Your Mess Is Mine

by amory

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They fall in love.

Notes

Here we go again

So, this fic has been completely rewritten three times and now is nothing like what I started with but I'm still not very sure about it. Please let me know if you think I should continue or just scrap the whole thing and go back to writing kid fic fluff on my phone while I commute to work.

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Edit: This fic now has its very own playlist!! [Here is the link if you're interested in listening](#) The songs that I listened to for each chapter are there :)


it was enchanting to meet you

Louis is woken up by the sound of something crashing and the unmistakable sound of a tiny voice whispering, “Uh oh.”

“Fuck,” Louis groans, rolling over to smash his face into his pillow and pray that he’s just hearing things. It’s too early to deal with his son, and he knows that makes him a bad person, but fuck it, Louis doesn’t care. He needs a break before he absolutely loses his mind.

The door to the bedroom creaks open, little barefeet feet slap across the floor quickly, and then there’s a small child cannonballing onto the bed. The springs squeak, Louis sighs, and Noah bursts into giggles.

“Daddy, get up!” He whines.

Louis turns his head just enough for one of his eyes to peek out. Noah grins at him, eyes sparkling, tiny fists clutching a stuffed dinosaur, and a smudge of something on his cheek.

“Good morning,” Louis says. “Do you have something to tell me?”

Noah frowns and then holds out his dinosaur “Was cup for tea, Daddy,” he whispers sadly. “Hank dropped it.”

Louis sits up immediately and starts looking him over in concern. “Oh, sweetheart, are you hurt?”

“No, no.” Noah sniffles. “I’m sorry, Daddy. Hank’s really sorry.”

Louis eyes the dirty, green T-Rex that Zayn bought for Noah the night he was born. They both thought the name Hank would be hilarious, but Noah caught on and he stuttered it out as one of his very first words. Besides Hank, Noah has a million other dinosaurs all with human names. Whenever someone new comes over he likes to bring them all out and explain who they are and what type of dinosaur they are. Louis really hopes his son never learns how to correctly pronounce triceratops.

“Baby, listen,” Louis says, reaching for one of Noah’s hands so he’ll look up. “You can’t play with the mugs or the kettle, alright? I don’t want you getting hurt, you could’ve burned yourself or stepped on the glass.”

Noah nods and then surges up to wrap his arms around his dad’s neck. “Didn’t touch the kettle, ‘cause not supposed to. But m’sorry, Daddy,” he sighs. “Just want you to be happy, no more sad.”

Louis frowns. “I’m not sad, darling, what would give you that idea?”

“Heared you crying last night,” his son whispers back.

Nothing makes Louis want to crumple up and sob more than the fact that Noah thinks he has to try to make his father happy. Louis closes his eyes and pulls his little boy even closer. He had been certain Noah was asleep already, that was the only reason he took the call last night. If he knew his son was in his room listening to his dad cry and beg his absent father not to give up on them, Louis would have ignored it completely.

There’s no going back now, though. Noah’s father that he’s only actually met a handful of times, and Louis’ ex-husband of almost four years, is never coming back. He gave up on both of them completely and Louis is so alone.
“I could never be sad with you around, baby,” Louis whispers. “You make everything better.”

It’s true, absolutely true. Louis honestly doesn’t know how he would’ve made it through the past few years without having Noah around loving him and depending on him to make things right.

“You’re the very best Daddy.” Noah declares, smacking a kiss to Louis’ cheek.

Louis smiles back and picks him up. “Come on, we have to get dressed and head to Grandma’s.”

At that, Noah lets out a loud whoop of excitement and yells about getting to spend the day with his grandmother and aunts while Louis carries him to his room, stepping over the broken mug on the floor and mess of cold water surrounding it.

While Louis looks through Noah’s drawers for a pair of pants, he tries to compartmentalize all he has to do today. First things first he has to drive Noah to his mum’s, then return home and gather his things for work, get dressed, drive almost two hours to his office, edit and submit the review he wrote for the terrible band he saw over the weekend, meet up with Zayn for lunch to talk about the wedding, call his lawyer-

“Daddy, why’s your head on the dress-the dresser.” Noah’s giggles break through his train of thought.

Louis groans and pulls his head up. His mind is running a thousand miles a minute, there’s so much to do and no time to do it in.

“I’m just sleepy, bud,” Louis sighs, turning his head to motion for Noah to come over. “Here, come put this shirt on and I’ll see if I can find you a jumper.”

Noah pouts and stomps over. “Don’t even like jumpers.” He grumbles while he wrestles his dinosaur pajamas off.

Louis smiles. “I know you don’t, but it’s still a bit chilly out. You can take it off as soon as you get to Grandma’s, I promise.”

Noah tugs his shirt over his head which sends his curls flying everywhere. Louis’s always been grateful he got his father’s hair, their surrogate looked more like Louis but he’s always hated his hair. Curls are so much cuter, sure they’re a nightmare to control and he’s considered shaving Noah bald on the mornings they wake up late, but Louis still secretly loves them.

After he gets Noah’s backpack together, which consists of filling it with coloring books, crayons, and a couple plastic dinosaurs, the two head out to the car.

The drive to his mother’s takes maybe ten minutes. Before Louis got married, he’d lived in Manchester for uni. He met Zayn there, one of his dormmates his first year, and eventually his ex-husband Luke. When he and Luke got married they moved back to Doncaster to settle down, but Louis kept his job working as an intern for Mod Magazine. Since then, he’s moved up considerably to being one of their main writers for the music section of the magazine and the website, had Noah, and still drives into Manchester almost every morning just for work.

It’s sort of ridiculous, and his friends love to point that out, but Louis wants Noah to grow up here like he did.

His mum greets him with a big hug as soon as he opens the door and announces they’re here. Noah ignores them both and runs off in search of someone who’s awake enough to color in the new book Perrie bought him this weekend.
“I’m so sorry, Boo,” his mum whispers.

Louis shakes his head and wills himself not to cry. “It’s stupid, y’know?” he murmurs back. “I knew he would never be around much for Noah, but I at least thought…I thought that maybe he’d want to be part of his son’s life.”

Jay pulls Louis in tighter and shushes him. “Lou, sweetheart, he doesn’t need Luke. He has so much love in his life, Noah doesn’t need that man.”

“I know but,” Louis breaks off when his voice cracks and takes a deep breath before continuing on. “I just know what that’s like, knowing your father doesn’t want you, and I never wanted that for my kids. This isn’t fair to Noah, Mum, and I feel like it’s my fault for not noticing Luke didn’t want this. Why didn’t he just say something? Why didn’t he fucking tell me-”

His mother makes a sad noise in her throat and rubs Louis’ back when he dissolves into sobs. She never liked Luke, Louis had always known that but he could never understand why. Luke was sweet and he seemed like he really loved Louis, like he really did want to start a family with him and grow old together. Well, that is until it actually happened and it apparently became all too real for Luke.

