “He said that we’ve met before and that it can’t be a coincidence. Oh god.” He rubs his hands over his face. “Oh god, this is not happening.”

Louis shrugs. “You should probably talk to him about it. I’m sorry if I seemed a bit of a snob during lunch. I just… wanted to make sure he’s serious about this with you. I don’t want a repeat of—”

“All right, the dishes are done,” Niall states, he and Zayn joining them. Niall settles onto the couch behind Harry and smiles. “Wanna watch a movie or something?”

Harry’s not sure how to process this information, but, he knows he’s not mad. Confused, definitely, but Niall has been nothing but genuine. Besides that, if what Louis says is true, that happened months ago. Maybe Niall was just as fucked up as he as that night and things went the way they went.

“Sure.” He gets up and climbs onto the couch next to him.

One things for sure, he’ll have to get some answers.

*

Louis and Zayn say their good byes. Louis hauls a sleeping Blaze over his shoulder, going down to put him in the car. Zayn stays behind for a second, whispering to Harry, “Hey, Niall’s a good guy. Louis told me about, ya know. But I can tell he’s pretty much fallen for you.”

Harry blushes.

“So like, don’t be mad?”

He shakes his head. “’m not mad. Thanks for looking out.”

“Good night, Harry.”
“Night, Zayn.”

Harry closes the door and heads to his son’s room, leaning against the doorway, observing Niall putting Alexander to sleep. “Who’s the best little baby in the world? You are. Yes you.” Alexander giggles, and it lights Niall’s face up. He figures Niall’s got this handle and goes to the bathroom to get ready for bed.

Returning from the bathroom, Harry heads to his bedroom and stares at Niall’s form lying in bed, exhausted from helping take care of Alexander all day. He tries to remember what had happened that one night, urges his brain to recreate the memories, but it’s no use. Maybe he’ll have to ask Niall after all.

He pulls his shirt off, climbing into bed and settles in behind Niall. He starts to stir, tired eyes glance to him, half lidded. “Hey.”

“Hey. Can we talk?”

Niall starts to sit up. “Sure. What’s up?” He yawns. Harry turns the tableside lamp on.

“When we first met, or at least, my first recollection, it was at Tesco’s and you had said that it wasn’t a coincidence that we met again.”

“Wait… what?”

“Did we hook up? Once before? At a club?”

Niall’s silent, staring him dead in the eye but he looks like he’s processing things. “You really don’t remember?”

Harry scratches the back of his head and sighs. “No. Louis gave me ecstasy that night. It was my birthday. He wanted me to have a good time and I guess I got faded and I must’ve taken advantage of you. I’m sorry.”

Niall reaches for Harry’s hands and shakes his head. “No. Don’t be. If anything, I took advantage of you. Or maybe we both took advantage of each other. I mean. I was pretty drunk, but I can handle my alcohol and the second I saw you just dancing by yourself, looking like you were having so much fun, it was just… so fucking sexy,” he breathes. “I couldn’t contain this sudden urge to dance with you. Then the next thing I knew, we were in the bathroom and I gave you head and then Louis came in looking for you. I ran. I was so embarrassed that we were caught. I regretted it afterwards though, running away that is. I really wanted your number. I didn’t even know your name.”

Harry scans over his contemplative expression, sees him forcing the memories.

“I couldn’t get you out of my head either. It was driving me nuts. Running you over in Tesco’s was complete fate. It had to have been. I didn’t even know you lived in the area. Then you had to go again and I kicked myself in the ass and forced myself to ask for your number. That’s uh… that’s pretty much it.” Niall finishes, looking down at his lap, afraid to meet Harry’s gaze. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you before. I thought you just didn’t want to remember me so I left it alone. But then I really started to fall for you and I’m just scared that I’m being naïve because you’re the first guy I’ve ever dated that actually likes me for me and not because I’m attractive or wealthy or famous.”

“Wait, you’re wealthy and famous?” Harry smirks and Niall lightly punches his shoulder.
“Oh shut up.”

“I know, I’m just giving you crap because there’s no need to put yourself down.”

“So you’re okay with this information? You’re okay knowing that I’m falling for you?”

Harry looks up and ponders it. “Hmm… well, only if you’ll say you’ll be my boyfriend.”

Niall doesn’t even have to respond to that. He jumps on top of Harry and kisses him hard, straddling his hips. “Yes. God yes. Of course I’ll be your boyfriend.” Niall answer between kisses.

“Good. I didn’t think I could go another night with you in my bed without knowing,” Harry hums, and Niall lays his head on his chest, listening to the beating of his heart. “Besides that, you make a fantastic live in babysitter.”

“Your jokes are awful,” Niall groans, rolling off of his chest to retreat to his side of the bed, but Harry catches him.

“Heyyy, don’t run away.”

“I’m going to catch the stupid joke disease! Help!” Niall whisper yells and Harry starts tickling him. A burst of laughter erupts from him and Harry has to shush him. “Niall, shhh… Alex.” He reminds and the blonde rolls over onto his back, gazing at a dimple faced boy with long curly hair.

“Then make me be quiet.”

Harry accepts the invitation, leaning down to bring their lips together.

Chapter End Notes

Finally! Niall's in the story Alexander is born and Harry's finally a daddy. I'm not finished yet though. So hopefully I'll see you guys in the next part?
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I am literally so tired of staring at the screen and hoping I could add more to this chapter, but I think I'm pretty satisfied with it. Anyways. Hope you like it!

14 October

Harry’s falling. He’s falling so hard and it’s almost unreal. He looks at Niall and he sees the world. He looks at Niall and Alexander and sees how everything else up till now finally makes sense. He doesn’t know how things worked out the way that they have and he doesn’t want to know because Harry could never imagine life without either of them. He loves every day of his life, adores how Niall’s always readily there to make sure him and Alexander are comfortable. He’s always there to help him put the little one to sleep when Harry’s too tired to do so. He really is. Alexander is only two and a half months old, but Harry’s absolutely exhausted and he can never find the energy for a lot of other things, which, despite his and Niall’s budding relationship, it’s okay. Niall can’t blame him for being too tired for dates or doing anything out of cuddling and falling asleep kissing.

Harry wants to explore other things with Niall, though. Wants to take things further with him, be that good boyfriend he wants to be.

Harry wants to know what it’s like for him, being a famous pop star, having to deal with fans all the time, but Niall doesn’t give him that option. He says it’s a world outside both of their own that he really refuses to entertain anymore because he has Harry and Alexander now and couldn’t care about anything else. Harry half wonders if Niall will ever leave though.

Go on tour and never come back, that sort of thing.

Niall spoils them. Constantly taking Harry and Alexander anywhere they want to go. The aquarium, the park, to footie games where Niall hopes to influence Alexander into becoming just as obsessed as he is. Niall’s pretty much become a permanent fixture in Harry’s life. He hopes that he’ll want to stick around long enough to become the second parental figure in Alexander’s life.

It’s all completely domestic, if anyone were to ask Harry. A year ago, he remembers watching Louis and Zayn take care of Blaze and how jealous he felt and now, now none of that seems to matter with Niall and Alexander. Surrealism seems to be his big thing right now, having felt like none of this is really real, but Harry knows better.

Niall stays over almost every night. If not, Harry’s still waking up to the sight of him. Niall has this ritual of going down to Harry’s favorite café bright and early and getting his favorite mocha cappuccino with no foam, whipped cream and the little chocolate sprinkles Harry can’t get enough of. Those mornings are usually only when Niall’s had a guy’s night out with Ed and Matty, which is perfectly okay. Niall has a life outside of Harry and Alexander and he can definitely deal with that.
At this point, Harry would rather stay in and make sure Alexander is taken care of than go out and hang with the guys. It comes down to two reasons: he hates finding a babysitter, which is either Louis or his mum and he always feels like he’s imposing on them, and because he’s just too worn out to go and party like the guys want to.

This is one of those nights where Harry is at home and Niall’s going out with the guys. Like usual, he doesn't mind but some part of him does mind. Niall went out last night, and now he's going out again.

Harry's a bit jealous, actually.

"You're leaving?" Harry asks, watching Niall get ready. He's taking his hands through his hair, messing up his quiff to give it that bed head look that Harry always loves.

Blue eyes meet green in the mirror and there's a reluctance to Niall’s smile. "Yeah. Bressie wants me to do another song with Ed. I won't be gone too long."

Harry glances at his watch. 8:49pm. He shakes his head. "Yeah. Don't worry too much about it. Alex and I will be asleep in about an hour."

"Oh," Niall frowns, reaching for the mouthwash and rinses his mouth out. He spits into the sink, wipes his lips and turns to Harry. "Did you want me to stay at my place tonight then?"

Harry isn't sure. He's yet to give Niall a key, something he's wanted to do for a while. Louis says it's a bad idea, having not given Zayn a key until a year into their relationship. Harry likes to think he trusts Niall enough, but he's been wrong before and wants to be smart this time around. They haven't even had sex yet and Louis says that's an accomplishment in itself.

Harry scratches the back of his head. "Uh... Did you want to come back? If not, it doesn't matter to me." It does, it really does, because waking up without Niall stings and feels cold and empty. He just doesn't want him to feel obligated.

"I won't get back til maybe eleven? I'll probably just go home tonight."

Harry just nods, stepping out of the bathroom to head into the kitchen, fixing up a bottle, just enough to get him to sleep. He tests the temperature on his arm, deeming it warm enough to give to him. Just as Harry's heading back to Alexander's room, Niall stops him, hands reaching out to caress Harry's arms. "Are you mad?"

"No."

"You're a crap liar, love."

"I'm tired." Harry sighs, looking away. It's half true, but he can tell that Niall sees right through him.

Either way, Niall lets Harry have his excuse and leaves it alone. "I'll be back in the morning, then. With your favorite?"

"Nah. Go ahead and sleep in tomorrow. I want the day to myself," Harry thinks out loud and instantly regrets it. Niall looks like he's been hit, staring up at him with big, sad eyes.

Harry doesn't know why he's in a mood. Niall going out and having a life isn't an excuse to feel butt hurt, but he goes. Not that he'll really admit it. The worst part is how easy Niall is to let Harry have his way, even if he's find nothing wrong.
"All right. I suppose that's fair." Niall concedes, nodding in understanding. "I'll see you later then?"

"Yeah," Harry can't look at him. Guilt overwhelming his body and all he wants to do is take back what he said and give him his key so he can come back.

He really hates waking up alone.

"Can I have a kiss?" Niall’s cautious. The uncertainty that things are okay is clear as day on his face. All it does is adds more to Harry's guilt.

A kiss, though, sounds fucking fantastic right now.

So he leans in, resting his hands on Niall’s hips, thumbs hooked on the loops of his pants, and pulls him up for a lingering kiss. Niall wraps his arms around Harry’s neck, pushing up on his toes. He licks at Harry's bottom lip, sliding his tongue along Harry's and all he can taste is the sweet spearmint of their mouthwash. Harry runs a hand through the back of Niall’s mussed hair, gripping lightly.

It takes all Harry has to keep from inviting him back to his room and finally cross that threshold in their relationship. Niall pulls away, pressing his lips to the underside of Harry’s jaw, sucking lightly. Harry lets out a soft moan, yanking harder at Niall’s hair when he bites down on sensitive skin. He hissed, but it only encourages Niall more.

Harry knows he's at least half hard by now, he just hopes Niall doesn't notice.

Suddenly, Alexander's crying and they break apart instantly. "Sorry," Harry mouths to Niall and heads into Alexander's room. The bottle in the back of Harry's picket almost forgotten.

Alexander is beat red, tears streaming down his puffy face, but the second Harry has him in his arms, rocking him and offering the bottle over, he goes silent. His big, green-blue eyes look up to Harry, tiny hands weakly pressed against the bottle. Harry smiles softly, eyes bright in wonder that Alexander is this beautiful.

After a few minutes, he feels a presence at his side. Niall sets his hands on Harry's arms, leaning against him lightly. "You two are my world," he whispers. Harry wishes he could believe it, but he doesn't allow himself the luxury.

All he see is hums, tilting the bottle to offer the rest of the milk to Alexander.

"I'll stay," Niall days after a while, watching Harry put Alexander in his crib, tucking the sleeping babe in.

Harry doesn't say anything. He walks out of the bedroom, turns the light off and closes it behind Niall. "Do you not want me to stay?" Harry's in the bathroom, brushing his teeth to avoid answering him. Afterwards, he moves to the room, stripping off his kit and settles into bed. He brings his copy of The Hunger Games into his lap and begins reading where he left off.

"So you're just going to ignore me, then?" Niall asks impatiently, and Harry finally glances up to him. Niall’s leaning against the doorway, arms crossed.

"I'm going to bed Niall." Harry says, his tone flat. "Go out and have fun."

"You obviously don't want me to go."

"No, I don't but I'm not stopping you either. Do what feels right, babe." He settles on, hoping it conveys that he's not really angry.
Niall, as usual, surprises him, unbuttoning his navy blue dress shirt and peels it from his arms. He settles it on the armchair next to the door, and moves towards Harry, climbing onto the bed to straddle his waist. "I'm staying."

Harry settles his book back in its place on the nightstand, and stares up at Niall curiously. "Really, you don't have to. I'm sorry for being such a twat. I'm just exhausted."

Niall rubs his hands up and down Harry's arms, shaking his head. "I know you are, but I want to stay. Ed and I can get together later about a song."

"Niall."

"Yes Harry?"

"You're an idiot."

"Maybe," he smiles, kissing Harry's forehead. "But I'm your idiot."

*I*

"I can't believe he's going to be five." Harry remarks, watching Blaze play with his avengers toys with Zayn commandeering the iron man figure. Louis smiles, lighting up their little kitchen almost instantly. Harry bounces Alexander on his leg, the baby humming. "Can't believe almost a year ago, Alex was just an idea."

"Our little miracles." They aren't really, but Harry lets him think that way. Louis' just so proud and that's all that matters. "I'm not ready for him to go to preschool either."

"If your reaction to daycare was anything then," Harry trails, a teasing smirk directed at Louis. He hits Harry's arm lightly, sticking his tongue out at him before turning back to the pot of noodles that should be about ready. "It'll be fine though. Blaze is getting along great with other kids right?"

Louis shrugs, looking over his shoulder. "For the most part. His daycare sitter says he likes to play pranks though. Eats glue and Play-Doh too."

Harry laughs. "Why does this sound familiar?"

"Hush. We don't bring up dark days."

"Awww c'mon, you were so cute when we were kids. I remember Jo grounding you from Play-Doh completely when you were seven. You ate it like it was the best thing ever."

"Twat."

Zayn gets up from the floor, kisses Blaze's head, and steps up to Louis. He presses a kiss to his cheek and watches him cook. "Hey, love. Watcha cooking?"

"Just some spaghetti. Maybe I'll get Xander to try it and he'll make a mess of Harry's silk shirt."

"Heyyy," Harry whines, pouting his bottom lip up at Louis. He returns it by sticking his tongue out.

"That's what you get for wearing nice clothes around a three month old baby."
"Alex is more behaved than that." Harry argues, angling his nose up towards the ceiling before leaning down to nuzzle his cheek with Alexander's. He giggles, then bubbles up spit, and Louis is passing Harry a napkin to wipe off his face.

"Right. But that doesn't mean he won't make a mess." He winks, returning to the pot of noodles. "I don't know why I come over here," Harry sighs. "Alex, let's go home. We're more fun than this guy."

Alexander coos to nothing in particular.

"That settles it. He's laid down the law."

Louis rolls his eyes and Zayn laughs.

“So, I think I know what we should do for Blaze’s birthday,” Zayn announces and Louis gives him a look. “It’ll be inexpensive, love. Don’t worry.”

Harry frowns, watching their little exchange. The severity of their finances aren’t talked about in front of him, but he can tell they’re still struggling. Even after a year, everything just seems to have gone further downhill, especially with Louis not being able to find acting jobs. He wishes he could help, but Louis’ too proud to ask, and would get upset if Harry even offered.

“My parents have a bungalow up on the Fylde Coast. My baba said we could use it for the weekend if we want. They’ll get all the groceries too if we needed,” Zayn explains. Louis strains the noodles in the colander and thinks it over. “It’d be nice to have a weekend with just us. Harry and Xander included if they want.”

Louis glances over to Harry, and he sits up straight in attention. “Would you want to go? You could bring Niall if you wanted as well.”

“Yeah. It’d be fun. I just hope Alex won’t be too much to handle if we go.” He admits, looking to his son, praying that he won’t be too fussy.

“Then it’s settled. We’ll head out on Thursday night and come back Sunday, yeah?” Zayn confirms and they nod.

**

“A weekend away with my two favorite guys? Count me in.” Niall smiles over dinner on that following Tuesday. He’s excited. A weekend away with Harry is exactly what he’s been wanting for ages. Maybe they could do other things to get rid of this building tension that’s been forming for weeks. “You sure Louis and Zayn won’t mind?”

Harry shakes his head, smiling from ear to ear. “Louis personally asked me if I wanted you to come with us. I’m pretty sure it’s all right.”

“Guess that means we’ll have to be good children then,” Niall wiggles his eyebrows flirtatiously and Harry almost chokes on his bite of chicken. A blush forms across his cheeks and he glances away at anything else but Niall. “Oh, love, it was a joke.”
"I know. But we’ve never actually talked about… that."

Niall gets up from his seat and settles into the one next to Harry, scooting the chair close. He rests his head on Harry’s shoulder and relaxes. “And we still don’t have to talk about that if you don’t want to.”

Harry shoves a piece of chicken around on his plate, keeping his eyes on it. “I want to.” He mumbles.

“You want to… what?”

“Talk about it? Maybe actually do it?”

“You want to have sex?”

“Maybe?” Harry looks to Niall now, eyebrows raised, face completely flushed red.

It’s adorable, the way Harry looks so innocent, but Niall knows better than that. Remembers better than that, but they don’t talk about that night in the club bathroom. “We can talk about it if you’d like. I’m not pressuring you into anything.”

“I know that. But there’s so much,” he trails, eyes flitting towards everywhere else but Niall. “Tension. It’s literally all I’ve been able to think about for the longest time.”

Niall’s shocked, if he’s being honest. Harry Styles has never admitted his sexual tensions before and Niall's curiosity is definitely getting the better of him. he doesn't say anything, though, for fear that Harry won't be able to get out the rest of what he needs to say.

"I'm not saying we have to, or that it's something that's super important to our relationship, I just..." Harry palms his face in frustration. "Maybe it's the reason as to why I've been so moody lately."

"So it's not your monthly hormones?" Niall quips and Harry shoves him lightly, a tiny smile caressing his face.

"Shut up. Of course not."

Niall chuckles, pulling Harry into a side hug, and kisses his temple. "I know, love. But whatever you decide, I'll be okay with. If you aren't ready, then I'm not ready. If you are then..."

Harry meets Niall’s gaze. His cheeks flush bright red. "I'm ready."