“Is he at least still…” Jay trails off, but Louis knows she’s talking about child support, another sore subject between them.

“Yeah, he can’t really get out of that. I sort of feel bad about it-”

Jay groans and shakes her head. “Louis, no, don’t let him make you feel bad. Don’t ever feel bad for that, okay? You can raise Noah on your own, I know you can, but you still need help financially and he owes that to both of you. You were supposed to be in this together.”

“I have to go,” Louis murmurs, mostly because he really doesn’t want to get into this. “I’m going to be late for work and I still need to call my lawyer.”

His mother looks like she wants to say something, but she lets him go with just a kiss to the forehead and a promise that she’ll be here whenever he needs her. Louis heads off after saying goodbye to Noah, keeping his head down on the way out to the car. The day has just started but it already feels like it might never end.

Louis’ excruciatingly long day comes to a head around noon when his editor approaches his desk.

“It’s still down, I’m working on it,” Louis mutters, still trying to figure out how in the hell the website crashed around ten this morning and yet is still not back up.

“Leave it, we’ll get the tech guys on it,” Jesy says, waving her hand. “It’s probably because of that review you wrote. People are pretty pissed, Louis. There was more traffic after you posted that than we’ve had all month.”

Louis rolls his eyes and navigates away from where he’s been hopelessly screwing around with the website for the past hour. “They were terrible, Jesy,” he replies. “They peaked awhile ago, the entire album was a mess and that show was disastrous.”

“Lou, it’s The *1975*,” she moans, like that’s important. “You’re going to get into real trouble one of
these days.”

“I don’t care though, is the thing,” he says, and then promptly bursts out laughing when Jesy slaps him upside the head.

After she walks over to check with tech again about getting the site back up, she returns with a strange look in her eyes. Louis ignores her and continues editing the piece that the magazine’s editor picked for this month’s issue. Jesy sits down on top of his desk and continues to stare at him pensively.

“I’m going to regret this.” She sighs.

“Regret what?” Louis asks, still not looking up from his laptop.

Jesy groans and picks the computer up, holding it so Louis will actually acknowledge her. “Could you find a babysitter for my darling godson this weekend?”

Louis rolls his eyes and reaches for his laptop but she holds it up even higher and he’s more worried about her breaking it than getting it back. “Noah isn’t you godson, Jes. But yeah, Zayn and Perrie have been begging to take him to the zoo so I guess they could do that. Why?”

Jesy smiles and hands him the laptop back. “Shutup, he’s my godson. Anyway, let them take him, I have an assignment for you.”

“Jes, other people work here,” Louis reminds her. “I had an assignment over the weekend, give to to someone else.”

Jesy sighs. “I want you to do it, Lou, I think you’d be the best at it. I want you to interview One Direction tomorrow night.”

“The boyband.” Louis says.

She cannot actually be serious about this, can she? Louis distinctly remembers his sister Fizzy going to one of their concerts for her thirteenth birthday. He also remembers getting out of going with her by the skin of his teeth. He definitely didn’t bribe Lottie to take her instead just to have to go to a One Direction concert at twenty-two years old. He’s an adult.

“They’re not really a boyband anymore,” Jesy explains. “They took a couple years off, rebranded, changed management, one of them even plays the drums now. The new album if rockier, people loved it, and now they’re on tour again.”

Louis frowns. “I’m almost entirely sure that they’re still a boyband, Jes. I saw them on the cover of Seventeen.”

“I don’t think you should be reading Seventeen anymore, Lou.” Jesy teases him.

Louis groans so loud a couple of the other reporters turn to see what’s going on. He dramatically drops his head into his hands and sighs just as loud. “Fine,” he snaps. “Get me the passes, I’ll go. If they sing that one song though, that one that makes me want to smash my car radio, I’m leaving. I’ll walk right out.”

Obviously not taking his threat seriously, Jesy hops off his desk. “You’re the best, Lou,” she tells him with a kiss to his cheek. “I’ll get you the press pass by the end of the day and please, just try not to be too brutal.”
“Everyone knows how I write, if they didn’t want an honest opinion they wouldn’t go looking for it.”

Jesy rolls her eyes and walks off. “Take your lunch, asshole. Say hi to Zayn for me.”

Louis salutes her and gathers his things, double and triple checking that he’s backed up everything before heading out. Zayn’s already waiting for him by the lift, looking every bit the brooding fashion journalist that he is. He’s all tall dark and handsome, leaning against the wall with one foot propped up behind him, frowning down at his phone through his glasses, hair styled perfectly because he probably showed up late this morning.

The entire facade is cracked when Zayn lifts his head and sees Louis. His frown turns into a soft smile and he stalks forward to pull Louis into a hug. Louis tucks his head into his best friend’s shoulder and deflates. Zayn smells the same as he always has, like cologne that’s too expensive for Louis to even think about, hairspray, nicotine, and weed.

If someone were to ask Louis what he thought home smelled like, it’d be a tie between this and Noah’s baby shampoo.

“I say we find that fucker and murder him,” Zayn growls. “Where’s he living now? We can track him down, I’m sure we have records somewhere.”

That surprises a laugh out of Louis which makes Zayn smile. They pull away from one another and Louis presses the button to call the lift up.

“It’s his choice, Z. I can’t really do anything about it.”

“I still want to beat him up, just a little, maybe break a few bones,” Zayn says casually. “I don’t understand how anyone could do this, especially to Noah. He’s the sweetest child on the planet, Lou.”

Louis smiles fondly at that. “I think we’re both a bit biased there, Z.”

Zayn rolls his eyes. “Never. All children are terrible demons, except Noah.”

They squeeze into the lift with the rest of the crowd rushing out to lunch and ride down to the ground floor in silence. There’s a small restaurant attached to the building, but Louis needs a walk and a smoke. Zayn agrees with him and they walk off together into the cloudy afternoon.

Louis lights a cigarette and lets it dangle out of his mouth for a moment, letting the smoke burn his lungs and his insides before he breathes out.

Being that they’ve been friends for almost nine years now, Zayn must know that Louis really isn’t okay, but he also knows Louis well enough not to mention it again until he does first. So, instead Zayn just says, “You really should stop, you know.”

“I know,” Louis sighs, cringing when he thinks of the speech Jay gave him about how he’s slowly killing himself. “It’s just calming, y’know? Life’s shit, Z, let me just have this.”

He quit once, back before Noah was even born, when their surrogate was just three months along, he swore to himself he’d never pick up another cigarette again. And then Luke left.

Zayn nods. “Perrie’s making me quit before the wedding,” he says carefully, words almost lost in the noise of the streets around them. “Maybe we could try together?”
Louis smiles at him and nods, but they both know full well that it isn’t going to happen.

They head to a burger place down the block that they usually save for eating their feelings in times of trouble. Apparently this counts because Zayn even offers to pay for both of their orders. After they practically buy the place out of chips, the two of them set up shop at a table in a corner, Zayn pulling out a tablet so he can show Louis color schemes he and Perrie have been thinking about. Louis thought being the best man would consist more of writing a drunk speech and planning a party complete with awkwardly old strippers, but apparently his favorite couple cannot make decisions to save their lives.

“Just don’t pick out something like fuchsia,” Louis advises through a mouthful of burger. “I look terrible in fuchsia.”

Zayn rolls his eyes. “No one has a fuchsia wedding, Louis.” He laughs.

Louis just shrugs back and they start looking for ring bearer suits for Noah.

On their way back to the office, Louis blurts out, “I’m interviewing One Direction tomorrow night.”

Zayn’s walk stutters and then he bursts out laughing. “No fucking way,” he snickers. “After what you did to those Australians, they’re trusting you with another boyband?”

Louis rolls his eyes at that particular memory. It was almost two years ago, but no one will ever let it go that he trashed a farewell tour. “According to Jesy, they aren’t a boyband anymore, but we all know that’s bullshit.”

Zayn slaps him on the back. “I’m looking forward to reading it,” he laughs. “Perrie and I will take the little man to the zoo, she’s really excited about it. There’s babies in the penguin exhibit apparently, her and Noah have been talking about it for two weeks now.”

“He’ll be so excited.” Louis laughs.

Zayn grins. “It’s a good thing I found someone who loves him as much as I do, that was a deal breaker.”

Even though it’s a ridiculous thing to say, Louis still smiles. He’s happy Perrie loves Noah too, even though his son is certainly not lacking in the aunt department. It’s also nice knowing there’s someone besides his mum that he can absolutely trust to watch Noah overnight when he works out of town. Not that he can’t trust Zayn with Noah, it’s just the last time Louis and Perrie left those two alone together they ate biscuits and chocolate bars for dinner.

Now if only he could find someone like that for himself.

“You heading up?” Zayn asks when they reach their building.

Louis shakes his head and lights another cigarette. “I’ll see you before I leave tonight.” He promises.

Zayn looks worried about him but still leaves, only after crushing Louis into another hug and whispering into his ear, “I love you, Lou. Noah doesn’t need him, okay? He has you. You’re wonderful.”

Louis ends up going through an entire pack of cigarettes before heading back upstairs to finish his day.

He’s just so tired.
“You’ll be good for your aunt and uncle, won’t you Noah?” Louis whispers to his son, tucking one of his dark brown curls behind his ear.

Noah grins and nods, practically buzzing with excitement. “We’re gonna see baby penguins tomorrow, Perrie told me so,” he says for about the millionth time since Louis told him he was going to the zoo two days ago.

Louis smiles fondly and kisses Noah’s cheek. “If you need me, just tell Perrie or Z and they’ll call. It’s going to be a little loud in there, but I’ll still answer okay? And I’ll call to tuck you in tonight.”

Still grinning, Noah throws his arms around Louis’ neck and hugs him tight. He kisses his father on the cheek, emitting a loud smacking noise, and giggles. “I love you, my Daddy. Have fun with the music, bring me a shirt.”

It’s a tradition they started years ago when Noah finally understood where Louis goes to on the weekends. He always stops at concerts and buys some sort of merchandise for his son, usually a t-shirt that’s always too big and that Noah always wears until it’s been washed so many times it’s impossible to make out who it was for. It makes Louis happy that his son loves music as much as he does, that he understands where Louis is and why he does it.

“I will definitely bring you a shirt, baby. Have fun with Perrie and the penguins.” Louis says, smiling at the way his son’s eyes sparkle with happiness.

“That would be a great band name,” Perrie tells him while she helps Noah hang up his backpack that’s full of everything he’ll need for overnight and the next day.

Louis rolls his eyes at her and stands up from helping Noah take off his shoes. “Don’t let him have too much sugar if he’s going to be running around, he’ll puke on you in rainbow colors.”

Perrie laughs. “Why do I feel like that warning is more for Zayn than me?”

They both turn to look at Zayn, who’s in the living room helping Noah set up his plastic dinosaurs on the floor. Louis shakes his head at the two of them and Perrie laughs even harder. She pulls him in for a quick hug and to whisper, “Have fun” in his ear, and then joins Zayn in setting up the dinosaurs, who are having a party according to Noah.

He takes a moment to watch them, looking exactly like the kind of family Louis always dreamed of having someday, and then leaves.

Because all he really has to do is interview the band, Louis ends up skipping their opening act. Or, that’s at least what he’s telling everyone, because the real reason is that it’s Friday and he only picked Noah up from his Mum’s a few hours ago. He already feels like he never gets to see his son, it just makes it worse when they aren’t together and they could be.

Louis makes it to the venue almost an hour later, already feeling like he’s going to go deaf from all the screaming inside. It’s a fucking stadium, actually, not even a venue, and this is ridiculous.

Somehow he manages to find somebody who actually knows what’s going on, and he’s led backstage to a dressing room where the band is waiting to start their set. Louis spent the majority of his day at work looking up One Direction so he would at least an idea of who they all are, and not
ask the wrong question to the wrong boy and be ostracized by the community.

As far as he knows, the blond one buzzing around with a piece of half eaten pizza in his hand is Niall Horan, the unfairly hot one with the snapback and bare arms who’s laughing at something someone’s telling him is Liam Payne, and the one sitting on a couch with his legs crossed and a ridiculous hat on his head is Harry Styles.

That’s the one he’s heard the most about, Harry Styles who’s silently scrolling through his phone and frowning down at it. It’s a stark contrast to the photos Louis saw this afternoon of him in court wearing a suit with his hair up in a bun only a few months ago. Apparently before their two year long break, Harry was pictured snogging another man in a club while he was still very much in the closet. When the man went to the press stating that he and Harry had been together multiple times before, the situation blew up into a mess involving their management, breach of contracts, and some sort of drug scandal. Most people probably wouldn’t have even tried to come back from that, but Harry Styles did, and Louis sort of admires that.

Even though he does look stupid sitting there with his shirt almost all the way unbuttoned to show off hundreds of tattoos, including a giant butterfly.

“Boys, this is Louis Tomlinson,” their publicist announces once she spots Louis just standing there awkwardly. “He’s from Mod Magazine, he’ll be watching and interviewing you tonight.”

The people in the dressing room sort of stop everything to look over at him. He smiles at everyone, waves, and is almost knocked over by Niall Horan who runs over to shake his hand.

“Nice to meet ya, mate. I’ve read your stuff before, that one you wrote about 5 Seconds of Summer was brutal,” he cackles, like Louis dragging their old opening act through the mud is hilarious.