Niall breathes out a soft sigh, smiling through it, assuring Harry that he doesn't mind either way. "Okay."

"Maybe later, when Alex is really down for the night?"

"Maybe. Whenever you would like."

"Okay," and Harry nuzzles up to Niall’s side. He sets his hand on his thigh and squeezes. It's a sweet moment, perfectly content, until they hear a loud screech coming from Alexander's room and they're both on their feet.

Flicking the light on, Harry quickly rushes to Alexander, reaches into the crib and pulls him into his arms. "Shh, it's all right baby. Daddy's got you." His big green eyes look up to Harry, flooded with tears but he doesn't calm down like he usually does. Niall passes Harry Alexander's stuffed rabbit and Harry offers it to the crying babe. It seems to do the trick.
He checks the time on his watch, 7:54. Alexander had only been down for twenty four minutes and he couldn't sleep without his stuffed rabbit. If that's not cute, Harry doesn't know what else is.

Even he can't sleep without his own rabbit, and Niall’s looking at Alexander like he's everything to him.

Harry can't believe how lucky he is that he got these two.

* 

Harry's frantic trying to get everything put together for the trip. Why he waited till the day of to start packing, he has no idea. The answer is so simple though with Alexander being so fussy the past two days and Harry can barely get any sleep. Of course, he and Niall take turns taking care of the little one, but Harry's mum suspects he might have colic and that's something Harry didn't want to ever worry over.

The screaming episodes are awful. Screeching, ear piercing wails of Harry's utter annoyance and concern over not being able to soothe his poor child. He'll cry for hours on end, face squished unhappily and red all over, his little hands balled up in fists, surely cutting off circulation by the blotchiness of his skin.

Harry's at his wits end, pulling on the roots of his hair with no solution on how to help his son.

"I don't know how I'm going to survive this trip. I can't have a colic-y baby the whole weekend. Louis and Zayn will crack before I do," Harry worries, pacing his room while trying his hardest to ignore the screams coming from the room over. Niall watches him move back and forth in front of the bed for a little while before he deliberately reaches his hands out to stop him in his tracks.

"Harry, babe, calm down. It'll be all right. I'm sure Louis and Zayn will understand if you tell them you can't go."

Harry ducks his head in defeat, relaxing his fingers between Niall's and gives a deep sigh. "But it's Blaze's fifth birthday, Ni. I can't miss it."

"Then what should we do?"

Harry loves that Niall considers their weird trio as a we. Makes him feel like they're a proper family. He shrugs. "I really don't know. I'm not leaving him at someone else's mercy either."

Alexander's screams heighten and Harry rolls his eyes, growling in exasperation as he gives up and marches back to his room. "All right, love, were going to make things better for you." Harry announces, lifting the wailing child into his arms and offers him his binky. Alexander moves his head away in disgust, eliciting a deep agitated sigh from Harry before he's softly shushing him, rocking the baby in his grasp.

"Hush little baby, don't say a word, daddy's gonna buy you a mockingbird," Harry begins to sing, and somehow, Alexander's cries begin to die down. Niall comes into the room and joins in on the song, soothing him almost indefinitely. "And if that horse and cart fall down, you'll still be the sweetest little baby in town." They both finish and without fail, Alexander has drifted off to sleep.

"Wish that worked earlier." Niall remarks and Harry can't help but agree, slowly settling the child.
back into his crib. "You still think he'll be such a problem?"

Harry cards his hand through his hair and shakes his head. "God, I don't know. But no matter what, I'll make sure he's the best little baby in the world."

Niall tangles his hand into Harry's and squeezes softly. "We'll make sure he's the best little baby in the world."

_I love you._ Harry wants to say, but bites down on the three words before he can utter them. Instead, he gives Niall a small smile and leans down to kiss him gently. "I think you may be my savior."

"Irish Jesus?" Niall offers and Harry rolls his eyes.

"Sure, Irish Jesus, you weirdo."

"Learned it from you," Niall coos, kissing Harry again before quietly tittering away from the room and into the kitchen. "What do you say I make us lunch and then we can finish packing?" He suggests as Harry joins his company.

"That sounds like heaven," Harry moans, plopping down on a chair at the dining table. "I could really go for a pint right now too," he adds, palming his face. Niall gives him a look, one that says he'd go for one easily, but they know better than that. Harry, as carefree as he can be, is still pretty sensible when it comes to being around Alexander. So when at home, there's a rule that dictates no alcohol, and Niall's quick to follow that.

"Craic." Niall comments, turning to the stove to fix whatever he's cooking. At this point, Harry could settle for a sandwich, but Niall's cooking is dead second to his mum's and he would kill to have it every day for the rest of his life.

It feels like only minutes have passed when Niall sets a piping hot plate of steamed vegetables and a pan seared chicken breast. "Sick. Thanks babe. Looks great."

Niall settles into the seat next to Harry and smiles, taking his first bite.

The trip up to the Malik’s bungalow isn’t too bad. Alexander sleeps most of the way, which is a complete god send. It’s only a couple of hours, but the time spent with Niall feels like a forever for Harry.

“Harry, look,” Niall points out at the sky on his side. Harry slightly looks, but tries to keep his eyes on the road. “Pull over, babe, let’s get a picture.” Of what, Harry’s uncertain, but he does what he’s requested and they both get out of the car quietly. When Harry looks up, he’s greeted by a magnificent sunset adorned with a double rainbow and okay, wow, that’s possibly the prettiest thing he’s ever seen. The mix of orange, pink, and purple with the luminance of the setting sun is like magic.

Off in the distance, Harry can see a bit of the coast waters sparkling with the sun’s reflection. It reminds him of Niall. Every time he looks into those eyes, he sees the ocean and the sun meeting and it’s an absolute work of art.

“You ready?” Niall asks, pulling Harry to his side, turning them around so their backs are facing the sunset, and points the camera up to focus on them. Harry smiles, leaning his cheek against Niall’s and he takes the shot. There’s a nice contrast of the sun that seems to match Niall’s eyes and Harry’s so gone for him that he can’t be bothered with anything else. To think, something as simple as a
picture with the setting sun on the way to Fylde Coast would possibly make him feel this way, but it does. It’s not just because of the picture, or the location, or the how, it’s the way they work and the reasons why Harry’s never felt more at ease with anyone else but Niall.

It’s because he’s sure he’s fallen so far in love with Niall Horan that he feels like he might burst from happiness.

They watch the sunset for a few more minutes, holding hands, quietly listening to life breeze by. Alexander gives a small groan and they head back to the car, Harry starting it back up and Niall offering the baby his binky, and they’re off again.

*

It's been ages, but Harry remembers spending summers between semesters here, where he, Louis and Zayn would all get high and sit outside by the campfire, watching the night sky float by. Everything always seemed so difficult for them, but looking back, Harry knows that was just stupid kid stuff and the real challenges are the here and now. Being a parent, while he made the choice solely, and Louis by accident, is the toughest, most fulfilling thing they have ever done.

So it only feels natural that they celebrate Blaze's birthday here. After all, the night he was named was spent sitting outside, watching the night for what felt like the last time they'd ever see the same one again.

The second Harry and Niall arrive, Louis is trudging outside, splattered with chocolate cake batter and Harry assumes one thing. Blaze.

"Are you serious? You thought baking with Blaze was smart?" Harry titters and Louis rolls his eyes.

"Piss off, yeah? He just... You know. He likes painting things. Like his baba." Louis admits, nervously rubbing the back of his neck. "Stop laughing, Niall, don't be a twat either."

Niall puts his hands up in surrender, stifling a deserved laugh. Louis steps up to the truck and watches Harry pull Alexander from his seat, the baby looking like he's just woken up.

"How has he been doing?"

"All right. He had a couple episodes today, but he slept the whole way here, I think he'll be all right." Harry answers, rubbing Alexander's back soothingly. Before they left, Harry had called Louis and told him about his colic, remembering when Blaze went through that phase too.

"I'd help you bring stuff in but," he trails, gesturing to his batter smeared shirt and arms. "I'm gonna go jump in the shower, but Zayn and Blaze are in the kitchen when you come in."

"Okay, thanks Lou." Harry nods, and Louis heads back up to the house.

They slowly get all their things inside, setting them down in the guest room opposite of where Alexander will sleep. Zayn offered to give him the room to himself, even though there's only three bedrooms. Harry feels bad, since Blaze will have to sleep with them, but the gesture is greatly appreciated. Blaze's crib is still there from years ago, so that works too.

"Uncle Harry!" Blaze squeals the second he sees him walk into the kitchen, and his grin grows when
he sets his sights on Alexander. "Little brother!"

"Hey birthday boy," Harry greets, kneeling down so Blaze can kiss both of their cheeks. "Alex just woke up. So he's a little cranky."

"'S okay." Blaze coos, giving Alexander another kiss. "Baba and I are baking a cake!"

"I saw, it was all over daddy," Harry grins and Blaze blushes.

Blaze looks incredulous. "Oh, you saw that?"

"Mhm. It was funny."

Zayn chuckles from the other side of the kitchen. Niall steps up next to him, eyeing the cake batter being poured into the pan. He looks like he’s going to start drooling sometime soon.

"That smells awesome, mate." Niall remarks. Of course the first comment he makes is about food.

"Don't, Zayn. You'll never see that cake become one if you let him try it," Harry teases and Niall blows a raspberry at him.

Zayn laughs it off, shaking his head. "Okay okay. This is going in the oven and that's it."

"Baba, cake!" Blaze shouts in excitement, jumping up and down.

"Not yet, bub. It's for tomorrow," Zayn says, puts the pan in the oven and sets the timer. Blaze rushes his leg, pouting.

"Want cake, now!" he screams. Harry and Niall give each other a look across the kitchen.

Zayn frowns, "Keep that up, and you won't get any."

"Why baba?! Why?! Blaze's cake! It's mine!"

"Stop."

"No!" Blaze stomps, crossing his arms. His face is red, fuming, and Harry's sure Zayn's almost at his limit. He hasn't seen Blaze have a meltdown in ever, but Harry knows Zayn won't put up with it.

"I'll put you in time out if you don't stop." Zayn warns.

Blaze starts crying at the threat. "Baba mean! I hate you!"

"Hey!" It's Louis now, freshly out of the shower and at Harry's side. His hair is still drenched, something Harry hasn't seen in years. He's usually so well kept. "You knock that off right now. Don't say mean things like that, apologize to baba." He approaches Blaze, who's definitely throwing a tantrum now.

Harry holds Alexander's head against his shoulder, rocking him lightly, hoping that Blaze won't set him off too. Niall's quickly at his side, reaching for Alexander. "I'll go put him to bed, kay?" He offers quietly and Harry happily passes him over.

"Please. I'll be in in a second to kiss him goodnight."

"Okay, love," Niall smiles, pressing a quick kiss to Harry's lips before trotting off.
"No! I want my CAKE!"

"Keep this up and you won't have a birthday young man." Louis scowls, staring Blaze down.

Blaze isn't having it though. Harry can hardly believe it, but he does, because while he's usually a good kid, he has moments. All kids do. But this has to be one of his worst fits.

"I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!"

Louis grimaces deeply. He reaches for Blaze's arm and pulls him towards the hallway. "That's it. Time for bed."

"No daddy! Not tired!"

"I don't care. You're such a brat." Louis bites back and then the door closes and there's muffled screaming.

Harry and Zayn exchange stares and sigh.

"Hope Alex will never be like that, but I know better."

"Yep."

"I guess I'll check on Niall and Alex." He starts to turn down the hall when Zayn stops him. He’s leaning against the countertop, an exasperation expression plastered across his face almost permanently. Zayn has his head rested in his palms, rubbing them across his face before glancing up to Harry.

"Hey, how are you and Niall?"

Harry halts, glancing over his shoulder curiously. "We’re fine, why?"

Zayn shrugs. "Just wondering, you two are cute. It's been what? Two months?"

"About, yeah."

"You think it'll really work out?"

Harry considers it. "Yeah, I mean, he's great with Alex and he's really good to me."

"But?"

"No buts, just not setting my expectations too high, ya know? I like the way things are." He doesn't want to talk about his insecurities with Niall possibly leaving because of his career, so he doesn't.

Zayn just nods and smiles. "Good. I want to make sure you're happy. That's all that matters to me."

"Thank you, Zayn. You too, okay?" There’s something about the way Zayn’s acting so curious that has Harry equally curious about him and Louis. He won’t pry though, knowing that either one of them will tell him what’s going on when they’re ready. He just hopes that they don’t stress themselves out too much.

If Blaze’s attitude as of late is anything to go by, their family life hasn’t been too well.

"Yeah."
Harry leaves things at that and heads down the hall to Alexander's temporary room. Niall's got him in his arms, rocking him softly. He's singing him to sleep as usual, but this time, he's singing a song Harry can't recognize. “On the horizon, oh, well, I know, I know, I know, I know, I know the sun will be rising back home…” Mid song, Alexander is out like a light and Niall's lowering him into the crib, leaning down to press a kiss to his forehead and tucks him in.

Harry can’t believe how awestruck he is every time Niall successfully puts Alexander down for bed. Lately, it’s been a constant battle for him, but Niall will take over and easily sing the baby to sleep. It’s sort of not fair, but he can tell Niall enjoys taking care of him.

“So, when should I start paying you that nanny paycheck,” Harry teases and Niall looks up curiously before smirking.

“It wouldn’t have to be with money.” He winks.

Harry raises an eyebrow smarmily. “Then you’d be something else other than a nanny.”

Niall reaches for the baby monitor and moves away from the crib and steps out of the room with Harry, closing the door silently behind him. “Oh yeah?”

Harry nods, “Mhm. But I think you’d kinda like that.”

He shrugs, inching closer to Harry, his free hand sliding up the smooth skin of his neck. “I bet I would. But only because it’s you.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “You’re a tease.”

“Perhaps.”

“We’re in a very unobtainable situation,” Harry reminds, but Niall doesn’t seem to bother with the semantics.

Instead, he reaches his hand back down to cup Harry’s crotch, biting his bottom lip while staring at him darkly. Harry gasps. “We could always be quiet.”

“Oh my god. Do not. I repeat, do not have sex here. I don’t want to hear that.” Louis whines from behind them. Harry and Niall are instantly apart, hands behind their backs innocently. “There’s children here.” He whispers harshly.

“Sorry, Lou.” Harry pouts.

“You’re forgiven, but I don’t ever want to hear those exchange of words ever again,” he shudders, walking past them to join Zayn in the kitchen.

Harry shrugs, glancing to Niall with a bashful smirk and turns back towards the kitchen. Louis and Zayn are hugging when Harry and Niall return to the room, and suddenly Harry feels like he’s invading a very private moment. “Do, uhh… do you want us to head to bed?” Harry offers and Zayn looks up at him from Louis’s shoulder.

“No, mate. It’s okay. Sorry about…” Zayn gestures his arm in the direction of Blaze’s room.

“It’s okay. I’m just… are you two okay?”

Niall looks up to Harry curiously, but he only reaches for his hand and squeezes. Louis and Zayn break apart and shake their heads simultaneously. “We’re fine, but…” Louis starts but pauses,
“We haven’t been doing so well financially, so, I think that stress is projecting onto Blaze and he’s been acting out this past week.”

“What happened with the firm?” Harry ponders and Zayn shakes his head.

“They’re thinking of demoting me. Or laying me off. Probably that. Things haven’t been going so well with corporate and they’re beginning to cut more employees.”

Harry frowns. “Oh Zayn. I’m so sorry.”

“So what’re you going to do?” Niall speaks up, albeit cautiously.

Louis sighs. “I’m going to apply for a teacher job at the school.”

Harry’s eyebrows lift, intrigued. “Really?”

“Mhm. They have a spot open for a drama teacher. I’m going down Monday to have an interview. It just sucks. I wanted to be a stay at home father for Blaze, but now he’s going to spend a lot of time at pre-school and with a babysitter, and I’m scared I’ll be so tired to spend time with him.”

Walking over to Louis, Harry wraps his arms around him and holds him tight. “It’ll be all right. We all have to make sacrifices for our family, right? I’m sure Blaze will understand. He’s a smart cookie.”

Louis buries his face into Harry’s shoulder and nods slightly. “I know. I just don’t want to not see him.”

“Me neither, love,” Zayn interjects, rubbing his arm softly. “It’ll work out though.”

“Yep, everything happens for a reason, ya?” Niall smiles and they look to him adoringly. It’s sort of crazy. Harry always has him to himself—so he never noticed—but the times all four of them have spent together, Louis and Zayn have gotten close to him. The fact makes him feel more comfortable about having Niall in his life. If Louis and Zayn accept him into their little group, then Harry’s certain he has a keeper.

“Whadd’ya say about all four of us settling down, drink some pints, and play us a board game or something.”

“Cards Against Humanity, anyone?” Harry offers and everyone looks at him unexpectedly. “What?”

“You dirty bastard,” Louis laughs.

Harry didn’t set his alarm clock the night before, so he’s wondering why he’s being woken up at seven in the morning. He’s almost angry, but the second he opens his eyes to see Blaze popping his mouth and grinning down at him, the irritation dissipates. “Morning Uncle Harry!” He shouts and Niall jumps up from sleep.

“Wha—who’s there?” Niall exclaims, sleep definitely encased around him. He groggily looks over at
Blaze and grins slightly. "Oh. Well, happy birthday."

Harry suddenly remembers that today's the actual day and smiles too. "Yeah, happy birthday, bub."

"Thank you!" He exclaims, throwing his arms up merrily and does a little jumping dance on the bed. He ends up tripping over Harry's gangly legs and falls on his butt, an echo of laughter filling the room warmly. "Oops!"

Harry laughs, shaking his head.

"Blaze William Tomlinson! You naughty child, let them sleep," Louis scolds from the doorway and comes over to pull Blaze from the bed. "Sorry lads. He's been up since the crack of dawn."

"No it's all right. I've gotta get up and wake Alex up." Harry mumbles, climbing out of bed. "But Niall can sleep in," he smiles at him.

Niall plops back down on the bed, rolls over to nuzzle his face into the pillow before he groans, turns back around, and stares up at the ceiling. He waits a few moments and sighs. "I'm up too."

"Yeah? You don't have to. I've got this," Harry assures but Niall's shakes his head, sits up from the mattress and finally gets to his feet.

"I need a wee anyways." He gives Harry a quick kiss on the lips before trotting out of the room and down the hallway to the bathroom. Louis' still in the room, Blaze monkey latched to his side and pulls a face.

"What?"

"Nothing," Louis raises his free hand on surrender. "Just nice to see how domestic you two are. It's refreshing."

Harry's a bit intrigued if he's honest. "How so?"

Louis shrugs, letting Blaze free, and frowns a bit. Blaze runs down the hallway, shouting "Baba! Baba!" and it only makes Harry smile a bit. "I'm sure you've noticed the tension."