Before Louis can even think of a retort, Liam is coming up to say hello. He has these huge puppy dog eyes that sort of combat with the beard he’s sporting and the shirt he’s clearly cut the sleeves off of. “I’m Liam Payne,” he says, smiling through the proper introduction. “I hope you like our set, Harry and I wrote most of the songs.”

Louis smiles back, fighting to be just as polite. “I actually haven’t listened to the new album at all, I wanted to have my first reaction down.”

Harry approaches slowly, and he’s still frowning. “M’Harry,” he says. “Do you really not like Matty?”

That surprises a laugh out Louis. “Healy? I mean, I’m sure he’s a nice guy, but the sound just isn’t my cup of tea. Are you friends?”

“Kind of,” Harry replies. “We’ve hung out a few times, I really like his music.”

Louis shrugs and pulls his phone out of his pocket when it starts to ring. “To each their own, I guess. I have to take this, I’m sorry.” He turns away and hits answer, smiling when he hears Noah already giggling on the other end.

“My Perrie says she wants to know, um,” he trails off and Louis can hear Perrie whispering to Noah
in the background. “Oh, she says ask if I can have a fish. I dunno if I can eat fish, Daddy, don’t remember.”

“Tell Aunt Perrie it’s just no shellfish, or else you’ll turn into a balloon, and I can’t have a balloon for a son can I? You’ll fly away and I’ll never see you again.”

Noah bursts into giggles again. “No balloon Noahs, Daddy, promise. I love you so much, you’re with the music?”

“I am, I have to go now okay? Don’t let Zayn keep you up too late and tell Perrie I’ll text her in a second.” He knows that Perrie probably knows most of what Noah can’t have, mainly nuts, but it would still make him feel better if she had a definitive list.

Noah sighs softly. “I love you Daddy, call to tuck me in.”

“I will baby, I love you too.” With that, he hangs up.

When he turns around he finds that Liam and Niall have disappeared across the room but Harry is still standing there, and he’s beaming. “Do you have a baby?” He asks, his voice full with excitement.

“Well, he’s four now so he technically isn’t a baby anymore, but yeah,” Louis says, grinning like he always does when someone asks about Noah. “That was my son, Noah, he’s staying with his aunt and uncle for the night.”

Harry’s grin grows even wider. “I love babies. Do you have a picture?”

Louis pulls his phone out right away. “Are you kidding me? I never stop taking pictures of that poor child.” He scrolls through all his pictures and hits one he took earlier today when Noah picked Louis a flower from their neighbor’s garden. Not that he encourages that sort of behavior, but it was adorable.

When Harry sees it, he giggles, honest to god giggles. “He’s adorable! And he has your eyes,” he points out, grinning when Louis flicks to another picture of Noah. “You and his mum are very lucky.”

Louis’ smile falters like it always does when someone unknowingly reminds him of Noah’s father. “It’s actually just me at the moment,” he says awkwardly. “My ex-husband and I had him through a surrogate.”

Harry looks up, eyes wide. “You’re really brave,” he says in awe.


At that, Harry shakes his head. “My sister, her boyfriend’s gone so she’s raising my niece alone,” he whispers, like it’s a secret. “She’s my hero. Braver than I’ll ever be.”

“Well, I highly doubt that,” Louis smirks.

Someone calls Harry’s name and he whips his head around to nod back at whoever it was. “I have to go, enjoy the show Louis.” He grins at Louis, a giant grin, and then runs off to join Liam and Niall who are being shuffled out the door.

An assistant who looks like she has better things to do leads Louis back out to where family members, and apparently girlfriends, sit during the concert. He makes sure to keep away from them.
because Louis is a sucker for families and he would absolutely be biased if one of these girls even looked at him sweetly.

When the boys come out on stage, the fans scream even louder. Louis watches Harry grab onto the mic and smile into it. He’s replaced his hat with a bun tied at the back of his head, and Louis really shouldn’t find that attractive. What kind of man wears a bun, anyway? A man in a boyband, that’s who.

Niall starts by strumming his guitar quickly and Liam joins in pounding on the drums, and then all three of them are singing. Right away, Louis notices that Harry carries most of the songs, but he notes that it probably wouldn’t sound right without Liam or Niall harmonizing. The songs are a lot different from what Harry knows of their boyband days; less bubblegum pop and crooning about girls, a lot more rock and roll. The second Harry slips a him in a song about halfway through, the crowd goes wild.

He looks like pure sex on a pair of unfairly long legs, bun long since shaken out so his curls fall past his shoulders, shirt completely unbuttoned, skin shining with sweat. When the camera focuses on him and his face is blown up on those giant screens, all Louis can see are his lips. It’s obscene, he’s obscene, and Louis is finding it very hard not to love it.

Harry jumps around on the stage a lot when he isn’t singing, punching the air to the beat of the music like a loon, and shimmying in front of Niall until they dissolve into laughter. He even steals Liam’s snapback at one point, flipping it backwards before heading back to the mic stand to finish the song. Between songs the three of them make conversation, talking about the fans and the venue, telling stories from writing sessions, and answering questions from twitter which Louis finds a bit juvenile, but the fans eat it up.

Three hours and a shouting goodnight phone call to Noah later, it’s all over. Louis finishes his notes with the fact that the fans scream for more until a good ten minutes after the boys leave the stage, and heads back to the green room for the interview.

As soon as he’s through the door, Harry’s greeting him. He’s obviously showered and his curls are dripping down onto the stretched out collar of his jumper. Louis smiles back at him, because he really can’t not with Harry grinning at him like that.

“Did you like it?” Harry asks breathlessly.

Louis shrugs and walks over to where Liam and Niall are already settling into one of the two couches. “I don’t know, I guess you’ll have to read the review, won’t you?”

The words don’t seem to phase Harry in the least, he just keeps grinning.

Louis takes a seat in the chair they’ve set in front of the couch for him. A hand appears to give him a list, and when he squints down at it he scoffs.

“These are all the good questions,” he whines to the publicist.

She purses her lips and sits down beside him. It’s quite obvious she doesn’t care.

Louis sighs and sets his phone up to record, putting it down on the table between them. The very first rule on the list is not to ask Harry about any boyfriends, so naturally the first thing Louis says is, “Hello One Direction. So, I saw some lovely ladies watching the show out there. In the interest of journalistic integrity, who here is single?”

The publicist makes a noise of protest, but all three boys burst into laughter as well as most of the
other people in the room. Louis shoots them a dazzling smile and waits.

“My fiancee was here tonight, and Harry’s sister too,” Liam explains, still smiling. “That’s probably who it was.”

Louis nods. “So, no one else?”

“Harry and I are single,” Niall laughs. “Someone’s gotta have fun. Liam acts like he’s sixty.”

Liam frowns at him. “We’re twenty-five, Niall, almost twenty-six, and you still act like a teenager.”

Niall simply crosses his arms and leans back on the couch. “Cunt,” he mutters, and Louis bursts into laughter that he quickly hides behind his hand.

“Sorry, shit,” he mutters, ignoring the way Harry is staring at him. “Anyway, seriously now, twenty-six is pretty young. Do you still consider yourself a boyband?”

“We’re a man band.” Niall says proudly.

Harry rolls his eyes and elbows Niall in the side. “Please don’t write that down. We are not a man band, or a boyband. We’re just a band.”

“We’re a man band.” Niall mutters petulantly.

Liam interrupts the two with a winning smile. “I think that in a way, people will always see us as a boyband. It’s not a bad label I don’t think, it just isn’t who we are anymore.”

Louis smiles at him and nods before he moves on with the questions. He finds out that Liam has been wanting to learn how to play the drums since X Factor and that their old drummer actually taught him. They tell him Harry and Liam tend to write most of the lyrics, but Niall writes some as well. Harry, apparently, writes the majority of the love songs and he blushes when they other two tell Louis that.

Louis tries very, very hard not to find that adorable.

They can’t say anything about the trial or the court proceedings of course, but it’s still obvious how much it affected them. Harry doesn’t look up once from his hands the entire time they talk about the two year break, and only speaks briefly before returning to chewing at his lip until it swells up. Niall and Liam don’t say anything, but Louis can see concern in their eyes.

After Louis asks all the normal questions, like what their favorite song from the album was, who influenced them, what it was like coming back to tour after so long, they’re set.

“Well lads, that would seem to be it,” Louis announces, hitting the button on his phone to save the recording. “Thanks for your time, the show was great.”

Harry jumps up off the couch immediately, eyes wide. “Are you leaving.

Louis pauses from where he’s gathering all his things to stare at him. “Are you staying?” He asks with raised eyebrows.

The question makes Harry go red, but he presses on. “I just mean-well, me and the boys are gonna go out and you…you could come too? I mean, only if you wanted.”

Liam drops his head into his hands and his shoulders start to shake. Niall on the other hand just stands up and shakes his head. “Real smooth, Styles. Fucks sake.” He chuckles. With that, he walks
off to the minibar and chugs almost half a beer at once. A girl joins him, one of the girls Louis sat with actually, and she’s laughing as well. Niall whispers something to her, and she just about bursts into tears.

Louis looks back to where Harry’s standing with his hands clasped behind his back, obviously waiting for an answer. Louis sighs and scrubs a hand through his hair. “That’s probably like, extremely not allowed. As much as I joke, journalistic integrity does still exist. Or, at least it’s a nice idea.”

Harry deflates and nods slowly. “Alright um…well, okay. It was really nice meeting you.”

Liam stops laughing long enough to lift his head and look up at the two of them. “Mate, you really should come with. It’s been awhile since we’ve met anyone even remotely cool.”

“I highly doubt that,” Louis laughs, thinking how Jesy is going to lose it when she hears Liam Payne called him cool. “According to my sources, also known as my teenage sisters, you’re never not hanging around extraordinary people.”

Liam rolls his eyes at that. “Yeah, but you’re normal. Our Hazza likes normal, don’t ya?” He bounces up, slaps Harry on the back, and leaves them to go kiss his fiancee hello.

Harry rubs at his back where Liam slapped him with a little frown on his lips. “I hate them both,” he grumbles. “Really though, you don’t have to come. I know you probably have plans.”

The thing is though that no, Louis actually has no plans. After this his plans were to drive home, fall into bed, and not get up until Zayn and Perrie brought Noah over. He hasn’t had plans in four years almost, unless you count his and Zayn’s biweekly nights at the pub as plans, which Louis doesn’t because they almost always end up having one drink and sulking back to Zayn’s flat for takeaway and a movie marathon.

But it probably wouldn’t hurt to go out, he thinks, and it’s not like spending a few hours drinking with One Direction is going to change his opinion of them that much.

“You know what, I’ll go,” Louis says. “I could go for some shitty drinks and terrible music right now.”

Harry’s face lights up like Louis has just give him the greatest gift. “That’d be great, yeah,” he breathes. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah, besides my son’s aunt has been begging to take him to the zoo for weeks now. If I tried to take him home any earlier, she might kill me.”


Laughing, Louis nods back. “Brilliant.”

Louis pulls his phone out to text Zayn that he’s going out so he might not answer right away if they call. Zayn texts him back with, lighten up and have fun tommo ;)

When Louis looks back up, Harry’s halfway across the room hugging the girl who was laughing with Niall earlier. It’s probably his sister, Louis assumes, because the other girl is with Liam and this one looks like Harry a bit.

She pulls away from the hug to tangle her fingers through his hair and tug. Harry laughs and slaps her away. He then glances back at Louis before whispering something to his sister. She raises her
eyebrows and looks back at Louis as well. Feeling awkward, Louis raises a hand in hello, and he grins. Harry’s sister says something back to him, kisses him on the cheek, and leaves the room with Liam’s fiancee following. Louis can hear them laughing when they walk out the door, and he’s sufficiently confused.

“Alright, boys if we’re leaving we need to go now,” a man in black announces to the room at large. “Liam and Niall in one car, Harry and his…friend, in another.” When he’s finished speaking, he eyes Louis like he’s planning on murdering somebody, and then walks away.

Harry smiles at Louis and motions for him to follow.

“I have my own car,” Louis whispers to him.

The boy’s eyes light up, and even though he’s twenty-five he does look like a boy, Louis thinks. “Let’s go,” Harry says.

Louis grabs his hand and tugs him out the way he came in. Harry’s giggling the whole time like a child doing something they know they’re not supposed to. Louis rolls his eyes and leads Harry through the maze of hallways until they reach the door connecting them to the front of the venue. There, he corners the giggling boy and looks him right in the eye.

“Alright,” he says, all seriousness. “This is going to take a lot of finesse and subtlety. Can you handle it?”

“Scouts honor.” Harry says, but he’s still giggling.

Louis sighs and shakes his head. “You’re just lucky most of them are gone by now.”

Harry pouts at the jab, but Louis just takes his hand again and shoves the door open. The two of them sprint out, weaving in and out of the groups of fans left over from the show until they’re in the parking lot.

“Onward!” Louis shouts, and he lets go of Harry’s hand just to jump onto his back. Harry squeaks in surprise but doesn’t falter for a second, lifting Louis all the way up and stumbling in the direction that Louis’ pointing.

“How is this subtle?” Harry laughs.

“Don’t question the method, Harold,” Louis scolds, but he does still smile because his plan worked. He knew he could make Harry happy again, and it’s more than a little strange to him that he even cares. Shaking away those thoughts, he points to his car in the corner of the lot. “There it is, our chariot awaits!”

Harry walks the rest of the way to Louis’ car and crouches down in front of it so Louis can scramble down and get out his keys.

“Please ignore any suspicious stains and throw any and all stuffed dinosaurs in the back.”