"Tension? What tension?" Harry teases but Louis shakes his head and slowly sits at the end of the bed. "Sorry. Yeah. I've noticed."

"Zayn and I haven't even had sex in like, four months. Harry. I don't know what to do. This money issue is tearing us apart. Blaze isn't helping either, with his attitude and all. I'm sure he can't really help it though. He's an emotion leach. All kids are." He sighs, running his hand through his messy bed hair. "It's driving me nuts. It's driving Zayn nuts too. Him being the sole provider is putting too much stress on him and we even got in a fight because I haven't had a job in five years."

Harry leans on the bed, reaching out to grab his hand. "Oh Lou."

"I just... Hope this teaching job will help us. If not then..."

"No. Don't even go there, Louis. You know that Zayn’s not going to leave you. If he didn't intend to stay, you know he would've left a long time ago."

"Maybe? But who's to say that this doesn't split us up? Anything could happen and he could just up and leave one day and everything would be all my fault," there's tears in his eyes, and all Harry can do is get up and pull him into a hug. He hates seeing Louis like this. It's heartbreaking.
Harry sighs. Rubbing his hand across Louis’ back, he pulls him closer, and kisses his temple. "It’ll be all right. Everything will work out. I promise. Okay?"

"Okay."

*

Blaze's birthday isn't as grand as it was a year ago, but the Transformers action figures he gets brightens his day up and he's giving Harry and Niall hugs from left and right. Harry can see the sad look on both Zayn and Louis' faces but they're grateful nonetheless. All they could get him was some colouring books and a few shirts for school. No five year old boy wants to get clothes and colouring books for his birthday. He's a brat about it, but he doesn't know any better.

"Thank you, I know he wasn't very happy with what we got him," Louis says apologetically and Harry and Niall shake their heads.

"No. I'm sorry for spoiling him." Harry frowns. "Maybe we should've got two different ones so you could've given him one."

Zayn rolls his eyes, instantly irritated. "Right. That makes me feel better."

"Zayn Malik. Don't be a twat," Louis scolds, only to receive an angry glare.

"I can’t wait till you start working." He grumbles under his breath but everyone clearly hears him.

"Don't start."

"Oh please. Like they don't know already? The whole family knows that were broke and it's your fault for not getting a job two years ago when I asked you."

"Zayn, please," Louis begs, doing his best to keep face as long as possible. He's embarrassed and Harry can't blame him.

Niall's seated next to him, bouncing Alexander in his lap. He gives Harry a look before awkwardly getting up and heads down the hallway, avoiding conflict.

"No, Harry can hear this. He should know that I'm the only one working his ass off making sure this family is taken care of, and what do you do all day? You play house."

Louis' definitely got tears in his eyes and Harry doesn't know why he sticks around for the fight, but he does. He internally claims it’s to support Louis. "Excuse me, I'm raising our son while you're never around."

"You mean, your son. He's not mine." Zayn bites back, slamming his hand on the counter.

Louis deflates, mouth snapping shut and tears flooding down his cheeks without reservation. Harry can barely believe the words that have just blurted out of Zayn’s mouth, and despite the quick guilty expression he obtains, Harry doesn’t know if this is something that can be forgiven. Blaze is his. Literally. All three of them have been a little family since the day the little bugger came into their lives and now that Louis and Zayn are engaged, it’s almost completely binding.

Harry has to give Louis props when he speaks up, cutting the silence sharply. “Leave then.”

“Leave. If you feel like none of this is worth it anymore and you can’t even stake claim on the child you helped raise, then leave. I don’t need this, and neither does Blaze.” He’s sobbing through his words, but he stays strong, holding a heavy stare on the man that he’s loved for years. Harry can barely fathom that he’s here, witnessing their seemingly inevitable break up like it’s a bloody drama movie. Why did he have to stick around for this?

“Baba! Baba! Look!” Blaze is shouting from behind Harry and suddenly at Zayn’s side, hopping innocently as he flies his Optimus Prime action figure around. The look Zayn gives the child is absolutely heart wrenching and poor Blaze has no clue.

“Yes, I see.”

Louis stills, watching their exchange cautiously as Zayn pulls Blaze up into his lap and wraps his arms around the child lovingly. There’s this deep sadness that falls over the lot of them, and Blaze is the only one talking.

“Love, Baba. Thank you for the colouring book.” He says and Harry thinks he might be mistaken when he observes Zayn shut his eyes tightly and a tear rolls down his face painfully.

“Love you, too.” He sobs, and slowly lets the child down to go off and play again, blissfully unaware of the events spiraling around them like it’s the end of the fucking world.

A shrill scream echoes throughout the bungalow and Harry’s quick on his feet, drawn to the cries of his own child. “I’m uhh…” He looks between Louis and Zayn and they both nod to him, eyes watery, but small smiles on their faces. Harry doesn’t understand it fully, but he thinks, maybe, just maybe, they’re going to be all right. “Right.” Harry hurriedly heads towards the sound of Alexander wailing and stops when Niall’s passing the baby over to him. “Hey,” he smiles softly. “Hey it’ll be all right. Daddy’s here.” He holds Alexander close, hand cupped against the tiny child’s crown, and the crying slowly comes to a calming silence.

“I’ll always be here.”

Niall eyes him carefully, eyebrows furrowed deeply and somehow he knows. The depth to his words reach him and he’s wrapping his arms around both of them, kissing Alexander’s crown first, and then Harry’s hand.

“Always,” Niall murmurs and Harry believes it.

*

Harry wakes up the next morning, scared that Zayn had left in the middle of the night and Louis is stuck in his room, sobbing. He does that, though. After a break up, he’ll lock himself away and watch stupid rom-coms and cry until he can’t produce the liquid it takes to make tears. He’s fantastically surprised when he walks into the kitchen and there’s the strong smell of bacon wafting through the air and Zayn and Louis are standing beside one another, arms crossed between them and holding at each other’s hips while Louis flips the pancakes and Zayn babysits the bacon.

Harry breathes a sigh of relief and smiles, shuffling towards the coffee maker to grab a cuppa.
Zayn whistles merrily and Louis looks up at him like he’s the brightest star in the night sky and Harry internally screams.

Things are definitely back to normal.

“Good mornin’,” Niall yawns from the hallway, scratching his hip as he scoots over to Harry’s side, reaching across him for his own cup.

“Morning,” Harry smiles, kissing Niall’s lips chastely.

“Morning!” Louis bellows merrily and Harry’s grinning for miles.

Zayn joins in on the excitement, riffing a “good morning~” and yep. Everything is definitely back to normal.

Harry doesn’t ask what happened to mend things, because he can see that Louis and Zayn are meant for each other. He knows it from the bottom of his heart. No matter what they go through, how many fights they have, they will always end up meeting at the fork in the road again and figure out which direction they should head in.

He only hopes that he can have the same type of relationship with Niall.

By the looks of it, he’s doesn’t have a worry in the world.

15 November

Harry returns to work on the fourteenth of the month. It’s familiar, but still strange to be here, sitting at his old desk that hasn’t changed. Liam welcomes him back with open arms, says that everything went smoothly during his leave and that Harry shouldn’t have to worry about catching up on anything. Harry’s content with that. Glad to know that his first day should be relatively easy.

He worries anyways though. Not because he’s here, but because he’s not there, with Alexander. Sure, his mum is taking care of him for the day, and Louis will have him tomorrow and Friday, but it’s not the same. Around lunch time, he’s ready for a nap, wishing he were at home, cuddling up with his baby.

“You seem tired.” Liam mentions around a forkful of lettuce and carrots, chomping on his salad hungrily.

Harry plays with his soup, pushing the noodles and chicken around lazily. “I am. I’m usually due for a nap this time of day.”

“Ah, baby duties. Must be hard being a single parent.” Liam remarks. “Which, I meant to ask, but, when can I see the little guy?”

Harry feels guilty automatically. He’d promised that he would introduce them, but with Niall in the picture he completely forgot. Groaning, Harry smacks his face against the table. “I’m so sorry. Soon. I got so held up with daddy duties that I forgot. Mate, I’m really sorry.”

Liam only laughs lightly, reaching a hand across the table with a small smile directed towards him. “It’s okay. I totally understand, so don’t worry.”
“Okay,” Harry mumbles, rising from the inflicting surface and rubs his face of the pain. "Maybe tonight after work? It'll be just Alex and I if you want to."

The smile on Liam's face is giant. "I would love that."

Harry gets back to work with ease, going over Liam's appointments for the day, making sure he doesn't have to call anyone to reconfirm. When he looks up, realizing someone's there, it's a very well dressed man with dark hair and an attractive face. "Hi," Harry greets.

"Hey, where's Maggie?" His accent is a strong Irish one and it reminds Harry of Niall.

"Oh, umm she was just filling in for me. I'm Harry. How can I help you?"

"I have an appointment for my client."

"Ahh," Harry murmurs, going to his computer and looks up the schedule. "Niall Breslin at two?"

"That's the one."

"Okay." Harry reaches for his phone and dials Liam. "Hey, I've got a Mr. Breslin here to see you."

"I'll be right out."

Turning to the client, Harry nods. "Liam will be right out."

"Thank you," and the man stands away from Harry's desk. Harry watches him though, instantly recognizing the blonde haired man that approaches Niall Breslin and Harry's startled.

"N-Niall?" Harry breathes and his boyfriend is turning towards him curiously.

"Harry? What're you doing here?" Niall asks, approaching the desk and completely ignoring the other.

Smiling up at him, Harry gives his answer easily. "I work here. My first day back since Alex was born."

"No shit? I've been recording here since February. Why haven't I ever..." Niall trails, recognizing the framed picture of Harry and Blaze on the desk and he can't believe he's never put two and two together. "I'm an idiot."

Harry laughs. "I've been in and out of here since February, working with Kate and her pregnancy. Took a leave after Alex was born and I don't know."

The man comes up to the desk to join their conversation. "Niall, you know him?"

Niall turns to his manager and nods. "Hey Bressie. Yeah. He's my... My friend."

What?

Harry's stunned.

Again. What?

Niall looks to Harry and he's pleading with his eyes. He doesn't know why in the hell his boyfriend:
sweet, funny, Niall is pretending like they're nothing but friends, but he has nothing else to say.

So he just nods.

"Yeah, just friends." Harry hums, looking away from Niall completely. He feels like his whole world has suddenly been turned upside down and still. What?

Bressie walks away when Liam comes out, shaking hands cordially. Niall leans over the desk and whispers. "He doesn't know."

"What?" Harry replies shortly, attending to paperwork nonchalantly.

"That I'm gay."

Harry has no chance to reply as Niall is pulled away quickly and he has no choice but to stay at his desk.

He wants to storm in there, give Niall a piece of his mind because what the actual fuck? His boyfriend, who has been in his life for all of three months is a closet gay, and that’s cool and all, if they were in high school. But now? No. he’d already gone through this before and he really doesn’t care to go through this sort of drama. It’s like Nick all over again, but it’s different because this is Niall and he’s falling hard for him and god.

Why?

Harry really wishes he had the balls to go into that office and out him, tell the whole world that Niall fucking Horan is gay and has been in a serious relationship with another guy for a little while.

But he refrains, keeps his cool, and finishes out the rest of his workload for the day. Harry clocks out at four, texting Liam his address and to come over whenever he can. Walking out, he catches a glimpse of Niall, but ignores the sound of his name being called, heading straight to his truck without looking back.

Upon getting home, he has six unread messages from Niall. He throws his phone in his room and ignores it.

Liam comes over around six. There’s a box of wine in his hand and a bag of take out in the other and Harry’s shocked. When in the world did Liam start drinking?

“Hey, I brought some food over, it’s from that Italian restaurant down the street. Dunno if you’ve tried it before, but it’s really good.” He greets, and Harry smiles, letting him in.

“Thanks. Haven’t had a chance to eat since I got home. Alex has been fussy since my mum left.”

There’s an apologetic grimace on Liam’s face while he sets the wine and the bag down on the counter and gives Harry a hug. “Been a while since we could be just friends, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Harry murmurs into his shoulder, embracing him back. “Sorry if I left early.”

“What was that all about? Niall says he wanted to talk to you but you kinda stormed out.” Harry goes into the kitchen to grab a couple of plates and Liam helps dish the pasta out. “Got a couple of glasses?” He’s gesturing to the wine and Harry nods, pulling two wine glasses down from a cabinet.
“It was nothing. Didn’t want to talk to him. Oh, Alex is down for a little nap, but I’ll wake him up in a bit.”

“Sounds good, we can eat and talk before I meet the little guy. He must’ve had a long day.”

“Being away from him really sucks,” Harry remarks and they settle at the dining table. “It’s like… he’s my whole world and I’ve just had crazy anxiety being away from him all day. Needed to go home early.” That’s partially a lie. He’s just not sure he’s ready to tell Liam that he’s dating one of their clients, even if it’s before Harry knew Niall was one.

“Hmm…” Liam hums, taking a bite of his pasta and pours wine into his glass. “You know I can tell when you’re lying, right?”

“Yeah.” Harry agrees, but doesn’t give away that he just did.

“Tell me how you know Niall.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “He’s just a friend.”

“Just? Sort of doesn’t seem like he’s just a friend, Harry.” Liam argues and there’s a loud clang as Harry’s fork drops to his plate and he’s eyeing Liam in annoyance.

“He’s my boyfriend, okay?! He’s my fucking boyfriend and he’s in the bloody closet and said right in front of me that I’m just a friend!”

Liam goes quiet, scanning Harry’s face as he searches for anything he could say to reply.

“I—I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have…”

“It’s fine.” Harry sighs, carding his hands through his hair in anguish. “I’m just… I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be so pissed, but I am. Niall’s the one that pursued me in the first place and ugh… I can’t do this right now. I’m going to get Alex.” He gets up, abandoning his dinner, not really feeling hungry anymore. If anything, he feels sick to his stomach and just wants to go to bed. “I’ll be right back.” He heads down the hall, leaving Liam to finish his dinner.

“Hey, bud. Time to wake up,” Harry whispers, reaching into the crib to pull Alexander from his sleep. The baby gives a little whine, but is offered his binky and slowly settles down, eyes sleepy. “There there. You’re all right. C’mon let’s go meet a friend of mine, kay?”

Harry moves back out into the hall and towards Liam, who’s cleaning up the table.

“Alexander, I want you to meet Liam.” Harry introduces and Liam’s smiling widely the second he lays eyes on the sleepy child.

“He’s so calm.”

“It’s his bobble,” he gestures to his binky. "He’s been obsessed with it since Louis gave it to him when he was a month old.” Harry explains, handing Alexander over to Liam. He cradles him, infatuated with his whole existence.

“He’s absolutely beautiful. Looks just like you. Even has your eyes.”

Harry scratches the back of his head, smiling timidly. “Really? I was starting to think he looked a lot like his mum.”

"Nah, he's definitely a Styles boy." Liam coos, poking Alexander's nose. He gets a grin out of him as
a present. "Oh! Yeah he's got dimples. Definitely yours."

Harry’s about to reply when there’s a hurried knock on the door. Reluctantly, he gets up. "I swear if it's another religious salesman I'm going to—" he opens the door, surprised when he easily recognizes the pretty blue eyes that belong to his boyfriend.

**

xX Three Hours Ago Xx

It keeps replaying over and over the way Harry had just said, “Just friends.”, and the hurt look on Harry’s face after Niall had said it at first, killed Niall more than he thought it would. The second he was pulled away and Harry couldn’t bear to look at him, that’s when Niall really knew he fucked up. He wants to leave this stupid meeting, go out there and apologize and explain his side. He’s not out, but that little fact never crossed his mind when he was around Harry. He revolved around Harry like nothing else mattered, so the idea rarely hit him until he wasn’t there, lying next to him in bed, kissing and cuddling and whispering sweet nothings till they passed out.

Niall can’t believe that he said that either. Feels like the biggest dick in history.

God. When will this meeting end?!

The second it’s over, Niall is racing out of the office, hoping to catch Harry before he leaves for the day. Today’s their day apart, but he needs to see him. Needs to tell him that things aren’t what they seem.

Spotting Harry, he calls his name, but he keeps walking with determination, like he’s trying to run away from him. Not that Niall blames him. He’s certain Harry’s hurt, really hurt, and he wants to fix things, wants to say something before it’s the end.

“H-Harry! Harry wait!” Niall yells, but it’s no use. Harry’s already gone.

Liam and Bressie meet up with Niall and they’re looking at him in concern.

“Hey, everything all right?” Bressie asks.

Niall doesn’t answer.

“Do you know Harry?” Liam inquires and Niall nods.

“Yeah. Fuck. I need to talk to him.”

He leaves before they can pry any further.

He paces the parking lot in front of Harry’s apartment hours later. Niall doesn’t want to fuck up. He knows he already did, but what can he say to make things right again? The idea of coming out to the
public is still a very sensitive topic for him. But he really cares about Harry. Adores Alexander. Loves the little niche he’s fallen into with them even though it’s only been three months.

To say that he’s not in love would be a complete lie.

Niall just isn’t sure how to go about this.

He’s had girlfriends, plenty of them, but it never felt right with them. Then Harry came along and things just fell into place so easily. Loving Harry is so easy.

That’s just the thing.

He loves Harry. He seriously truly does, but he’s too scared. He’s famous, not extremely famous, but he’s known around the world. It’s enough to possibly kill his image if he comes out. Niall knows that it shouldn’t matter because his happiness should come first, but he has a contract. It’s strict. Bressie wouldn’t be mad if he knew, which he probably does anyways, but at the same time, he doesn’t want to hear what he knows Bressie will say.

“You can’t show that in public. Not until your contract is over.”

Niall really can’t understand the big deal behind it, not fully anyways. He knows that image is important for a celebrity figure, but the initial precipice for him to be a musician was never about the image. At first he didn’t care what he did, how he dressed, never cared about anything but the music and the fans. Cuz, seriously, if it wasn’t for their support, he wouldn’t be where he is now.

But now. Now with Harry, he wouldn’t rather be anywhere but here.

He constantly remembers the night at the club. So drunk, everything hazy and out of focus. Except for Harry in the middle of the dance floor. Everything about him made his heart race and he thinks back and wonders why some stranger could do that to him, but the second he even stepped into Harry’s space, Niall knew he was so gone for him.

Meeting him again months later was never just a coincidence to Niall. He doesn’t believe in all that spiritual mumbo jumbo, but there couldn’t have been any other explanation besides fate bringing them together.

So, he’s in front of Harry’s apartment, the sun setting, and he needs to make a decision.

What he really needs to do is grow a pair and knock, because he’s not going to get anywhere else unless he does.

Sucking in a deep breath, Niall raises his fist, hovers it over the door and forces his hand to knock. It’s rushed. Panicked sounding, but it’s enough to get Harry’s attention.

"I swear if it's another religious salesman I'm going to—" Harry is shouting but stops the moment he opens the door and sees Niall standing there, timidly smiling up at him. “What are you doing here?” The look in his eyes is enough for Niall to gather how angry and hurt he is.

“Can we talk?”

“As just friends or as my boyfriend? Cuz I really don’t know what to consider you at this point.” Harry leers.

Okay he deserves that, but it’s not like it doesn’t hurt. “As Niall and Harry. As us.” He gives, looking down shyly.
Harry steps out of the apartment and closes the door behind him and it’s got Niall all sorts of nervous. Why isn’t he letting him inside? Does Harry have someone over? All these questions race through his mind, but the second Harry starts talking again, he forgets them all together.

“Okay. Go ahead. Talk.”

“First,” Niall gulps, looking up to meet his eyes. “I’m sorry. Words can’t describe how sorry I am. I really should explain why though.”

“Because you have an image to uphold. Yeah, I get it, Niall. But that doesn’t excuse how much it fucking hurt hearing you say that. I can’t just forgive you. Hell, you didn’t even tell me you weren’t out yet. Could’ve saved us a world of trouble.”

“I know. I know. I fucked up, Harry. I just… I can’t lose you.”

Harry’s silent for a while. The falling night is dropping the outside temperature dramatically and Harry’s suddenly beginning to shake from the cold. He crosses his arms, rubbing at the chilled skin. Niall wants to offer him his jacket but he’s unsure if he should even move. “Lose me? Niall… honestly, I don’t even know if you really want me.”

“N-No! I do! I really really do.”

“Then why are you ashamed of this?” Harry gestures between them, keeping his distance estranged.

“I’m not.”

“Niall, you told your manager I’m just a friend.”

“I know, god, I fucking know.”

Harry sighs, shaking his head. “I need to go back in. I have a guest over and I have to take care of Alex. I’ll call you later.”

Niall goes to stop him, but Harry’s inside the apartment before he can even blink.

**

It's between the time that Alexander starts screaming and his phone is buzzing loudly next to him so obnoxiously that Harry finds himself screaming too. Leering at his alarm clock, it's five am and he's definitely not in the mood for this. He went to bed angrily, wanting to smash his fist into the wall because the only thing on his mind is how much Niall is ashamed of them. At least he probably should be.

Who wants to see a gay couple taking care of a baby anyways? It's one thing to be a single father, but by throwing Niall into the mix, he's damaged his little dynamic he's had going here for a while. Everything was perfectly fine before Niall crashed into his life.

He knows that he should fight for him, but he feels pretty hopeless at this point.

It's Nick Grimshaw all over again and Harry knows he's going to get his heart broken. He's really not sure if he can be someone's dirty little secret again. Nick treated him like he didn't matter in public, but acted like Harry was his whole world when it was just them in private. The whole relationship
was fucking shit too. Nick would come over drunk and demand to be pleasured and catered to and if Harry refused, he'd get hit.

It took coming over to Louis and Zayn's with bruises on his face for Louis to convince Harry to leave Nick.

University really wasn't all fun and games.

Nick is the reason he's stayed single for years and why he never wanted to try again. Then Niall came along and some sort of hope glimmered in the back of Harry's mind and he figured he should try again.

But this. No, he really doesn't think he can do it.

He has to give him a choice, either he chooses him and Alexander, or his career. It's shitty, but he can't do this to Alexander.

And he can't do this to himself again.

With a forced groan, Harry climbs out of bed, ignores his phone and heads into Alexander's room to quiet his child. The poor thing is wailing, and his diaper is wet and this is exactly what Harry didn't want to wake up to, but it's his responsibility and he takes care of it anyways.

He changes Alexander's diaper with a practiced finesse and cuddles with him, bouncing the baby lightly to get him to calm down from his tears. "Shh, baby. It's all right. You're okay. Yeah... You hungry?" Alexander gives a little whimper and Harry knows he is. They head into the kitchen and Harry fetches him a bottle, warming it up under hot water. After testing its temperature, he settles onto the couch in the living room, offering Alexander the bottle before turning the TV on and flipping to a news channel.

"With rumors spouting about pop sensation Niall Horan being gay, girls around the world are crying from their loss of a chance with him," the celebrity news reporter states and Harry can't help but roll his eyes. "Do you think it's true? Ireland's own prince of pop is, in fact, playing for the same team?"

"Dunno Becky. It's quite possible with kids these days. Wanting to experiment. Maybe it's just a phase."

"Bullshit," Harry curses at the TV, but he can't find the nerve to change it.

"Sources say that he's been seen around town with his supposed boyfriend. I don't know, Tom, have you seen what eye candy this guy is?" Becky muses and Harry's heart drops when an image of him and Niall walking along the street pops up on the screen. "If I were Niall, I don't think I'd have an issue dating him either."

Irritated, Harry quickly changes the channel to a kid's network, ignoring the TV completely.

His phone goes off again in his room and he's reluctantly getting up from the couch, Alexander passed out in his arms from his early morning breakfast. Snatching the device from the nightstand, he doesn't bother looking at the caller id before answering. "What?"

"Harry?"

It's Louis.

"Hi Lou. Any reason why you're ringing me at half five?" He can't disguise the aggravation in his
voice. He's just that fucking tired.

“Blaze is really sick. The doctors say he has pneumonia and,” Louis’ crying at this point, hyperventilating on his choked sobs and Harry forgets everything else he’s been worrying about. “A-And… Zayn’s work defaulted on our insurance and th-the hospital says that they require us to have insurance to t-treat him.”

“What? What do you mean they won’t treat him?"

“I d-don’t know.”

Harry can just imagine Louis standing in a secluded corner of the waiting room, head pressed against the wall to hide that he’s breaking. His voice is so hushed and his sobs are progressively becoming uncontrollable and Harry needs to be there.

“What hospital?"

“W-What?”

“Which hospital are you at?”

“St. Mary’s…” Louis barely manages.

“All right, I’ll be there soon.” Harry hangs up and quickly goes to grab Alexander’s bag and his carrier.

“What do you mean you’re refusing my money? I’m paying you everything up front, no insurance deductions, full payment for all the treatments and medicine. What the hell kind of person are you to deny someone the opportunity to help save a life?” Harry growls at the receptionist. At first she wouldn’t give in, but the second Harry slapped a wad of cash on the counter, she began to falter. He knew all he had to do was guilt trip her.

Damned medical system is a bunch of sucker proxies.

She gulps and looks to her computer, tittering away at the keys. “O-Okay. Mr. Styles. We’ll go through with the treatment.”

“Right. How much?”

Zayn and Louis are tending to Alexander when Harry returns to their side. “Everything’s taken care of. They’re going to treat him right away.”

Louis’ tears never seemed to disappear since their phone conversation, but this time he’s at least crying tears of joy. He hugs Harry tightly, burying his wet face in his large jumper. “Thank you so much. I’m so so sorry. It must’ve cost a fortune.”

“Nothing is more important than the safety of our children, Lou.” Harry murmurs sweetly, pulling away to wipe the tears from Louis’ face. “Right Zayn?”

Zayn looks up from Alexander and smiles half-heartedly, looking as if sleep will overcome him shortly. “Yeah. Even if Xander isn’t ours and Blaze isn’t yours, we’re all a family, and that’s what matters.”
“Exactly.” Harry agrees with a nod. He wants to ask Zayn what happened with his insurance at work, especially since he worked for an insurance company. It seemed a bit fishy to him, and he knows that Louis and Zayn have been keeping their financial problems to themselves but this is serious.

He decides not to pry.

Harry gets home a little after nine, Alexander crying the second they pull into his parking space and Harry knows, knows that he’s wet his diaper again and he dreads changing it immediately. He really can’t wait till he’s old enough to potty train.

Plucking him from his restraints, Harry settles Alexander on his hip, reaching for his bag before slamming the truck door to head up to his apartment. He just wants to change him and lay them both down for a much desired nap. Just daddy and son time, but to his dismay, there’s a very familiar, very unwelcomed body standing next to his apartment door and his face falls into a grimace.

“Harry, I—” Niall begins and Harry shakes his head, giving him a stare that tells him don’t say a single word, and keys the lock open to allow the three of them inside the apartment.

“Just…” Harry sighs, readjusting Alexander on his hip. “Sit on the couch till I’ve changed Alex. I don’t want to talk to you yet.”

Niall looks up to him with that childish glow of innocence that somehow hasn’t left him even though he’s twenty-five. He nods, though, complying with Harry’s wishes and settles onto the couch, tucking his head between his knees. Harry ignores the way it clutches his heart to see Niall so distraught, and moves into Alexander’s room to change him.

After he’s done, he kisses Alexander’s forehead and lays him down in his crib. “Daddy will be in the other room, okay? Go to sleep, it’s been a long morning for us.” He doesn’t know why he talks to Alexander like he can understand, but somehow the little one surprises him and seems to comprehend what he says most of the time. Harry offers Alexander’s binky to him and the babe finds himself easily falling asleep.

Harry slides quietly into the living room, settling into the single armchair next to the couch Niall’s occupying and clears his throat to get the blonde’s attention. The moment their eyes meet, Harry can easily see that Niall’s had just as rough a night he had and it kills him. There’s a thick puffiness to his eyes, one that shows he’s been crying, and his hair isn’t quaffed perfectly as usual. He doesn’t want Niall to be sad over this, but deep down he knows he should. Niall’s the one that messed up and Harry’s too strong to let him forget that.

But then the footage of the stupid celebrity gossip from this morning has some sort of hope swirling around his body that Niall will out himself and choose Harry instead.

He can only hope though.

Harry slides quietly into the living room, settling into the single armchair next to the couch Niall’s occupying and clears his throat to get the blonde’s attention. The moment their eyes meet, Harry can easily see that Niall’s had just as rough a night he had and it kills him. There’s a thick puffiness to his eyes, one that shows he’s been crying, and his hair isn’t quaffed perfectly as usual. He doesn’t want Niall to be sad over this, but deep down he knows he should. Niall’s the one that messed up and Harry’s too strong to let him forget that.

He won’t be the victim any longer.

"I thought I said that I’d call you.” It's not a question but Niall treats it as such.
"I-I know but I really needed to see you. I couldn't sleep all night and I thought maybe talking in person was the better route."

"Maybe for you," Harry bites back and Niall physically flinches as if he's been hit. "I have a responsibility to two people right now, Niall. Alexander comes first, then me. But I'm not going to forfeit my happiness on the idea that you'd be good to my son. You are," Harry goes to point out when Niall moves to argue. "You're terribly wonderful to him, and you treat him like he's yours which is phenomenal to say the least. But it isn't enough for me. I need to know that this," he gestures about the apartment. "Is what you're willing to stay with, and unfortunately Niall, that means you have to be okay with the public knowing about Alex and I."

"It's not that though," Niall tries to reason. He clasps his hands together in thought. "This is everything I want. You're everything I want. It's not me that has an issue with being gay, it's my contract."

"Screw your contract then," Harry spits, standing to his feet. "If it's money you're worried about, we'd be fine."

Niall shakes his head. "No, I also want to be a singer. It's all I ever wanted growing up."

Harry knew it. Niall’s too invested in his career. "You can't be with me if we have to be a secret. I'm not doing this again."

"Again?" Niall’s asking and Harry knows he's said too much.

"Doesn't matter. I don't care if you want to be a singer or a fucking janitor, Niall. I seriously care about you and really want to do this with you. But not like that. If you can't do what you want to do and be who you are then it isn't worth it and it isn't fair to me or to Alex."

Niall looks torn. He really does, and Harry's on the verge of tears because he knows his words are absolute. “I know.” It’s like a mantra he keeps repeating and it's annoying the ever living shit out of Harry because why can’t Niall just choose him? Why can’t this be easier?

So many whys in his life and the biggest one has to be about this fluffy haired, bright eyed boy who stole his heart in the middle of a stupid Tesco’s at three in the bloody morning.

“If you know, then make the tough decision. Or take the easy way out and just leave and never come back.” Harry growls. He doesn’t know why he’s encouraging the option that literally will break him.

He just prays he’ll be strong enough if Niall does choose to leave.

Niall meets Harry’s eyes for the first time in a while and he gets to his feet, inching closer to him. “Please, don’t make me do this.”

“I’m not making you do anything. I’m giving you the choice. It’s either me or the public. Which is more important?”

“Don’t.” Niall pleads, his eyes glassy.

“Then don’t go.”

They stand like that for a while, eyes locked and in their own world. This is it, Harry tells himself. This is where I lose him.

“Harry I… I really love you.”
Harry wishes he could believe it. Wants so badly to just let Niall stay and keep his secret, but he’s too proud. There’s nothing wrong with them being this way, it’s the world that has a problem. “Show me that you do, then.” He challenges, hoping it’s enough for him to stay.

It’s not.

Niall clenches his fists, shakes his head as tears fall, and he’s quickly leaving the apartment.

Harry’s body betrays him and breaks down the second he’s alone.

It’s not enough.

And it never will be.

*

Zayn comes by on the eighteenth. Harry doesn't answer the door. In fact, he's locked himself up in Alexander's room for the day. He can't keep himself from not feeling sorry. He should've known not to get involved with someone so he has no one to blame. Harry didn't bank on remembering that Louis and Zayn have a spare key just in case and in his silence he guessed they got worried after the fiftieth screened call.

"Harry?" Zayn calls the second he unlocks the door and Harry's body is spiking with fear that his best friend is going to find him in the state he's in.

He's not ready.

"Harry, c'mon mate, where are you?" He attempts again and within minutes, he's opening the door to Alexander's room. "Oh Harry. What happened?"

Harry looks up from the floor, meets Zayn’s eyes and let's go of the tears he's been holding in for hours. "Zayn..." He whimpers and he's at his side, pulling the broken boy into a warm embrace. There's no telling if he knows what happened, but he has a knack for sensing when his friends need him and that's enough for Harry to explain right now.

Zayn just holds him and lets him cry until Alexander is waking from his nap, sobbing awake.

"Don't worry, I've got him," Zayn offers the moment Harry tries to get up to attend to his child.

He hates this. Hates how one person can make him break into bits and pieces. But he's grateful for his friends.

He just knows he can’t sulk too long about Niall. He does have a life to take care of.

16 December
It’s been weeks and Harry hasn’t heard a word from Niall. He’s not okay, as much as he tries to convince everyone that he is. Blaze recovered from his pneumonia fairly easy, and Louis’ birthday is right around the corner—and Christmas, which Harry should be excited over because it’s Alexander’s first, but he can’t. All he can think about is how miserable he is without Niall and it’s hard. In a way, he’s sort of glad Alexander is so young that he won’t remember Niall being a big part of his life. Alexander is five months and has started crawling, quite well if he’s honest. Harry can’t get the little bugger to stay still for five minutes, which is cool and all but when he wants to take pictures, it becomes a pain.

Waking up by himself still stings him. He misses the way Niall would cuddle with him all night and the second that Harry’s alarm goes off, he would groan a little and roll over to the other side, but not before planting a sloppy, sleepy kiss on Harry’s cheek. He misses the morning breakfasts, and how easy it was to take care of Alexander with two people instead of one.

Now he really is the single parent he originally set out to be.

Harry supposes it’s for the best. He’s still hurt about it, hates that Niall chose his career over him, but he can’t blame him either way for it. After all, they were only together for a few months.

Albeit, it only took a few months to fall so far in love with the bastard that it has his heart ripping itself into shreds.

What Harry’s not expecting is Niall showing up at his front door minutes before Harry’s about to lay down for his midday nap.

“Wh-Why?” Harry blurts the first thing on his mind and Niall’s flashing his trademark smile, all crooked and adorable and the urge to kiss him couldn’t be any greater than it is now.

“Can we talk?” He asks and Harry nods, biting at the loose skin on his bottom lip. Niall steps inside the apartment, chaotic from Alexander crawling all over the place and leaving messes with his toys, and somehow his smile never falters.

“Can I get you a cuppa?”

Niall shakes his head. “Nah, I’m just here to talk and I’ll get out of your hair.” He explains and Harry nods, the both of them sitting at the dining table. Harry was nursing a cup of tea before the curious knock on the door, so he finishes tending to that, wishing it hadn’t cooled off already.

“So… uh…” Harry doesn’t really know what to say. He’s all sorts of flustered and confused, fumbling with the handle of his cup. His heart races a thousand miles a minute and his stomach is in knots and he can’t sit still. What could Niall possibly have to talk about? Is he coming back? Did he come out?

So many questions circle Harry’s mind but he stays quiet, waiting for Niall to explain himself.

Niall pulls out a little gift and sets it on the table. “This is for Alex, but only if you want to give it. I’m not going to blame you if you don’t.”

“Ohkay.” Harry tucks the present into his grasp and stares at it, trying to keep calm, otherwise he’s scared he’ll jump across the table and kiss those stupidly plump pink lips that should only belong to him but they don’t anymore.

“I’m going on tour,” Niall starts. Harry shouldn’t be surprised, but he is.

*This is it, he thinks. I'm really never going to be with him.*
"But I wanted to make a proposal."

Harry perks up curiously. "A proposal?"

"Mhm, this is my last time I'm doing this and I'm coming out. I want to settle down with you, if you'll wait for me."

It sounds beautiful. It really does. But it's also not realistic to Harry. He can't count on Niall to be true to his word because what if things change? What if he finds someone else?

What if Harry finds someone else?

He doesn't think he will, but it's likely.

"I... That sounds lovely Niall but I..." He pauses, looking away abashed. "I'm not sure if I can wait."

Niall's shoulders sink. "I thought you might say that. But on the off chance that you do, I hope you'll take me back. I wish I could do what you want this very second but—"

Harry knows that's bullshit.

"No, don't even start with that. If you wanted to do it, you would've. You would've never walked out that door and left me like that. You should've stayed. If you really love me, you still should, but you won't." Harry's beyond being nice. Knowing that everything is futile is enough for him to give up. "I can't do it Niall. I can't wait for you to suddenly walk back in here after being away for half a year on tour and expect to welcome you home. So whatever fantasy you have of that happening needs to get tossed aside because it'll never happen. Not if you walk out that door again."

"Harry, please."

"No! If you're going to leave, just do it. Don't bother coming back. I can't," Harry's realizing he's started crying and it sucks. This whole situation sucks. He wishes he could hold onto hope that Niall's true to his word about this, but he can't believe it. No matter how hard he wants to, his heart refuses to believe there's any hope. "Please, just go. I don't want to talk anymore."

Niall gets up slowly, moving cautiously towards Harry. His hands are clenching his chocolate tresses, tugging tightly and his face is drenched in his tears. Harry doesn't want Niall to see him like this, but no matter how much he urges himself to stop, it doesn't seem to work. "Harry... Don't do this, please love." Niall's whispering, his cold fingers caressing his cheeks softly as he coaxes Harry to look up at him. "Give me a day with you. Let me show you I mean this."
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

“Am I stupid?” Harry blurts out at the dinner table. Louis and Zayn look to him, wide eyed and mouths full of food somehow flatlined.