“Keep my hands inside the ride at all times?” Harry jokes.

Louis rolls his eyes and leaves Harry so he can slide in behind the wheel. For some reason when Louis gets in he finds Harry grinning at a purple T-Rex in his hands.

“That’s Susan.” Louis tells Harry while he starts the car.
Harry barks out a laugh and puts Susan in the backseat very carefully. “Who named her Susan?”

“My darling son, of course,” Louis says, affronted. “She’s Hank’s sister.”

That only makes Harry laugh harder. “And who’s Hank?”

“His favorite dinosaur, try to keep up Harold,” Louis teases. “Now, where are we going? I’m sure everyone’s noticed you’re gone by now, so I’d better return you quickly.”

Harry’s smile is gone from his face almost instantly, turning into a disgruntled frown that makes him look a bit like a disgruntled child. “I’m no one’s property.” He says sternly.

Louis just raises his eyebrows at the outburst. “I never said you were, popstar, calm down.”

Harry crosses his arms over his chest and stares out the window, biting his lip. Finally he pushes a hand through his hair and shakes his head. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to snap at you.”

They ride in silence for awhile, Louis trying to focus on the traffic, and Harry staring out the window with a sad sort of look on his face. It’s a bit awkward, and Louis never did well with awkward silences.

“Wanna talk about?” he asks, startling Harry out of his reverie. “I find it’s a lot easier to vent to strangers, that’s why god made the internet.”

That gets Harry to at least smile again, but he still seems cautious. “You’re the press,” he says like he’s trying to remind himself of that fact. “You’re the exact person I’m not supposed to be talking to about shit like this.”

Suddenly, all Louis can think of is the massive list their publicist gave him earlier. He thinks of every little thing on there, every question that could mostly be directed to Harry, every question about the comments he made while the band was on break. He wonders if Harry’s allowed to talk to anyone about shit like this, as he so eloquently put it.

“Could you say I’m the press again?” Louis asks him lightheartedly. “I wanna record it and show my boss, she’ll shit herself.”

Harry rolls his eyes, but Louis can see a small smile playing at his lips. “So, you’re telling me you have no intentions of writing about how you drove Harry Styles to a club in your car after he gave you a piggyback ride out of the arena, and also had a heart to heart about his management along the way?”

“No, I don’t care about gossip and shit, I care about the music so that’s what I write about. I think you have a right to at least some privacy,” Louis says very plainly. “And also if anyone I know found out I drove Harry Styles around in this thing, they’d never stop making fun of me for it.”

Harry smiles a real smile this time, wide and teasing. “Why?” he laughs. “It’s not like I’m going to tell anyone about you millions of toy dinosaurs.”

He’s very obviously changing the subject, but Louis plays along.

“They aren’t mine, I keep mine in the bedside table.” Louis turns just to give him a ridiculously exaggerated wink. Harry laughs so hard his face looks like it might rip in half, and Louis knows for a fact that he isn’t that funny but it still makes him smile.

The club, as it turns out, is on the complete other side of the city so they’re in for a bit of a drive.
Louis turns the stereo on and groans when Wheels On The Bus starts blaring through the speakers. There’s nothing more annoying than this CD, Louis’ mum had bought it for him a few years ago when Noah used to scream each time they got in a car. Turns out she was a life saver because the only thing that stopped the screaming was to play the thing on repeat. The only problem, of course, is that Noah is now so attached to it that Louis feels bad saying no when his son asks to listen to it.

“You know, I’d thought your music taste would be a little different, considering your job.” Harry remarks, smiling at Louis who’s fumbling with his phone to get it connected and stop the chorus of demonic children singing about the people on the bus going up and down.

Finally, Louis’ phone syncs up and Sam Smith starts crooning through the car. Louis turns it down a bit and starts tapping on the steering wheel to the beat.

“I love him,” Harry says, “He’s really sweet in person too, have you ever met him?”

Louis nods. “For about a minute last year when he released his new album. You’re probably besties though, aren’t you?”

Harry rolls his eyes but still smiles. “Bitter, aren’t we?”

Louis cranks the song up louder and starts singing along, refusing to let himself smile.

When they pull up to the club it’s obvious Niall and Liam have already arrived if the crowd of fans and paparazzi outside are anything to go by. The bright smile Harry’s been sporting for almost the entire ride quickly turns into a sad frown right before Louis’ eyes. He slows the car a bit, just looking at the insanity out there, and shakes his head.

“How do they even know you’re going to be here?” He asks in awe.

Harry shrugs, but it’s obvious he knows. “They have whole websites dedicated to stalking our every move,” he says, like that’s at all normal. “And sometimes our management will leak where we’re gonna be so the fans will get there first.”

Louis stares at him now, mouth slightly open. “What the fuck?”

“It was a lot worse when we were younger and I was um, when I wasn’t out. But they still want us to seem, I dunno, available I guess.” Harry sounds like he’s reciting something he’s been told a million times and Louis doesn’t doubt he has been told that since he was sixteen.

The whole thing makes Louis sick to his stomach and he wants absolutely no part in it, so he pulls away from the curb and starts driving again. Harry’s eyebrows furrow as they pass the club and they don’t turn back. “Where are we going?” He asks.

“Somewhere far away from that circus, if that’s okay with you?” Louis looks over and Harry seems apprehensive, but nods anyway.

“Please,” he says and his voice sounds small but still very serious.

Louis simply nods and starts driving towards the outskirts of the city where his favorite pub is. He worked there during uni, and it’s still where he and Zayn meet for their night out because they spent almost every night there when they were in school. It’s still their place though, even after all these years. Louis knows that nobody is going to bother Harry there and he’d like to just talk to the boy, he seems interesting.

After finding a place to park, Louis leads Harry into the pub. It’s not very busy yet, but it’s getting
there so Louis snags a table and makes Harry sit down.

“I promise I’m not abandoning you,” Louis jokes when Harry pouts up at him. “I’m just gonna get a couple pints, I’ll be right back.”

When he approaches the bar Stan is waiting for him, smiling mischievously. Louis groans. “Just give me the beer, I’m not in the mood,” he says.

Stan laughs. “I’ve known you since we were kids, Lou, it’s not like I wouldn’t notice you’re out with someone new. What’s his name, then? And what’s with that hair-”

“Stop it, christ,” Louis moans, shaking his head. “His name is Harry. Can I have the pints now, please?”

“Harry, huh?” Stan mutters, pulling out two empty glasses and filling them up. “Tell that Harry over there’ll be no getting off in my pub. I’m not walking in on you fucking someone in the bathrooms again.”

Louis snatches the drinks away and gives Stan a glare of epic proportions. “I hate you,” he announces, before turning on his heel and stalking away.

“You love me, Louis, I know you do!” Stan shouts after him.

Harry’s smiling when Louis gets to the table. “Friend of yours?” He asks, laughing when Louis frowns at him.

“That’s Stan, he was my best mate growing up. This was his dads pub,” Louis explains, glancing over to where Stan is laughing at a joke a drunken woman is telling him. “He took over in our last year of uni, worst day of my life. Fucking nuisance.”

Harry grins and takes a sip of his beer. Something starts ringing, and Harry reaches into his pocket to retrieve his phone. “It’s Liam,” he sighs, unlocking it and reading the message. “They’re being eaten alive out there. I feel terrible.”

Louis shrugs. “Every man for himself, Harold. Let me see?”

Despite the fact that they’ve known each other a whopping six hours at this point, Harry stills hands Louis his unlocked phone. It’s a bit worrying, Louis thinks, that he’s so trusting, and it worries Louis that he’s worrying about that when it’s really none of his business what Harry does.

“Can I add my number in here?” He asks, and Harry of course nods.

Instead of snooping around to see what sort of celebrities Harry has in his contacts, Louis simply makes a new one and puts in his information. He even does the boy a favor by taking a picture of himself crossing his eyes.

“Just in cast there are any other Louis’s in there,” he explains.

Harry smiles down at it when he gets his phone back. “I wouldn’t be able to forget you that quickly,” he promises. “Here, let me see yours.”

Louis unlocks his phone and watches as Harry puts his number in. He bursts into laughter when Harry takes his own picture screwing his face up and sticking his tongue out. “Just in case there are any other Harry’s,” he teases.
They really shouldn’t be this fond of each other after only a few hours, but it seems impossible to stop it from happening. It only gets worse when Harry starts telling terrible jokes after only a few drinks. He gets very upset too when Louis doesn’t get them or even laugh.

“It’s because he thought his neck was his face, Louis,” Harry whines after possibly the worst joke of the night. “It makes sense!”

Louis nods a few times, trying to school his smile into a straight face. “Of course, perfect sense Harold.”

“Why do you keep calling me that?” Harry whines again. “Everyone knows it’s just Harry.”

This time, Louis does let himself smile. “I like Harold better anyway.”

To his surprise, Harry smiles back. “I like Harold better too, so long as you’re the one saying it.”

With that, he kicks his foot out under the table and Louis catches it when his own. He wraps his ankle around Harry’s and traps him there. They break out into giggles and Louis starts swinging his other leg around.

“You know, you’re quite fit Harold,” Louis says out of nowhere.

Harry blushes red and ducks his head down, letting his hair hide his face in a mess of loose brown curls. “I think you’re very pretty, Louis,” he whispers when he picks his head back up.

They stare straight at each other for a moment, eyes meeting and feet still stuck together under the table, and then Louis grins and leans over enough to fit their lips together. Harry gasps out a startled noise, but then quickly starts to kiss back, sliding his chair closer to Louis’ so they don’t have to stretch too far. Louis pulls away to take a breath before surging forward once more to nibble at Harry’s plump lower lip and tangle his hands into those curls.

Harry moans softly and pulls Louis closer. “Want you,” he breathes, and then he’s pulling away to press open mouth kisses against the column of Louis’ throat. He bites down softly, Louis gasps, and then Stan is standing right fucking there.

“Not in my pub, Louis,” he growls sternly. “I called you a cab, I don’t care where you go but you cannot fuck each other in here.”

Harry stops sucking and biting at Louis’ neck long enough to look up at Stan. Louis frowns. “You ruin everything,” he hisses at his, now former, friend.

Stan rolls his eyes, obviously quite used to Louis after all these years. “Just go, the car will be here soon. I’ll see you in the morning, Louis.” He gives his friend a knowing smile and heads back to help tend to the bar.

“Let’s go back to my hotel,” Harry suggests, kissing the bruise that’s probably already blooming on Louis’ neck. “I want to see you, all of you.”

Louis stands up so fast he almost topples over on his shaky legs. Harry giggles, sounding far too innocent for what he’s just said, and lets Louis lead them outside with their fingers intertwined. The cab is waiting for them outside and Louis practically throws Harry inside.

While Harry rattles off the address to the hotel where he’s staying, Louis climbs in his lap and starts to return the favor.
By the time they reach the back entrance of the hotel, Harry’s jumper is rucked up to his armpits and his neck is mottled with love bites. Louis’s in the process of trying to figure out which of his four nipples—he has four, which really fucked Louis up for a minute—is the most sensitive, when the driver clears his throat.

Harry apparently realizes they aren’t alone finally and quickly pulls his jumper down. He reaches into his back pocket and tugs out his wallet, pulling a few notes out and paying the man. Louis reaches up to nip Harry’s earlobe and he laughs.

“C’mon, let’s go.” Louis whines.

Harry turns to him, smiling, and fuck he is gorgeous. Why hadn’t Louis noticed how gorgeous he was before? He really needs to tell Harry immediately how pretty he looks like this, lips red and wet and swollen from kissing, eyes sort of spaced out but still sparkling, curls disheveled from where Louis’ been tugging and running his hands through them, hands still clutching at Louis’ thighs, so much bigger than Louis’ own on top of them.

Louis leans forward again as Harry leaves the man a tip for his trouble. “I’m going to wreck you.” He growls in the boy’s ear, and Harry completely stills.

“Is that a promise?” Harry whispers back, his voice cracking halfway through.

Louis smiles deviously and tugs him out of the car.

Harry stumbles around on their way up to his room, looking for all the world like a baby deer who has just found their legs. Louis keeps laughing the whole way up, and Harry keeps frowning at him before dissolving into giggles every time he trips.

Finally, finally, the two of them make it to a door on the tenth floor where Harry stops. He reaches back into his pocket for his key card, and Louis takes advantage of the moment to slap him right there.

“You’ve such a tiny bum,” Louis giggles. “So cute.”

"It isn't tiny," Harry whines, fumbling with the card a few times until Louis finally snatches it away and opens the door himself. Normally he'd probably stop and take in the fact that Harry’s hotel room is the size of his entire fucking flat, but instead he just hooks his fingers into Harry’s belt and tugs him forward.

"It's small darling," Louis giggles, trying to tug his shoes off as he walks backwards. "But it looks cute in these jeans, bet it looks cuter out of them."

Harry bites his lip and then opens his mouth to say something, but suddenly Louis is falling and the world is turning on its side. Harry lands on top of him with an oomph and Louis grins when he realizes they've reached the bed.

"That was my plan." he says, and Harry bursts into giggles.

He’s so stupid and Louis is sort of infatuated.

They move to the middle of the bed and Harry ducks his head into Louis’ neck and starts rutting against his thigh. Louis grunts and reaches down to unbuckle Harry’s belt and start pushing his jeans down.

“Christ, what are these painted on?” Louis slurs out.
Harry laughs again and looks up from where he’s been sucking a sizable bruise onto the skin of Louis’ neck. “They make my bum look cute.” He quips.