“Harry, we’re eating.” Louis remarks smartly, continuing to chew down his mouthful. Zayn tries to stifle his laugh.

Harry sighs in disdain. “I’m being serious. Am I stupid for breaking up with Niall?”

Chapter Notes

So I was going to only post 4 parts, but Nicole said I should post this now and then give you all a total of 5 parts! So, it's not over yet.

This part absolutely destroyed me. I just really wanted to make this a good as I could make it and I really hope it doesn't disappoint you. xx

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

17 May

The brisk weather of May in LA has always given Niall a sense of comfort. It’s familiar. Where he recorded his first album actually, and he has fond memories of spending the summer with his mates from back home right here in the middle of the city, making all sorts of mischief as young boys do. A small breeze flies by, wisping around him in a slight caress before it leaves him, heading onwards as life usually does. He's milking a lukewarm cappuccino at a busy Starbucks while pretending to hear what his new friend Ciaran is yapping on about. Something along the lines of how shitty his roommates are and why he even bothers with them in the first place. All Niall can think about is the concert he has scheduled this evening at seven and debates on whether or not he can miss it.

Obviously he can't, but he wants to. This whole tour has been shite for him. Isn't as fun as it was the year previous and he can't help but wonder if it's because he's missing a certain curly haired brunette in his life. Niall exhales a bottled up sigh, and it comes off harsh and Ciaran is looking at him like he's been insulted.

"Sorry, I can go if you don't want to hang out right now."

"No, I'm sorry. I'm just thinking about a lot of things."

"Yeah?" He scoots closer to him and leans in for a whisper. "Anything you want to talk about?"

Niall shakes his head, but then nods. "Yeah, it's..."
"Harry?" He's staring up at him with that bright green stare that only reminds Niall of Harry and it kills. It's been five months, maybe a little more since they really called it quits. Since Niall lost the part of himself he didn't know he'd given away.

The whole thing is bittersweet. Truthfully, he knows that their relationship shouldn't have felt as forced as it actually was. It was still so new to both of them and maybe Niall should've done what Harry had asked, but in the end, it was Harry himself that had the revelation both of them were too stubborn to admit to.

"I can't expect you to just come out because I'm not okay with a closeted relationship. It's not fair to you and it's not fair for me to pressure you."

"But I want to be with you." Niall had begged, but it was no use. Harry had made the decision and it was clear as day on his disgruntled face.

"I can honestly say the same thing. It stings to be without you. But maybe we just aren't meant to be. Maybe we aren't supposed to be together right now and I just have to accept that and move on. I hope you can too. I hope you can find happiness with someone that isn't trying to change things."

Niall hasn't found that someone to erase Harry from his heart. He thinks, maybe there isn't someone else like that for him. Even if he's the first guy he's ever loved, Harry Styles is still the one he's in love with and that says more than anything else in the world.

"Have you tried calling him?" Ciaran offers.

Niall only shakes his head, looking on towards the bustling throng of passersby hurrying down the streets. "What would be the point in that?"

"I don't know. Maybe ignite some form of hope that things will work out?"

The idea is nice, yes, but it'd be pointless. Harry's probably already moved on. Besides that, he's busy being a dad and Niall knows he has no right in extinguishing that burning desire Harry's always had. Just being in the picture probably made things more difficult for Harry.

Niall glances at his watch and sighs. "I have to get ready for tonight's gig. You can come if you want to. Sound check and everything."

Ciaran smiles. "Sure, mate. I'd love to."

**

"No, daddy. Can you say it? Da-ddy." Harry's eyeing Alexander, urging him to say his first word, but the little bugger only grins up at him, three little teeth peeking out from his gums. He squeals. Harry scoffs. "No, baby, c'mon. Daddy. Daaaaaa dddyyyyy~"

"He's not going to do it ya know," Louis grins from the couch opposite of them. He's cuddled in with Zayn, looking as blissed out as ever, sporting the type of smile that could kill if he wanted it to. Harry frowns. "I'm serious. He'll speak when he wants to."

"And his first word will most likely be something you won't even know where he heard it." Zayn adds, smirking coyly. Harry slumps against the foot of his couch, resting his head back on the
cushion and groans, defeated.

"Why does this have to be so frustrating?"

"Hey, you're lucky he isn't talking yet. Ten months in, Blaze was yammering on like there wasn't enough time in the world to say everything."

Rolling his eyes, he sits back up, gazing down at the little boy who's busying himself with Blaze's old stuffed lion that he gave him two months ago—because he's too old for silly little toys and wants big boy toys now that he's five.

Harry's never loved someone as much as Alexander and it's almost precious when he looks up at him, the world in his eyes, until he makes his poopy face and Harry's groaning again.

Louis laughs, then plugs his nose, waving his hand back and forth. "Phew. What a stench you've created, Xander. You stinky little twat."

"Lou," Zayn chastises, passing him a look.

"What?"

Harry gets to his feet, lifting Alexander into his arms. "Off to change my three thousandth diaper. Can't wait till he's potty trained." He stumbles off to Alexander's room quickly, barely hearing the "baby steps, Harry!" that Zayn shouts at him.

After successfully defeating another nasty diaper, Harry let's Alexander down to his feet, guiding him along the carpet out to the hallway. He started walking back in March, and he's still a little clumsy, but does just fine on his own. He's just about 70cm, has three barely there teeth, thick, dirty blonde hair that's starting to curl in the trademark Styles way, and his eyes have turned a darker shade of green, but they resemble Harry so closely it's like looking into a mirror.

A rustling from his bedroom is all Harry can hear once they step out into the hall, and curious to the source of the noise, he lifts Alexander into his arms, cradling his bum with his hand and heads into his room. At first, he doesn't see him, but turning around the corner of his bed, Harry spots Blaze sitting on the floor. The nightstand drawers are ajar, papers and items scattered round him and a picture frame situated in his hand. He has a cautious grip on it, staring at the image intently.

Harry puts Alexander on the floor next to Blaze and kneels down to meet his eyes. "Hey bub, what are you doing in here?" He asks, placing his hand over the crown of Blaze's head, quickly causing the boy to glance up at him, tears very obvious in his eyes. Harry's startled, to say the least, and then he's looking at the root of Blaze's crying.

The image hits him hard, reminding him of who he once was, and how he felt when they were together and Harry just hates how suddenly everything comes rushing back to him. "Oh Blaze..."

"I miss Niall." He admits with a sniffle and Harry pulls him into his arms.

"I'm sorry."

"What happened to him?"

Harry stills, and Blaze is looking expectantly up at him. Alexander crawls into his lap, places his hand on the picture of Harry and Niall and looks to him too. "Don't know." He lies, trying his damnedest to keep face.
Alexander looks back to the picture and frowns. "Dada..."

Harry's frozen.

Two reasons: his first word, and then referring to Niall as anything.

He can't decide if he should be happy or sad about this. It's a known fact that he's still broken up over him, wants to try and maybe talk to him again but is too stubborn to do anything about it. Wants to stick to what he said and move on. But this. He wasn't even expecting Alexander to remember him.

He was only three months old when Niall left for crying out loud.

"Dada," Alexander whimpers, looking back up to Harry with watery eyes and fuck. This is it. He's going to break down too. Great.

"Harry, have you seen—" it's Louis, and he can feel his presence entering the room. "Oh, there you are, Blaze. Baba and I have been wondering where you went off to." He moves over to the three huddled on the floor and Blaze is holding the picture frame up to show what he has.

"Daddy, its Niall."

Harry can practically hear the sadness that washes over Louis' face, and then he's leaning down to find Harry's. "Oh, Harry..."

"He said his first word," Harry bluntly states, his voice a little shaken, but clear all the same.

"What?"

"Alex said dada."

Louis forces a smile. "That's awesome!"

"No."

"No?"

Alexander loses his somber expression and smiles up at Louis. He taps the frame with his hand. "Dada."

It finally registers for Louis that dada isn't Harry. "Oh. Zayn?" He calls, and there's a thumping of footsteps heading their way. Louis removes the picture from his son's grasp and sets it gently on the nightstand.

"Everything okay?"

"Take Blaze into the living room, please," he requests quietly, pulling a pliant and silent Harry onto the bed with Alexander still in his arms. "Please." He repeats and Zayn complies, grabbing Blaze’s hand and leads him back to the living room.

"But baba, I—"

"Let them be, bub."

It's little, but Blaze’s reply is well heard. "Okay."

The room’s quiet, but Harry likes that. He doesn't make a sound, but he feels like screaming
anyways, although he know he won't because there’s this content calmness about the three of them, and he wants to keep it like this. Louis has him in his arms, rubbing circles over Harry's back and sighs.

"Wanna talk about it?"

"I don't know what to say." Harry grumbles, then sniffs.

"If you're worried that Alex will always remember him, then I can assure you that—"

"I want him back, Lou." Harry finally sobs, breaking that barrier between okay and not. Because he's not okay. Has never been okay about this.

Niall’s happiness just came first and how could he ever be happy if he couldn't do what he wanted to do because of him. He knew, in those last moments when Niall was trying so hard to stay, that he never wanted them to be that way.

Harry almost gave in, but he was too proud to lie to the world about them for six more months.

Yet, the idea never occurred to him that Alexander would ever remember who Niall was for a moment there.

It was never said out loud, but Niall has, in a way, been his other dad. Having practically known him since he was born and this...

It hurts far too much.

"Then... Then call him?"

"I..." Harry physically stills, ignoring the way Alexander tries to wriggle out of his grasp. "I don't know..."

*

Harry has lunch with Ed and Kate a week later. It's overdue, and he feels bad about not spending time with them earlier. The last time he saw them was his birthday three months ago, and that was sort of short lived because Alexander had gotten sick and Harry asked for everyone to go home early to take care of him.

They have meaningless conversation. Talking about what they're going to do when Kate has a vacation in the middle of July and how excited Ed is that he'll have her undying attention for a week straight. Harry's happy for them. Still finds it strange that they got together the way they did, but happy nonetheless.

It isn't until halfway through lunch that Kate asks about Alexander.

"Did he finally say his first word?"

Harry can't get over how every time someone asks, that he freezes indefinitely, showing obvious signs that the memory isn't a good one.

"I take that as a no?" She interprets but Harry is shaking his head instantly.
"No... He did."

Kate lights up instantly. "Really? That's awesome! Such a smart kid, already walking and saying his first word at ten months."

"Must be from your side," Ed jokes. Usually this would have Harry laughing along with them, but he can't help but feel so upset about this.

"It was dada," he growls.

"Aww his first word was you." Kate comments.

Harry gives her a look. "Dada is Niall."

She stills. "Oh."

Everyone's quiet for a while, the only thing differentiating them from the rest of the loud bustling restaurant.

Harry finally gives in, though, looking to Ed. "Have you... Have you talked to him lately?"

Ed seems reluctant to answer, but gives it anyways. "Yeah. Wrote a song with him last week actually."

It appears to dawn on Kate that they had. "Was that when you two were on Skype for ten hours?"

Ed nods. "He wrote most of the lyrics, I just helped with the composition of the music."

"Glad he's doing well then," Harry murmurs. He's done with the conversation, but Ed isn't.

"You should call him." There's a look in his eyes that says he knows something that he can't say.

"What's the point? It's been five months. I should just let it go. I'm sure he has."

"I'm not saying anything, because it's not my place. But I think you should call him either way."

*

“Am I stupid?” Harry blurs out at the dinner table. Louis and Zayn look to him, wide eyed and mouths full of food somehow flatlined.

“Harry, we’re eating.” Louis remarks smartly, continuing to chew down his mouthful. Zayn tries to stifle his laugh.

Harry sighs in disdain. “I’m being serious,” he reaches over the table and spoons baby food into Alexander’s mouth. It’s sweet potatoes and turkey flavored and sure, the real deal is good, but mixed together it makes Harry gag. At least he’s been blessed with a child that isn’t a picky eater. God knows where he got that from because he’s pretty picky himself. He then turns to the others again, “Am I stupid for breaking up with Niall?”

“Harry,” Zayn groans, not wanting to have this conversation now.
“I just keep thinking, maybe it’s all my fault for everything. I can’t exactly have a proper relationship with someone, let alone the addition to the relationship,” he’s talking about Alexander, and the others catch on quickly it seems. “What if… What if I’m the problem? And I should’ve just went along with Niall’s plan?”

Louis shakes his head, pushing his plate forward on the table. “Listen, you did what you felt was right, for you and Xander. That doesn’t mean it was stupid of you, or wrong of you. Sure, it didn’t fit the bill for Niall, but I get where you were trying to create an environment for your son to grow up in. If I was in your shoes, and Zayn was Niall, I don’t think I could’ve gone along with it, either.”

Zayn shrugs. “I think I can accept that.”

“Niall was probably beat up about it, but he probably also thought about you and Xander and what was best for all parties. That’s why he left after you told him to go.”

“Yeah, but… I can’t possibly ask him to come back, can I?”

“Why not? He did say he’d wait for you,” Zayn recalls and Harry can only nod, staring down at his half-full plate of food. He’s not very hungry anymore.

“You could call him,” Louis suggests.

“You know I can’t.”

There’s a collective sigh between Louis and Zayn and Harry realizes he’s being the biggest pain in the arse about this whole situation, but what’s he to do? He understands that he was asking too much of him, trying to get Niall to expose himself to the world when it could’ve very well been the biggest breach of his contract, not to mention, he wouldn’t have his career anymore. Or at least for a while. Harry knew of the ramifications, but he was too selfish in their relationship.

How could he possibly ask Niall to come home, when he very well doesn’t deserve the right?

“You know what, you are stupid,” Louis bites, removing himself and the plates from the table, despite Zayn’s cries of not being done.

“What?” Harry stares at him with doe-eyes, mouth gaped and body slack.

“You keep acting the martyr, Harry, and you’ll never get anywhere in life.” Louis says, mulling over washing the plates off in the sink. Blaze comes up to him with his plastic plate and offers it over.

“Thanks, love. Go and play, okay?”

The boy smiles widely. “Okay!” and he’s off.

“But I—”

“He has a point, Harry,” Zayn interjects, eyeing him profusely. “Look, you keep blaming yourself for everything that’s gone wrong in your relationships. I realize there’s a reason for that, but it’s time to figure out that not everyone by nature is bad until proven good. Niall’s a great guy. Sure, there’s a few things that you may not like, but he’s good to you and good to Xander. Isn’t that what you want? A relationship where there isn’t any worry that he’ll be there at the end of the day. Where he’ll take care of you and your child despite whatever’s going on in the outside world. I know the whole set up isn’t ideal, but he did say that he’s ending his contract when he gets back. That he’s going to come out for you.

“Harry, Niall Horan is the only guy that’s ever treated you like you truly mean something. He fell for
you the second he met you, and didn’t think twice that you had a kid. He accepted that fact and built a relationship with you upon the blocks that had already been lain. Think about that for a moment and tell me you shouldn’t try and get him back.”

Harry thinks maybe this is the most Zayn has ever said to him all at once and it hits him. Seriously hits him that he’s one hundred percent right in everything he’s said.

“It’s okay to be scared, but don’t be stupid and let this one go.” Louis adds.

18 June

He loves this. The roar of the crowd when he plays their favourite part in a song. The beautiful signs they make to show their support. Of a few he can spot in the crowd, there were very obvious pride signs and he almost doubles over in shock. He isn’t expecting anything like that, but the rumours of him being gay have only become more prominent in the news and Niall’s uncertain on how much longer he can hold in the truth.

It’s his last show. The end of June, and his resolve is firm. He’s going to do what he’s been anticipating over for the past six months. Niall steps up to the microphone stand, breathes out a deep sigh and strums at his guitar lightly. He smiles to the crowd, waving his arm slightly to greet them for the final song of the night. “You’ve been so fantastic, I want to thank each and every one of you for being here tonight. If not for all of you, I wouldn’t be here.” The crowd screams and he gives a chuckle, staring down at his feet for a moment before facing them again. “I need a favour from you, though. This next song, has never been heard. But I need you to film it and put it up on YouTube. Get it on the internet as much as possible so I can get this message out to a special someone.”

The band starts to play and Niall steps closer to the microphone. “I think I’m gonna lose my mind. Something deep inside me I can’t give up. I think I’m gonna lose my mind, I’ll roll and I’ll roll ‘till I’m out of luck, yeah, I’ll roll and I’ll roll ‘till I’m out of luck...”

**

There’s an incessant knock on Harry’s door and he’s about ready to shoot someone. It’s five in the bloody morning, there’s no reason in the world that would make him happy for being woken up at this hour.

Unless he’s won the lotto, someone’s going to die.

“Harry! Harry open up!” It’s Louis, and Harry’s ready to do it. He’ll murder him and he’ll know exactly where to hide his body.

Harry opens the door, purposefully keeping the locks on, and glares at Louis through the crack. “Do you want to die?” He scowls.

“Harry, I know it’s early, but there’s something you need to see.”
“What?”

“It’s Niall. Zayn got an email from one of his co-workers, Zannah, and she sent this video and, fuck Harry, let me in so I can show you for Christ’s sake!”

He thinks about it for a moment, not particularly registering anything that Louis’ just rambled off, but if this is that important, maybe he’ll let him in. “Fine, but make it quick. I have to be at work in four hours and I’m not supposed to be up for two.” Unlocking the door, Louis rushes inside, opening his laptop and hurriedly finds the email Zayn had forwarded to him.

Harry still doesn’t get how this is so important that Louis had to rush over to show a video he could’ve just emailed to him. He runs an exhausted hand over his face, rubbing the sleep away as much as possible.

Louis finds the video, and turns the volume up a bit. He skips to the part he wants Harry to hear and… what?

“Cause nobody knows you, baby, the way I do. And nobody loves you, baby, the way I do. It’s been so long, it’s been so long, maybe we’re fireproof. Cause nobody saves me, baby, the way you do.”

Niall’s teary eyed face is a full HD display on Louis’ laptop and Harry can barely understand the throb in his chest as he kneels down next to his friend, staring at the screen curiously. “This song is dedicated to the love of my life. I’m not going to deny it. This is my last concert for what may be the rest of my life.”

The crowd is in chaos, crying screams of “What?!?” and “No!” and all sorts of creative ways to exert their feelings. “It’s not because I don’t love this, I do, and I love each and every one of you because without you, like I said earlier, I wouldn’t be standing up here, telling you all of this. But there’s something in this world that I love more than my own career.

“He been sitting at home for the past six months, taking care of his—our—child while I’ve been away acting like the biggest idiot. Harry, baby, I love you, and I hope you see this, because I’m coming home.” The video ends and Harry’s silent. Staring at the screen with wide eyes and unable to speak anything coherent.

“What?”

“Babe, he’s coming home.” Louis smiles, his face lit up by the dim lighting of his computer.

“I…”

“He called me, actually, asked me to show you this. It’s sort of too corny for my tastes, but… you like that corny shite.” Louis admits with a smirk and Harry finally finds the words he needs.

“He called you? Wait, why didn’t he just call me?”

“Because of the same reason you haven’t called him.”

Harry sinks into himself, gazing down at the floor somberly.

He came out. At a concert where thousands of fans are going to show the world his confession. He even said Alexander is their child. He’s a dam about to break. So happy he could burst into a million pieces and never care to be put back together.

“Harry, babe, look at me,” Louis begs and Harry does as he’s told. His expression is soft, smile genuine and eyes staring straight into his soul. Louis can just tell what’s going through Harry’s
entirety, the severity of how much he can’t handle how he’s supposed to feel. “Want to come with me to pick him up at the airport?”

**

“Yes, no. I know that I broke the contract. No. I don’t care, Bressie. I’m sick of hiding this part of myself.”

“You know that you're not going to be able to continue working for this company, right?”

“Yes.” Niall holds the phone close to his face. It’s hot in his hand, burning his cheek, but he doesn’t register it until he’s let out the breath he’s been holding. “Yeah. I know that.”

"Is he worth throwing everything away for?” This, this is his friend. This is the type of person that Bressie truly is. The man that has basically been his father for the past seven years. And has been the one person to seriously give a damn about Niall and what he does in life.

Niall pauses, just about to cross the terminal threshold and he thinks about it. He thinks about Alexander and his sweet little face, all dimply and full of curiosity for the world. He thinks about how he was there for the first few months of his life, how he felt like he’d really become like a father to him even if the baby couldn't acknowledge that feeling.

But Niall did. The connection between them became strong, somehow. All the nights he took care of him so that Harry could get some sleep after being awake before the sun actually came up. And the way that Alexander would instantly fall into comfort the second that Niall pulled him into his arms and starting singing him a song.

And then there's Harry. Sweet, heart of gold, slow talking, Harry. The only person who could simultaneously steal and give back his heart, and nothing could stray Niall away from the way he feels about him. He should be angry that Harry was selfish, shouldn't have the desire to be with him, but he does. And he's going to do his damnedest to get him back.

Niall smiles. "Wasn't it you who always told me to go after the things I love?"

It takes Bressie a moment, but the second Niall hears the grin creep across his face, he knows what he's about to say. "Go after him, Nialler."

"Will do."

**

Harry wouldn't go. He wanted to, but he couldn't do it. His own body hesitating the moment he started to get up to leave. Louis could only nod in understanding because what was Harry to really do? Go to the airport and meet Niall and then…

What?

Everything will just go back to the way things were before?
They can’t. The break up still stings, no matter how much Harry’s heart yearns for Niall, his brain keeps beating it to the punch, stopping Harry before he can do anything irrational.

Louis prepares tea while Harry mopes about his internal crisis. He has work in three hours but he doesn’t want to even think about going. Louis’ staying home with Alexander today, thankfully, but he has to go home first and take Blaze to daycare before he can come back. In the meantime, Harry will get ready for the day.

And it should be just a normal Tuesday morning, but it’s not, because Niall fucking Horan had to go and confess to the entire world that he’s in love with him and Harry still can’t wrap his head around it.

Louis sets their cuppas down on the coffee table. He sits on the cushion next to Harry’s and sighs. “You know, he’s going to wait for you till forever ends.”

“That doesn’t even make sense,” Harry grumbles.

“Don’t be a twat.”

Harry cards his fingers through his tangled tresses and gives out the deepest sigh. “I need a cigarette.” He gets up, grabs his cuppa and heads towards the balcony, ignoring the way that Louis scoffs as he follows him.

They watch the sun rise over the hills. It’s peaceful, but something’s still missing. Something’s always missing, Harry gathers, and he’s not sure he’s willing to admit what or who it is.

Time passes by without pause, leaving Harry in a momentary lapse of misjudgment when Louis sighs and pats his jeans, wrinkled from just being pulled from the floor before his haphazard rush to get here this morning. “Well… I guess I better go pick up Mr. Horan. You sure you don’t want to go with me?”

Harry glances up to him, begging with his eyes for him not to go, but it’s no use. Louis doesn’t break promises, and he told Niall he’d pick him up to avoid any paparazzi traffic. “I’m… I’m not ready to see him, Lou.”

Okay.”

“You can keep telling me that I’m stupid and that it’s going to happen eventually but—wait… Okay?” He’s in shock. “You’re not fighting me about this?”

Louis shrugs. “After twenty years of friendship, I think by now I know when and when not to fight with you over your stupidity,” he smirks, tousling Harry’s lengthy hair before pressing a sloppy kiss to his temple. “I’ll swing by in a few hours to watch Xander. I promise not to bring Niall over.”

“Thank you.”

He nods, and Harry watches him go, gripping his mug tightly before letting out an overdue breath. Its half past seven and he’s about time he got ready for his day. Something’s telling him that it’s going to be a long one.

***
Climbing into the beat up old Chevy import that Louis really hates—but Niall thinks is kind of neat due to their current situation—the first thing Niall notices is that the back seat is completely empty. He shoots Louis a concerned look and frowns. The brunette only shakes his head and taps the steering wheel before pulling out into the slow morning traffic.

“He’s not ready.”

“Did he see the video?”

“Showed him this morning,” Louis answers.

Niall slumps his shoulders in defeat, leaning against the car door. It’s already so humid, being the middle of June, and the fast rush of air blowing from the car vents is all Niall wants right now. If Harry’s going to be difficult, then two can play it that game.

There’s this silence that falls on the two of them. It’s not like they never really became friends, but the awkwardness of Louis being Harry’s best friend and Niall being the ex-boyfriend makes the situation a bit uncomfortable. Niall still can’t believe that Louis even offered to come pick him up. He could’ve braved the paps if any showed up.

After a while, Louis sighs, tightening his grip on the steering wheel. Niall looks up at him over his shoulder, watching his movements. “He’s just not ready,” he repeats.

“Yeah… I get that,” Niall scoffs, crossing his arms defiantly. He would be lying if he said he isn’t disappointed, but he sort of expected this.

“Things… just happened, Niall. They never really fell back into place when you left, and I mean that for all of us.” Louis admits, chancing a side glance to Niall to see if he’s getting anything of a response from him. “It’s like… you were this little puzzle piece we didn’t even know was missing until you came and went. My own child misses you. Do you know how bloody tough it is to lie that you just went on a little trip and you’ll be home later even though none of us actually knew if you were to come back?”

Niall’s gutted. He doesn’t know what to say or do because this information is the exact opposite he thought he’d ever hear from anyone, especially Louis Tomlinson.

“So, no, you don’t get that he’s just not ready. How can you possibly know? And this seems really shitty,” Louis gestures his hand about dramatically. “This whole thing about me picking you up from the airport, all to have some lecture with you about leaving Haz and not even acknowledging that you had your own reasons. You don’t even have to say them, because I already know. All you’ve been doing is everything you can for Harry and Xander and I respect you for that, but this… This whole leaving for six months bullshit just broke us.”

Louis’ stops the car at a light and it’s everything he has not to break down, or so Niall thinks. Just looking at the bloke, he’s shaking like he’s gotta pee, eyes shot like he’s been on a coffee binge for days, but Niall just knows it’s Louis trying his hardest not to crumble. He knows, because that’s exactly how Niall looked the night after Harry ended it with him.

The night that they almost finally gave themselves to each other.

“Louis…”

“All,” he interjects, voice cracking. “All I’m asking is for you to wait just a little bit longer, okay?”

Niall goes to argue, but he’s speechless. He doesn’t know if that’s exactly an option at this point. To
allow Harry to continue being selfish? It’s not really right. But then again, was it really okay for Niall to have left in the first place, putting all of them in this position?

“Please,” Louis begs.

Niall gives. “Okay.”

19 July

Niall can’t sleep. He’s tried, consistently to force himself to fall asleep, but no amount of sleeping pills or efforts to lay in bed are fruitful. He isn’t certain as to why he can’t find slumber. Really, it’s only been a month since he’s been back home, but nothing really explains it. Not now for that matter.

The single reason he can come to the conclusion is Harry.

The one goddamned thing on his mind every second of the goddamned day is only ever Harry. He wants to talk to him. Always reaches for the phone but stops himself. The memory of Louis pleading with him to wait, constantly reminding him not to try.

So, it’s very easy to understand why he’s so surprised the moment he sees Harry’s name pop up on his phone’s screen. The buzzing of his phone echoes throughout Niall’s bedroom, a symbolic statement of how lonely he feels. Everyone’s trying to talk to him, but he couldn’t possibly return their calls. Not when the one person in the entire world isn’t a part of his life anymore.

And now? Now he’s calling and Niall is almost too eager to answer.

“Hello?”

“Niall?” Harry sounds a bit panicked, quickly bringing Niall to attention.

“Yes? What’s wrong? You okay?”

“Oh thank god you picked up. I…” Harry pauses. “I need you. Can you please come over? I know it’s late but—” There’s this wailing noise on Harry’s end and Niall puts two and two together.

“Want! Want! Want!”

“Alex, please!” Harry begs and Niall’s to his feet, grabbing for his hoodie because it’s been a depressing week of nonstop rain.

“I-Is that Alex? He’s started talking?” Niall rambles, searching frantically for his keys. He finds them tucked in the dish by the front door that has various types of trinkets he can’t possibly begin to figure out their origin.

Harry sighs, “Not important. I just really need you right now. Please?”

“Of course, Harry. I’m on my way.”
“Thank you,” Harry murmurs before the line cuts. Niall stares at his phone for a long moment, internally giddy with excitement because he gets to see them again. After a long, lovely seven months, he's able to see the two boys in his life that matter the absolute most and it couldn't be better than this.

Remembering why he's holding his keys in his hand, he starts for the door and down to the street to his truck.

When Harry opens the door, he looks so drained. Beautiful, as Niall always thinks, but drained nonetheless. Niall never bothered to look at the time, but glancing at Harry's watch, he could see the little time hands pointing to half three and Niall just wants to do everything he can to help him get to sleep.

"Thank god." Harry exhales, letting Niall inside his place. The second Niall walks in, he feels like he’s walked into a different apartment. Everything's changed. The normally clean and proper apartment is messed with toys and clothes belonging to Alexander. The living room is the biggest victim of the chaos and its obvious Harry's got his hands full.

"What's wrong?" Niall asks, setting his keys on the counter. Harry shuts the front door and there it is again, the wailing screech from Alexander's room. Niall looks to Harry, an expression asking if he can go take care of him, and he nods, utterly defeated.

He takes the initiative, heading into the babe's room, greeted by a very grown almost one year old Alexander. His hair has grown into a fluffy tuft of curly light brown, eyes a dark green and three barely in teeth peeking out at Niall. Alexander's face is blotched with red, covered in wet tears and Niall quickly goes to him. Pulling him into his arms, Niall cradles the baby, not prepared for the obvious growth of the weight of his body, but he holds him close regardless. "Hey... Hey. It's okay. I'm here." He shushes him, rocking the crying child tenderly.

It finally registers for Alexander that this is not his dad. This is someone different but familiar and the recognition in his eyes is almost blindingly bright.

Niall’s not prepared for the next thing to come out of his mouth. "Dada?"

Harry stops in the doorway, watching them with his arms crossed, looking more exhausted than he did before. Niall gives him a look of confusion. "Dada? That's you, right?"

Harry only shakes his head.

"Dada. Dada here," Alexander coos, nuzzling his head into Niall’s chest. This is too much. His talking, he's moving like how he remembers Theo moving when he was about this age. It's all so surreal.

"Who's dada?"

Harry gives a deep sigh and looks him in the eye, almost fondly but almost disdainfully. Like he doesn't want to say what he's about to. "You're dada."

"What?"

Harry only walks away.
Harry can only remember falling asleep at a little after four am, crashing on the middle of his king-sized bed in a stupor that felt almost drunken. Waking up, he stares at the alarm clock, registering the numbers stating eleven in the morning and groans. He needed it though. The seven hours of sleep feel like an absolute dream, and he's shocked when he realizes why he had been able to have that luxury.

Niall.

Harry doesn’t really remember what came over him to allow the guy to help him. He faintly recalls Alexander screaming for his "dada", something that drove him absolutely nuts. What is it about Niall that he even imprinted a memory into the child's head? Why is it that a barely one year old baby remembers the very person that left Harry the way he did?

Is he a better dad?

Is he more suited to take care of him than Harry is?

He really doesn't fucking know and in a way he really wants to be mad at Niall. Mad because he left, but also because he never left Harry's heart.

Sighing, Harry rubs his eyes, and slowly gets out of bed. He scuffles into the bathroom, rinsing the sleep from his eyes and stares into the mirror. "Okay, Harry, he's not going to be out there. You didn't invite him over, he's not still here. You can do this." He assures himself, taking a deep breath and heads towards the living room.

Entering the living room, he's faced with a sight that he's crossed between loving and hating and why do they have to look like a proper father and son?

Niall’s fast asleep on the couch, Alexander laying across his chest, thumb lodged comfortably in his mouth—something Harry really needs to break the habit of. It looks akin to something straight from a fucking family album, the kind of thing that his mum used to take pictures of when Harry was but a babe, fast asleep in his father’s arms.

The urge to wake them is nagging, but they look so precious that Harry would feel guilty if he did. So he succumbs to the sight, trudging into the kitchen and starts the coffee maker. He pulls out a drawer, fishing quietly for the stash of cigarettes he has for those moments he just can't handle, and yanks a stick from its casing. Harry grabs for a lighter too, shutting the drawer and pours his cuppa before sneaking out onto the balcony.

It's a dreary Saturday morning, the nearly noon sun peeking through the clouds, and Harry just wants to scream. It’s depressing, really. The entire situation. Niall being here, the sky, Alexander wanting only his “dada”, Niall-fucking-Horan sleeping on his goddamned couch with his precious baby boy, the fucking sky. Okay. So it's just two things really. But they're two things that stand out the most and it’s putting him in the worst of moods.

He was stupid for asking him to come over. Harry should’ve bucked up and laid down the law with Alexander. Should’ve told him he was never coming back and to stop, because after time went on, Alexander would’ve never remembered Niall in the first place.

But maybe he’s mostly mad at himself for surrendering so easily.
Because, truthfully, the one that needs Niall the most, is Harry and he hates that so fucking much.

He’s down to the last bit of his cigarette before he smashes the butt into the ashtray and stares in disdain out at the very city he fell in love with all those years ago in uni. The same city where he met and fell in love with Nick Grimshaw, the abusive ex-boyfriend who was the worst excuse of a closeted homosexual that Harry ever knew and even if the memories were never good, he knows, deep down, that if it wasn’t for Nick, Harry wouldn’t have found Niall.

Nor would he have Alexander.

His confliction is haunting him. Consuming him into something Harry’s not sure he’s ready to face.

“Hey.”

It’s Niall, creeping through the crack in the arcadia door silently, and Harry doesn’t bother to face him either.

“I put Alex in his bed.” He murmurs, slowly approaching Harry. Then they’re standing side by side, staring out at the cityscape, completely silent.

For all of about thirty seconds.

“I’m sorry.” Niall whispers and Harry whips around.

He stares him down. “What for, hm? Leaving me? Telling people I’m just your friend? Admitting to the whole fucking world that you’re in love with me and then singing that fucking song, hoping it’ll bring me back to your arms? Tell me, Niall. What makes you think that I would take you back after all of that? There’s more bad than good in everything that caused our break up. A stupid fucking song isn’t going to make me suddenly fall in love with you all over again, you know!” It’s the worst word vomit that’s ever fallen out of Harry’s mouth, and usually he’d feel pretty awful about saying all those nasty things, but this time is different.

This time, he’s not surrendering.

He isn’t expecting Niall to fight back.

The leer in those fiercely blue eyes is intimidating, enough to throw Harry’s guard off. “You think you’re the only one that hurt from our break up? Fuck. Harry. You have got to be the most selfish, ignorant, asshole that I’ve ever met. I’m sorry, okay?! I’m fucking sorry for leaving you like that. I’m sorry for treating you like a dirty little secret for a split second. But what I’m not sorry for, is getting the chance to love you. To be in your life for as long as I was, because it was the best four damn months I’ve ever had with any one in my entire life.” There are tears in his eyes, and Harry thinks maybe his heart is breaking all over again.

This isn’t what he wanted.

“So if that’s what you truly want, me out of your life, then I’ll give you that. I’ll let you be selfish and stop fighting for you.” Niall sniffs, wiping angrily at his tears. “I’ll give you up, even after I threw away everything else I worked so hard to get, because I love you that much. Because I don’t want to do anything else to hurt you.”

For a moment, Harry almost lets him go like that. Face flooded with tears, blotches of red all about his cheeks, nose running and never stopping.

But he can’t.
No.

Not like this. Things can’t just end this way. Not when they have the opportunity to see eye to eye again.

“Niall, no!” Harry shouts after him, racing to the front door and shoving his back to it, blocking Niall’s way, arms spread across the span of the door’s width. There’s determination in his expression, staring directly to Niall with everything he’s got.

He surrenders.

“Please. Don’t leave. Not like this. I…” He pauses, barely letting out the small “can’t” he murmurs.

Niall stops, watching Harry cautiously.

“Y-You’re right. You’re so so right. I’ve been selfish, thinking that I’m the only one hurting.” He bows his head, fighting against the raging tears begging to release from his eyes. “But you have to understand, I didn’t do it because I wanted to. I did it because I didn’t want this to be the same thing all over again.”

“What?”

Harry looks back to him, slowly moving away from the door. He’s shying away, covering his chest with his arms, hoping it’ll be enough to hide his shame. His heart from Niall.

Niall’s looking to him like he can finally see right through him. Like he can see every little insecurity Harry’s ever felt, all the pain, all the long nights crying himself to sleep because Nick hit him for being “too gay” and because he “touched him in public”.

He feels like he’s suddenly on display for the whole world to see.

And Niall’s the entire world in his eyes.

“What do you mean all over again? D-Did something happen?” Niall inquires, stepping closer to Harry, only to have him take a step away. “Harry, please. You can’t just drop a bomb like that and expect me to ignore it.”

Harry breathes a deep sigh, slumping his shoulders and tugging nervously at the hem of his shirtsleeve.

“Sit down. I have a lot to tell you.” Harry whispers and Niall obliges, finding a seat on the couch and waits for Harry to join him.

So Harry explains it. Everything from the start of figuring out he liked guys and only guys, to when he had given his virginity to some stranger at a party when he was supposed to have been studying for his A Levels, all the way up to when he met Nick and how everything seemed perfect until it wasn’t.

“It wasn’t until Louis and Zayn made me look in the mirror at all of my bruises that I realized just how bad things were. It’s pathetic, but I remember nights where I’d just rock myself to sleep, chanting over and over that Nick loved me. That’s why he hit me. Why he hid me from the world because he didn’t want to share me. Turns out, I was nothing but his dirty little slut that he came home only to fuck till I couldn’t move, and then ditch for some pretty bird he met down at the bar later that night.”
Niall gulps, unable to let out a word, because what could he say?

So he places his hand on Harry’s, surprised when Harry places his other hand on Niall’s and squeezes desperately. “I’m so sorry for the way I’ve been acting. For being so selfish and a complete twat. But…”

“But?” Niall manages after his lengthy silence.

“If we’re to make things work again… we should start over.” Harry suggests, shutting his eyes tightly, unable to look at the world for the moment.

“I think I can agree to those terms for now. But… what’s starting over, exactly?” Niall quirks a curious eyebrow and the sight is slightly comical. Harry lets out a snort of laughter. “What?”

Harry covers his mouth, stifling his hysterics before calming down. “N-Nothing. Just thought you looked cute quirking your eyebrow like that.”

Niall rolls his eyes. “Oh shut up, idiot.” He smiles, looking down at his timid knees. “But seriously.”

“Okay, okay. Just… Starting over doesn’t have to mean to the very beginning, but like… Maybe just start dating again and see if things go well from there.”

Niall ponders the suggestion, rubbing his invisible beard and side smirking at Harry. “I believe we have a deal, Mr. Styles.”

He puts his hand out, and Harry anxiously shakes it.

“Deal.”

“So…” Niall trails. “Dada?”

Harry shrugs. “Dunno,” he gets up to retrieve his now cold cup of coffee and sits back on the couch next to Niall. “One day I’m trying to teach him to say “daddy” and then the next thing I know, he’s pointing at a picture of you and saying dada.”

“First word?” Niall asks, suddenly sitting up straight like he’s just received the best present in the world.

“To my disappointment, yes. Congrats, Niall Horan, you’re a father,” Harry sips from his cup, staring straight at the telly, avoiding the very obvious expression of proudness on Niall’s face. “Oh stuff it.”

*

"It's about fucking time you two made up." Louis remarks after Harry tells him what happened the other day. "I was getting really sick of waiting for you to man up."

"Heyyy," Harry groans bashfully.

Zayn joins them at the island counter in the kitchen, setting his cuppa down and plays with the rim. "Lou has a point. We've all been trying our hardest not to force you two."
"We're not exactly back together, yet, lads."

"No, but you're talking and you're going to try. That's what matters." Louis explains and that's enough for Harry to accept.

Zayn runs his hand through his sleep messed hair. "So, when's the big date?"

Harry shrugs. "Niall says he has something big planned, and only told me to keep my weekend free."

"This is great. If you want, we could take Xander off your hands," Zayn offers and Louis nudges him.

"Zee," he groans. "Sorry Harry, but it seems like Zayn's forgotten that we have a date weekend planned ourselves."

Harry smiles. "It's all right. I'm sure mum and Gemma won't mind seeing Alex for the weekend. Gives them time to bond before his first birthday."

"Is that really soon?" Zayn asks and Louis nods, pointing at their calendar on the fridge.

"I have it circled and everything, Zayn. Do you really not pay attention?"

"I guess not."

Harry laughs at them, "you're like a proper husband and wife, you know."

"Stuff it, Haz. If anyone's the wife, it's Zayn."

Zayn snorts.

"What?"

"You know what." He answers, shaking his head in amusement. "Anyways, I'm off to work. You two stay out of trouble," he says to the both of them, giving Louis a longing goodbye kiss.

Harry sighs. He hopes that one day soon, he and Niall will be that way again.

*

"All right, love, you're going to stay with nana all weekend. I'll be home on Sunday, so be good," Harry smiles, buckling Alexander into his car seat. He kisses his forehead. "I love you."

"Love daddy." Alexander coos and Anne's a puddle of cuteness overload.

"I can't believe he's talking. I have a whole bunch of flash cards I can show him if you want." She offers, reaching to give Harry a hug.

"That would be great mum. He'll return a genius." He jokes, eliciting a chuckle from her.

She stares him over, giving a proud smile. "I'm really happy for you, love. I hope you and Niall have a wonderful weekend."
"Thanks, mum. Hope Alex isn't too much of a handful."

"Nonsense. He'll be fine. Don't worry, okay?"

Harry shrugs. "All right. I'll see you Sunday." He gives his mum a kiss on the cheek and waves to Alexander before shutting the door.

He watches them drive off, a bit sullenly, but also a bit excited to be child free for the next two and a half days. It'll be good for all of them.

Harry goes back up to his apartment and gets his things ready. Niall had said to pack enough clothes for two days, hinting they themselves were going away for the weekend and the excitement is almost overwhelming.

Niall shows up an hour later, a curt knock at the door, and Harry quickly answers it, inviting him inside. He almost goes to kiss him, but backs away nervously. Niall just grins. "You all set to go?"

"Yep. I've got everything right here," Harry answers, patting his duffle bag. "I've gotta ask though, where are we going?"

"It's a secret." Niall hums. "But you'll like it, I promise."

They head up north in Niall’s Range Rover, causing Harry to believe that they're going camping. Niall’s always been a simple guy, so it doesn't take much to figure it out, but either way it makes Harry happy knowing that Niall’s pulling out the stops to make this "first" date better than the original.

At least he won't be unknowingly frightened by his worst fear.

They pull to a stop at their destination, a quaint little cabin up in the woods. Harry gives him a curious look. "Don't tell me there's a serial killer out here. I've seen the movies!" He teases and Niall laughs.

"Of course not. No, this is the cabin I bought after my first big check. It's where I go to clear my head, write songs, all that hippy mumbo jumbo."

Harry leans over the console to press a quick kiss to Niall’s cheek. "It's perfect. Thank you." He thinks he sees a small blush pepper Niall face as he gets out of the truck.

Niall unlocks the door, and the scent of musk and pine envelopes Harry the second he invites himself inside. It feels like this might be Niall’s first time taking someone here and that in itself says a billion things.

"So the bedrooms in the back, bathrooms the first door on the right and straight across from it is the kitchen. Make yourself at home." Niall explains and Harry does just that. He settles his bag down on the king sized bed in the room, running his hand across the soft duvet covering the mattress and smiles.

Then he realizes they're going to be sharing this bed and suddenly he's in a fit of nerves. After six months apart, and more than that of not sleeping together, he's barely certain if he's ready for this.

But then he turns to see Niall smiling softly at him and his nerves seem to flit away as quickly as they came.
"I'm going to go make dinner. The sun will set in about an hour. I want to watch it with you." Niall states kindly.

"I'd love to."

And it's just like that. Simple, sweet, and just the two of them. Like nothing ever happened, and Harry sort of likes feeling blissfully unaware of their past.

"Thank you for dinner," Harry murmurs, sitting next to Niall on the porch swing out front. It's the perfect view, akin to that same sunset they witnessed together on the way up to Fylde Coast. There's this wide expanse between the trees that marks the moment of the sun falling slowly in the sky, lighting it up in pretty pinks and oranges fading out to purples and blues.

"Thank you for spending the weekend with me, love." Niall returns, reaching for Harry’s hand, and he’s nervous, if the small twitching in his fingers is any sign, but Harry grips his hand back, smiling. "This reminds me of when we went to Zayn’s parent’s cabin."

"I was just thinking that."

"Mmm…" Niall hums, resting his head on Harry’s shoulder, staring out at the sky, silent, but full of kindness and love and Harry thinks maybe he’s falling all over again. If that’s even possible.

Moments pass blissfully, just two guys enjoying nature as it should be, and then the suns fallen, tucked away for another night. Niall sits up straight, looking to Harry with a smarmy grin. "What?"

"I have a surprise for you. Can you start a fire?" He asks, pointing to the humble fire pit settled to the right of the porch steps, a few chairs placed carefully around it.

"I’m not just your regular bloke," Harry teases.

"Good," Niall starts to get up. "If you’ll get that started, I can go get your surprise."

"All right, love." Harry murmurs, bashfully allowing Niall to press his lips to his forehead, the touch so familiar that it etches into his skin like how all of his tattoos have. Niall disappears into the house and Harry gets to.

The moment the fire’s lit, Niall’s emerging from the door with a plate of ingredients to make s’mores in one hand and his guitar in another, lithely flowing down the stairs with practiced ease.

"So, s’mores and Kumbaya? I think I can deal with that. Not much of a surprise though," Harry remarks playfully and Niall rolls his eyes.

"Don’t be a smart ass. Take a seat, babe. The night’s only just begun."

Niall sidles onto the log next to Harry, settling the plate onto one of the aluminum end tables, pulling his instrument into his lap. He strums a few strings on the guitar, lazily playing.

It isn't until Harry realizes he's spaced out watching the swaying fire that Niall's playing a familiar tune. He turns his head to face him quickly, the blonde seemingly lost in the sound of the flowing chord.

"I think I’m gonna lose my mind. Something deep inside me I can’t give up. I think I’m gonna lose my mind, I’ll roll and I’ll roll ‘till I’m out of luck, yeah, I’ll roll and I’ll roll ‘till I’m out of luck…"
Niall's voice hits Harry, hard. Having always wanted to have him sing a song for him, and maybe Niall's a mind reader, but Harry couldn't imagine something as marvelous as this.

He won’t never admit it, but Harry has laid in bed every night, watching that same stupid video of Niall's last performance. It'd make him feel so incredibly happy, made him fall in love over and over again. Because despite what he said, this fucking song did it for him.

Their eyes meet, and maybe it's the fire, but Harry's body is so hot, sparks of something racing throughout his veins. A warmth so intense it’s consuming his mind, persuading it to feel the same as his heart.

And he hopes that Niall feels the same.

Niall fumbles over a chord and curses under his breath. "I'm so sorry," he can't look Harry in the eyes and the embarrassment is very obvious on Niall's face. The blonde sets the guitar down, shaking his head, ashamed. "I can't sing in front of small crowds and especially not in front of one person, but I thought, for you, I could do it. Because I wrote this for you and I love you so much and I just wanted to do something simple but romantic and I'm so sorry, Haz. I'm—"

"Shut up you idiot," Harry cuts him off, gets up from his seat and smashes their lips together, hands wrapping around Niall's neck. The kiss itself would've been perfect, but Niall loses his balance and falls back off the log, bringing Harry along with him.

Niall smiles up at him, "you okay?" He reaches up to twirl a curl around his finger.

Harry returns the grin, caressing Niall's cheek softly. "I’m ruined. How dare you for suddenly going into song like that."

Niall shrugs, laughing lightly. “I told you I had a surprise for you.”

He’s shaking his head, cannot believe how insanely adorable Niall is, and maybe this is it for them. This is where everything comes together like how it should’ve all those months ago. They don’t need to start over, not when things were never quite let go. Harry sinks his face into Niall’s neck, slowly pressing kisses to the soft skin. Niall lets out a small gasp, gripping a handful of Harry's hair as he presses open-mouth kisses to his skin, sucking and nipping lightly every now and then. He runs his tongue over red flesh and—

"Harry," he breathes. "Harry, wait."

Reluctantly, he pulls away, looking down to Niall in concern. "Something wrong?"

Niall shakes his head frantically. "No, I just... Where is this going?"

Harry sits up, straddling Niall's waist and looks up like he's in thought. "Hmm... Well, that's all on you, mister-I'm-going-to-make-this-the-best-date-ever. Those were your words, right?" Harry teases and Niall writhes underneath him, trying to wiggle away from his hold.

"Harry... Don't tease." Niall groans, only to receive a grind of Harry's hips against his. He moans. "Fuck. You're hard."

And that was all it took to get them off the ground, heading desperately into the cabin. They hit the wall in a fit of gasps and silencing kisses. Their hands intertwine, the backs of Niall's pressed to the wall, Harry clearly being his anchor.

Somehow, they make it into the bedroom, with Harry on his back and Niall sidling onto his waist,
leaning down to pepper kisses down his neck. His hand snakes up under Harry’s shirt, grazing lightly over his skin and halts at his nipple, suddenly sensitive and Harry can’t help the small whimper he makes. Niall grins. They’ve never had a chance to explore each other, despite their four month relationship previous.

Alexander would always ruin any moments they thought they could get away from him, instantly destroying any sort of mood they were in.

But now, there’s no distractions. Now, nothing can keep them from each other.

No threat of going on tour for six months without contact.

No fear of feeling like a dirty little secret.

And maybe, just maybe, Harry’s willing to be his all over again.

“Should we talk about…?” Harry lets out suddenly, staring at the ceiling in a lustful daze. Niall lifts his head from its perch against Harry’s chest.

“Talk about what?”

Harry gulps, sits up and looks Niall in the eyes nervously. He pulls away shyly. “This is going to be our first time. We’ve never talked about how we would do this.”

Niall gives a loud laugh. It sounds vaguely anxious. “You don’t just talk about having sex.” Harry’s bruised and Niall scoots next to him, taking his hand into his. “But we can talk about it if you like. What you’re willing to do and what you won’t.”

Harry exhales, relaxing his shoulders and thank god for Niall. He passes him a timid smile. “I’ve always been the one to be fucked. So I guess…”

“I’ve always been on top. Kinda… backwards, isn’t it?” Niall remarks and Harry realizes it’s over their size difference. Staring at him under the fluorescence of the full moon seeping into the room, Harry recognizes that he’s distinctly smaller in frame than he is.

“Yeah,” he breathes. “A little. But… I’m okay with that.”

Niall meets his gaze and it’s soft, kind just like he is. “Any limits?”

“Not that I really can think of.” Harry hums.

“Ohay,” and Niall leans in to pull Harry’s lips to his, breathing him in. He flits his tongue over Harry’s lip, sliding into his mouth with ease. He lightly pushes Harry to his back again, kissing him fervently. Harry shuts his eyes, allows himself to fall into this, to fall into Niall in a way that he’s never done before.

With anyone, and that’s terrifying.

Sitting up, Niall frantically pulls Harry’s shirt off, then goes to remove his, while attempting to continue their kiss. It’s futile, gets him stuck and they bump heads. Harry gasps a laugh and rubs his temple, looking up to Niall with bright eyes. They don’t say anything though, only hurriedly trying to go along with it, despite feeling like incapable prepubescent sixteen year olds.

Niall unbuttons Harry’s trousers, pulling them off and to the floor, digits curling under the hem of his pants. All Harry wants is to get naked and impatiently yanks off his boxers, going to remove Niall’s
“No,” Niall whispers, palm pressed to Harry’s chest. “Let me do the work, love.” And there’s this look in Niall’s eyes that spells out a dangerous lust and Harry welcomes that, permitting him to give Niall the reins he wants to control. The blonde gets his clothes off, reaching into his nightstand drawer to fish out what Harry suspects is the lube and a condom, and sets them on the table top. He returns to Harry’s lips, sliding along his body, rubbing his hard cock along Harry’s, eliciting a delicious moan from them.

Niall’s hand glides between their chests, gripping them in his hand and working his way up their shafts.

“Niall…” Harry moans, arching his back. It’s incredible how he knows what can do it for him. Wants Niall to piece him apart, unfold him and reveal his heart.

Niall hums, biting his lip when he catches Harry’s gaze and he’s so fucking hot.

Harry knows that if he continues like this, he won’t last. It’s been far too long since he last had sex, and he can’t even remember the last time he wanked. Groaning, he bucks his hips, eliciting a moan from Niall and fuck. “Ni… Please…” Harry begs, and it sounds so naughty coming out of his mouth that way, but he needs him. Now.

Niall smirks, removing his hand from their cocks, and reaches. He comes back with cold fingers, spreading Harry's legs and pressing against his hole. Harry gasps, tensing a bit when, then relaxing as Niall pushes into him, slowly working him open. It feels so good that it's torture.

Niall reaches for the condom, keeping up with his movements, pushing a second in, scissoring his fingers open and close, twisting and moving further inside Harry and okay, he really needs him now.

“Ni…” Harry barely gasps and the blonde gives a small laugh.

“It’s okay baby. Almost done.” Niall coos, placing the end of the condom wrapper between his teeth and yanks. Except. It doesn’t work, and tries again only to slip. He curses under his breath.

“Dammit… was trying to be sexy.”

Harry winces at the loss of Niall’s fingers and watches him rip the wrapper open with his hands, sliding the condom on in frustration. Their eyes meet, both debauched and embarrassed and then suddenly they’re laughing and nothing else matters. Okay, so maybe they both tried to be sexy and failed, but isn’t that what this is all about? Being able to be themselves and still find each other so far in love that there’s no judgments?

He wraps his hand around Niall’s neck and pulls him into a longing kiss, running his hand down Niall’s covered cock and tugs, hinting to do something before he goes insane. Niall titters against Harry’s lips and reaches down to rub the lube over the condom and guides himself between Harry, pushing him down to his back.

He sinks down into him carefully, Harry groaning, immersing himself in just being so full.

Niall bottoms out, looking to Harry. “You okay?” He caresses his cheek tenderly, receiving a nod.

“Yeah, you feel amazing,” he whispers, eyes half lidded, washed with a lazy hunger.

Nodding, Niall allows himself to move, slowly thrusting. Harry drags out a moan, instinctually driving Niall to thrust faster. Harry wraps his legs around Niall’s waist, heels pressed against his arse to hold him closer, awkwardly bringing him in for a desperate kiss, one that’s almost impossible to hold. It’s all he wants, all he needs, is to feel close, closer if he can. He’ll never allow himself that
loneliness akin to Niall being away for so long, not now. Especially not because he’s here, with him in the most proverbial way to be with someone, and he’s never going to let go.

Harry doesn’t know what time it is, nor does he care. It’s still dark and the moon’s still shining in through the three paned window watching over them. He’s entranced by him, the way his long lashes kiss the soft peaks of his cheeks, the way he softly breathes, and only snores when he’s shifting in bed. Harry revels in the caresses of the moonlight against Niall’s alabaster skin, illuminating the exact metaphorical definition of his world.

And that’s it for him. Looking across at him, he falls in love all over again.

Chapter End Notes

Many thanks to Nicole for helping me come up with the cutest fucking ideas, and then thanks to Suz for dealing with my crap for these past two months.

Credits go to One Direction for Fireproof.

Credits to Ed Sheeran for writing All the Stars and inspiring Harry’s final confession to himself.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Okay okay. I've been gone for so long that I NEED to give you all something to tell you that I'm working on it. It's only like almost 4k words, but have a little filler and I'll see all of you in the last chapter.

So that means six parts! Woo!

As always, it's not beta'd, so apologies for any mistakes. xx

20 July – continued.

Maybe this was a bad idea. And he knows that he should’ve been paying more attention than he was, but Harry just looked so content and beautiful and everything just feels so right.

Niall can just tell that everything is perfectly fine again, and he hopes to keep it that way.

But.

It seems life has something else entirely different in store for them, and maybe Niall should’ve seen the signs.

They’ve been on their tail for some time now, he can tell that much. But what had they seen, is the question. Since Niall and Harry entered London from the north on their way down from the cabin, something felt off. He’d ignored it, of course, because Harry is all he can even think about, and Alexander.

Anne’s house is about twenty minutes out from the dense city, away from all the noise and hustle of life that prowls the streets consistently throughout the day. Picking up Alexander was the first thing they planned on, hoping to maybe go to the zoo afterwards to surprise the little one with creatures he’s never seen with his young eyes. Then Niall started piecing together the way that things felt strangely familiar in a negative way, and then he saw them.

Those lurking eyes peering around the corner not twenty meters from Anne’s front porch.

Niall doesn’t want to tell Harry, on the off chance that he flips and wants to maybe back out of this with him. Which, in theory, wouldn’t happen because they’re clearly in this together for the long hull. But Niall’s doubts always seem to get the best of him, so he keeps quiet, side glancing every now and then to make sure they keep their distance.

Anne invites them in with open arms, smiling brilliantly, and pulls Niall into her arms.

“Niall,” she breathes, pulling away only to stare at him fondly. Then it dawns on her that this is their first meeting and she backs off embarrassedly. “Sorry, so sorry. I’ve just heard so much about you that I feel like I’ve known you for years,” she directs mostly at Harry who pretends to busy himself with searching for his son.
Grinning, Niall pulls her back into another hug and shakes his head. “If it’s all the same to you, Harry won’t shut up about you and Gemma.”

Anne laughs, rubbing Niall’s back before breaking apart from his embrace. She caresses his cheek gently and gives a wholehearted smile, one of those that hits you right in the chest and warms you. “I’m so happy Harry and Alex have someone as wonderful as you in their life.” She then whispers, “And you’ve made up?”

Niall nods. “I guess you’re stuck with me.”

Harry returns to their side with Alexander in tow, waddling along in a newer pair of shoes. “Dada!” He coos, reaching up to him with a toothy grin.

“Hey buddy,” Niall says, pulling the child up into his arms to hold him close. “Did you have fun at Nana’s?”

Alexander nods in excitement, grinning his three teeth smile. Harry looks to his mum and smiles. “We were gonna go to the zoo. Did you want to come? Take pictures and all that?”

“Wouldn’t miss it, love. Lemme just go get my purse and we can go.”

Niall doesn’t say anything even after they’ve arrived at the zoo about being followed. He really doesn’t know how Harry will take it and doesn’t even want to think about getting Alexander and Anne mixed up in his celebrity life. He sort of hoped that he would just fall off the radar after being silent for two months after he quit. Of course he hasn’t exactly been out of the house in two months so maybe the paparazzi finally caught on and now he didn’t know what to do.

It’s around the time where they’re looking at the safari animals that Niall asks Anne to take Alexander to the petting zoo.

“All right.” She gives easily, albeit giving him a curious look as if she knows something is wrong. But she takes him without a word, leaving Harry and Niall in a silent tension.

They walk around for a bit, and casually, Harry reaches for Niall’s hand. Niall gives him a squeeze with his before pulling away.

Harry gives him a worried look. “Everything okay?”

So Niall just comes out with it. “We’re being followed,” he whispers.

“What?”

Harry starts to look around but Niall grabs his attention. “No, don’t.”

“What the hell is going on, Niall,” he growls, glaring down at him. There’s a mixture of confusion and frustration on his face.

“It’s a pap. Just two. A cameraman and a reporter. They’ve been following us since we entered the city.”

“And you didn’t think to tell me this?”

Niall shakes his head. He doesn’t know what to say. Harry’s annoyed.
“Bloody hell, Niall.”

“Just ignore them. Maybe they'll go away.”

Harry grunts, but stays quiet, roaming around with him compliantly.

It continues on like that, tensions growing—mostly on Harry's end—and he just breaks. Harry turns around and scowls at the pap, who's very obviously following them. “Hey, can you just go away? We're trying to have a nice family outing.”

The reporter takes his opportunity to approach Niall, ignoring Harry's presence completely.

“Niall, what can you say about your recent absence? Where have you been?” The questions just start vomiting out and Niall knows that there's not much he can do but answer.

“I've been dealing with my own personal business.”

Harry looks between them, irritation definitely in his body language.

The pap finally acknowledges Harry, smirks, and turns back to Niall. “Is this your boyfriend, Harry?”

“Yes.”

“Was that your son?”

“Harry's son, yes.” Niall answers shortly.

“How do you feel? Knowing that your career is over?” Before Niall can even give an answer, Harry storms off in a huff.

*

Niall wakes to an empty bed.

It's early, or rather late, the sun not even bothering to come out yet. Groaning, he sits up, staring at the lonely space that Harry should be filling and gets out of bed.

He meanders down the hall, glancing into Alexander's room to make sure he's still asleep before moving out into the expanse of the quaint apartment. Ever since the zoo, Harry's been acting weird, only giving little answers to anything Niall says. He doesn't understand what's wrong, but he knows something is.

“Harry?” Niall whispers into the darkness, and hears a small response from the balcony.

The arcadia door is cracked, and the scent of a burning cigarette fills Niall's nose. He creeps outside.

That's not good.

“You all right?”

It takes him a few moments to answer, but turns to Niall nonetheless and gives him one that the
blonde didn't think he'd ever hear, “Do you blame me for ending your career?”

Initially, Niall thinks Harry's coming across spitefully. But on second glance, he can see the disappointment in Harry's eyes, a look that's not even directed at Niall.

Now everything makes sense.

“Don't listen to whatever that pap said, love.”

“’m not. It's just how I've been feeling ever since I saw that video.”

“My last concert?”

Harry nods, dragging on the last bit of cigarette he can before smashing it into the ashtray. “You know, when I saw that, I was so fucking happy I thought I might burst.” He begins. “But then when I realized what you did, what you did for me, I don't know, I just… It hit me that I selfishly swayed you to give up everything just to be with me and… I don't even know why you bloody did it.”

Niall reaches his hand out to grasp Harry's and pulls it to his lips to kiss. “You want to know why?” He nods, lip quivering. “Because I fucking love you, Harry Styles. And I love Alex, and your mum and Lou, Zayn, and Blaze. I just want to be apart of this.” Niall moves Harry to face him, taking his free hand in his as well. “I've got it so well with you at my side. Things seem clearer, I feel happier than I've ever felt. Giving up my career to be with you, that's entirely my doing. I had to give up something I loved, for someone I love. And it's the best decision I've ever made.”

“So… What did you tell that reporter,” Harry breathes, resting his forehead to Niall's.

“That I've never been happier.”

Harry smiles, dimples and all. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Niall smiles, meeting his lips with Harry's.

**

Harry can hardly believe that it's been a year since his world officially started. All these years, he can't believe he's been missing something as amazing as being a father. Nor can he believe that he went so long without Niall helping to raise Alexander as if he were his own. All Harry knows is that he couldn't be any happier than this and he's pretty content with life staying this way.

Alexander says his hellos and thank yous to family and friends wishing him “happy birthday”. At first he had no idea what to say, looking up to Harry and Niall in confusion. Explaining what a birthday is to his one year old son is never something Harry thought he'd have to do.

He's so bloody smart, Harry has to wonder where that intelligence comes from.

But then she enters the threshold of the party room and it all makes sense.

“Harry, Alex!” Kate exclaims, moving over to give both of them fond hugs and quick kisses on their cheeks. “Can’t hardly believe I pushed this little guy out a year ago.”

“Kate, that's very crude,” Harry reasons but she waves him off. Ed steps to her side and ruffles
Alexander's thick hair.

“Happy birthday, soon you'll be changing your dads diapers instead,” he winks at Harry and turns to Niall to give a hug.

Niall pats him on the back, chuckling as he pulls away to glance at Kate. “So you're this little buggers mum?”

“Technically. But I think those duties were passed along to you, love,” she grins cheekily and Niall gives Harry a look.

Harry shrugs, “hey, she said it. Not me.”

“I'm not the mum.” Niall grumbles. “I'm gonna get meself a drink.” And he meanders off to the adults side of the room. Harry watches him fondly, admiring the way that Niall's pants hug his ass in all the right places. He clears his throat then, remembering he's in the company of family that wouldn't be partial to seeing him drool over his boyfriend. Niall adjusts his pirate hat, brushing back some stray strands before reaching for a much deserved beer.

After all, to have a pirate themed birthday party was all him.

Kate coos over Alexander, playing with his booted feet. “You're so cute in your little outfit. A proper young captain if I say so myself.”

“What about me,” Harry whines.

Kate looks him over, from the top of the colourful feather adorning his hat to the black, sparkly boots. “Overdone, but it exudes your flashy personality. Close second to Alex.”


“if there were ever a well dressed captain on the seas, I'd have to say you are their direct descendant,” Ed remarks before Harry shakes his head, moving away from them to attend to his child. Alexander has the wheel of the stationed pirate ship with Blaze standing as his first mate. Despite their five year difference, the two couldn't be better friends.

That's something Harry could've only ever hoped for.

“Look at our two buggers. Cutest pirate pair I've ever seen,” Louis comments, smirking proudly. “Xander seems to be having a lot of fun.”

“We can thank Niall for that. If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't have gotten this reservation so soon.” It's true, though. They had to order all of these decorations from a specialized store that always has reservations full. Not to mention how expensive this is. Anne had offered to host the party. So he's in debt to both of them for making this a great party for Alexander.

The party goes off without a hitch. Harry and Niall hold Alexander up and help him blow out the candles on his cake. Blaze helps him open some presents. Everyone leaves either a little tipsy or in a fit of laughter and smiles.

Harry dubs this a success.

He's packing up Alexander's things into his truck when Niall's phone rings. Checking the caller id,
Niall stiffens, looking to Harry before excusing himself. Harry writes it off, continuing his task and tries to get a fussy Alexander into his seat. “Alex, baby, I know you're tired, but work with me.”

“No,” he cries, kicking his legs viciously.

Harry sighs, ignoring him as he finally gets him buckled up, closing the door and climbing into the front seat. He passes his stuffed lion over to him, calming the child.

Niall joins him after a while, a look of concern plastered to his face. “You all right?”

“We can talk when we get to your place,” Niall murmurs, sinking into himself quietly. He's huddled up against the side of the door, arms crossed over his chest. Harry frowns, turning the radio up.

* 

“Are we going to talk or?” Harry mentions after they've been home for a few hours. Alexander had his bath before nap time, washing off the sticky cake frosting and candy he'd gotten into. Niall busied himself with putting Alexander's presents away, staying quiet and avoiding Harry as a whole. He doesn't get what's wrong, but he'd be lying if he said he isn't annoyed.

Niall settles into the couch with Harry, giving a deep sigh. “I have a favour to ask you.”

“Okay?”

“Management’s lawyer called me earlier. Because I broke the contract, I have to give everything back.”

“What do you mean, give everything back?”

“Everything I ever bought with the money I received from my albums, I have to give it all back. Legally, they own it.” Niall explains. Harry notes that he won't even look at him. “So I'm basically broke and homeless.” He's sinking further into himself, almost like he's trying to hide inside a shell that isn't there.

Harry frowns. “Oh Niall.”

“I'm so sorry for fucking up.” He shuts his eyes tightly, lip quivering.

“Don't be. You didn't.”

Niall finally turns to him, tears in his eyes. Harry caresses his cheek softly, wiping at a tear with his thumb. His eyes, those kind eyes, now look like they've seen the end. Harry can see that expression of disappointment Niall has of himself and he wants to wipe it away. “You didn't fuck up, okay? Not in my book. You did what you had to do for yourself. There's nothing wrong with that.”

Niall shakes his head. “But I don't have anything to my name. I'm a failure,” he argues.

“Ni, I didn't fall in love with you for your money, or who you were with that contract,” Harry reasons. “Now, you had a favour to ask, so ask me.” His smile is genuine, full of a love Niall doesn't feel deserving of.

Niall gulps nervously, “C-Can I stay with you?”
Harry's body sighs with relief. “Of course you can.” He pulls Niall into a much needed hug, pressing a kiss to his crown. “We'll work through this together, okay? Anything you need, just let me know.”

“I love you so much.” He nuzzles into Harry's shoulder, wetting Harry's shirt. Sort of like a child.

It's endearing.

Harry chuckles, “I love you too.”

21 August

“I wasn't even listening, but I know whatever you said was wrong.” Louis voices, giving Zayn the most audacious look he can procure.

Zayn groans. “I don't want to plan this if you're going to be difficult.”

Harry and Niall look between them, silently witnessing their wedding squabbles.

“But we have to. It's our wedding, Zee.” Louis whines, reaching across the table to grab for his hands. Zayn reluctantly entwines them with a defeated sigh.

“You're ridiculous.”

“I love you.”

“Yeah yeah.” Zayn waves off, head lowered. He's exhausted.

Harry sits up straight and throws his hands on top of theirs. “What you two need is a day where you're relaxing. Just you two.”

Louis looks to him incredulously. “When can we possibly do that?”

“Why don't you,” he extends, glancing to Niall with a smile. “Let us take Blaze off your hands for a day and you two can go be lovebirds without distractions.”

“Harry, it's a nice sentiment, but the wedding is in January. We can't just not figure this out.” Zayn mentions.

“What's one day? And besides, a wedding shouldn't be something you two should stress over. I know you can't hire a wedding planner, but what if I help plan it for you?”

Louis grunts, “By the time you get everything taken care of, the wedding will be more extravagant than it needs to be.”

“For once, I'm on Louis' side,” Zayn agrees.

“You should always be on my side.”

“That's impossible.”

“Fuck you, then,” Louis growls, removing himself from the table. Then marches down the hallway and disappears into his room.
“It was a joke!” Zayn shouts, but Louis doesn't even bother with a reply. He groans, agitated. “I swear I'm losing hair because of him,” he remarks, tugging at his thick head of hair.

Harry sighs.

“Maybe Harry's right on this one, Zayn,” Niall starts. “You two really need a break from this.”

“I know, but things aren't all butterflies and rainbows with him sometimes.”

Harry intervenes, “of course not. You're getting married, you have a kid, and both of you are working so hard to make things perfect when that's not something you even have control over.”

Zayn side glances him from the surface of the table. He quirts an eyebrow, “what's your point?”

“My point,” he begins. “Is that you two need to stop worrying so much and just be together.”

“Being with Louis is proving difficult these days.”

“Having a poopy attitude isn't helping,” Harry snorts.

There's an incessant whining coming from Blaze’s room, “give it back! Give it back!” All three of them get up quickly to investigate. Louis beats them to it, holding Blaze carefully in his arms.

“What happened,” Harry asks, looking over to Alexander, who's completely at ease and then to Blaze, who's in a fit of tears.

“A-Alex took m-my toy and w-won't give it back,” he cries, rubbing at his wet face, smearing his runny nose over the back of his hand. Harry kneels down next to them, eyeing Blaze carefully.

“Oh love, he's only a baby. He doesn't know better. But if you ask him for the toy nicely, he should give it back.”

Blaze slowly nods, pulling away from Louis to sit next to Alexander. “C-Can I have my toy back, please?”

The baby looks up to him, all big eyes and calm faced. “Mhm,” he hums, surrendering the toy.

And it's as simple as that. Problem solved by common ground and nice words.

Niall looks to Louis and Zayn and grins. “If only you two could see eye to eye like they do, your fights won't seem so final.”

“Meaning?” Louis murmurs.

“Meaning that, it's okay to argue, but remember that you care about each other. And by compromising, you can work through this as a unit instead of constantly picking battles that don't need to be fought.”

Harry looks to Niall incredulously and back at his best friends. “Gentlemen, my boyfriend, the philosopher.”

Niall snorts but he rests his head on Harry's shoulder, content. “Only learned this because of you.”

“And such a smooth talker too!” Harry exclaims, causing Niall to shove him playfully.

“Oh hush, you ball of mush.” And he kisses him longingly.
Louis grimaces. “PDA! PDA!”

“You're a child,” Zayn remarks, smirking.

“You love me for it though.”

“Always, babe.”

*


Harry laughs, “and why would that be?”

Niall shrugs. “There's four of us. I just want to sit back, watch some footie and eat pizza like the fat old man I am.”

Settling into the couch, two beers in hand, Harry rolls his eyes. “I know, I saw that wrinkle you've been trying to hide.”

Startled, Niall quickly covers half of his face and gazes at Harry questionably. “Liar!”

He shrugs nonchalantly, “I could be, but you said it yourself, old man.” Harry winks at him and opens his beer, greedily drinking from it.

There’s a knock at the door and Niall gets up to answer, despite his whines at wanting to be lazy. “Well don't you two look nice,” he comments. Harry looks over the couch to catch an eyeful of Louis and Zayn dressed casually, but there's something more about them.

They look so happy.

Blaze runs into the apartment, arms out like he's a plane and he hops onto the couch with Harry. “Uncle Harry!”

He smiles. “Well hi there. Are you a plane?”

Blaze nods enthused. “Yep!” And he jumps off and roams around the living room.

Zayn steps forward, looking mildly refreshed from his usual exhausted semblance. “I can't thank you enough for this. We really needed a night to ourselves.”

Harry pats his shoulder, nodding. “I know you do. Enjoy. Pick him up in the morning. We've got this under control.”

Louis pounces on Harry, hugging him like he never wants to let go. “You're the absolute best. If anything happens you better make sure to—”

Pulling away from him, Harry shakes his head. “If anything happens, I will have everything taken care of. Seriously, enjoy your night off.”

The smile on his best friend’s face is enough to tell Harry the appreciation he has and just to see him happy after the struggles they've gone through… well, it's one of the best things Harry's received this
With a pat on his arse, Harry pushes them out of the door. “Now go. I don't want to see you till tomorrow.”

Louis grabs Zayn’s hand, squeezing. “Thank you.”

“Go!” Harry laughs, waving his hand at them before closing the door. Facing the living room, the three of them are sitting quietly on the couch, involved with the game on tv. “So this is what we're doing? Lazing about for the night?”

Niall shrugs, drinking from his beer. “Why not? Boys night, right?” He asks the kids. Of course they're all for it, excitement blatantly on their faces.

“Yeah! Boys night!” Blaze enthuses, bouncing on the couch.

Harry chuckles, hands resting on his hips. “All right. Let me order some pizza and get you two some juice boxes.” He comments, heading towards the kitchen, but Niall grabs the bottom of his shirt, pulling him back. Harry looks down at him, staring first at the carreen of his porcelain neck, to his perfectly shaped chin, lingering over the softness of his pink lips. “Yes?”

Niall grins, gripping the collar and tugging him down into a kiss. Harry hums against his lips, resting his hand on the brunt of Niall's neck. When he pulls away, his lips turn up easily, “Get me another beer?”

Harry scoffs, blowing at his face. “Sure. You lazy arse.”

“I love when you talk dirty to me,” he laughs, kissing his lips at him, watching Harry walk away.

End Notes

Thank you for reading! Kudos or comments are appreciated. my tumblr is kissperingniall.tumblr.com if you want to follow me
Love all of you lovely readers that inspire me to continue writing this
Special thanks goes out to my darling Susannah who literally has been with this fanfiction since before it's conception. You're my rock, babe xx

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