Louis pushes him away with a roll of his eyes and pushes Harry’s jumper until the other man helps him pull it off. He promptly latches onto one of Harry’s nipples and grins deviously when he keens and pushes at Louis’ head.

“Fuck,” Harry breathes out, tugging at Louis’ hair. “Fuck, stop Louis, wait.”

Instantly, Louis pulls his head up. “What is it?” He whispers, reaching up to brush Harry’s curls back.

“No pictures,” Harry obviously tries to sound firm, but his voice is shaking. “Promise?”

Louis’ heart breaks. He shakes his head and moves up to pull Harry in for a kiss, trying to be sweeter about it this time. “This is between me and you,” he whispers. “No one else gets to see you tonight but me, I promise.”

Harry searches Louis’ eyes and Louis knows that years from now he’ll still be able to pinpoint the exact moment he fell too hard. It’s right then, right when Harry looks at him with apprehension in his eyes that fades away to nothing but a smile and whispers, “I trust you.”

They move together slowly, Louis marking and kissing Harry’s chest while he shoves a hand down his sinfully tight jeans. Harry lets out a choked off moan and throws his head back, incidentally giving Louis unlimited access to his neck.

Louis jerks him off quickly, using precome as lube because he’s desperate just to get Harry off and swallow down his moans. Harry comes with a loud cry, eyes fluttering shut and hands tugging at Louis’ hair, and then flops down against the bed. Smirking, Louis brings his hand up to his mouth and sucks his fingers.

“Fuck, Lou,” Harry mutters, his chest heaving. “Gonna kill me.”

Barking out a laugh, Louis wipes his hand off on Harry’s pants and pulls his jumper and skinny jeans off. “Get me off first, and then I’ll write you a press release about how you’ve been killed by my dick.”

Groaning, Harry turns and presses his face against Louis’ neck. “You’re a dick,” he mutters.

Louis smiles and tangles his hand in Harry’s hair. “Go to sleep,” he yawns, because even he’s sleepy at this point. “You owe me when we wake up though.”

The boy nods, and he really is a man probably, but Louis still only sees a boy. The feeling is only amplified when Harry reaches over and swipes his finger over the little outlined dinosaur on Louis’ forearm. “Cute,” He mumbles.

“Night, Harry Styles.”

“G’night, Louis Tomlinson.”

The light streaming in from the windows is what wakes Louis up, which confuses the hell out of
him. There shouldn’t be any light streaming in, not with the giant tree behind his house that puts his whole bedroom in the shade. It’s about then that Louis notices how warm he is, the body underneath his arm, and legs tangled with his own.

He blinks his eyes open, blinks again, and then once more when he sees the curls covering his vision because holy shit. Holy shit, he actually slept with Harry Styles last night.

His sisters are going to kill him.

Trying not to panic too badly, because who’s he trying to kid, he’s absolutely panicking, Louis carefully pulls his arm away from where it’s wrapped around Harry’s waist. Harry snuffles and shoves his face into his pillow but, to Louis’ relief, doesn’t wake up. Still, Louis waits just to be sure Harry is really asleep before slipping out of bed.

While he looks around for where he’s thrown practically everything he owns, Louis really tries not to focus on how terrible he feels. He can’t even look at Harry, who seems even more sweet and angelic in sleep than he did yesterday with that little smile on his face and the sun tinting his tattooed skin golden. All Louis can think of is how much this is probably going to hurt him, Louis just disappearing, and how much he himself really doesn’t want to go.

But he has to. He absolutely has to leave, this cannot happen.

After locating his jumper, Louis tugs it over his head, grabs his shoes and phone, and quietly sneaks out of the room.

There’s people in the hall and they stop talking to one another to stare at Louis. Because he’s an idiot he waves to them awkwardly, and then tugs his vans onto his feet and flees.

Before he goes outside, Louis ducks his head and pulls his phone out to look busy. There are fans everywhere, mostly girls who are chatting with one another about something Liam or Niall or Harry did, all tweeting and texting and blasting the new album. No one even glances at him as he walks out and calls a car to take him back to Stan’s.

Sure enough, when he gets there his car is still parked outside. There’s a slip of paper stuck under his windshield wiper though. Louis snatches it up, afraid it’s a ticket or something, only to roll his eyes when he sees Stan’s scratchy handwriting there.

*I hope you got some. And lived while you were young.*

Louis crumples the paper up and throws it onto the passenger seat when he gets in the car. He starts it, and then lays his head down on the wheel so he can breath through his headache and the rising panic. So, he sort of slept with Harry Styles, if you count a messy drunken hand job as sleeping with someone. Or, even if you just count the actual act of sleeping as sleeping with someone, because he woke up spooning Harry Styles as well.

What was he thinking?

It isn’t until he’s almost home, window cracked and third cigarette of the morning between his lips, that his phone beeps. He glances down at the passenger seat where it’s sitting and almost veers off the road when he sees the name there.

Harry Styles.

It beeps once more and Louis pulls over just to read the messages.
Harry Styles: Why do bananas wear suntan lotion?

Harry Styles: Because they peel :D

Louis groans and takes another drag. What the fuck does that even mean, anyway? Harry should be pissed off, he should be ignoring him like most people do after a one night stand, not sending him banana jokes like a child. But, Louis still can’t find it in himself to be pissed off.

*that joke wasn't very appealing*, He writes back.

Harry responds just seconds later with five banana emojis and a smiley face. Louis lights up another cigarette and continues the drive home.

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Harry Styles: I wanted to say thank you by the way.

*please don't tell me you're thanking me for sex*

Harry Styles: No! I just mean thanks for not taking pictures or telling people what happened. It really means a lot to me.

*don't thank me for being a decent human being*

Harry Styles: Thank you for respecting me then xx

*thanks for not getting me off*

Harry Styles: :(

Harry Styles: next time?

*it's a date harold*
When Louis wakes up from trying to sleep off his hangover, it’s because his phone is buzzing incessantly.

Blearily, he unlocks it and watches as the little number telling him how many messages he has keeps multiplying. He frowns and pushes himself up against the headboard, wiping at his eyes roughly. Most of the messages, he finds, are from Jade. Jade never texts him unless there’s an emergency, like the time her favorite actor cut off all his hair and she needed emotional support.

Steeling himself for all the crying emojis he’s about to endure, Louis opens the messages.

:)Jade: im going to kill you louis

He frowns and scrolls through the rest of the texts, but they’re mostly exclamation marks and what looks like the product of her smashing her thumbs on the screen. There’s one that simply says, *Harry Styles???,* but Louis still has no clue what’s going on. Maybe Harry Styles has cut off all his hair this morning, he thinks, that would be in her domain as the gossip columnist.

Louis: Babe what?

:)Jade: check twitter

:)Jade: and i hate u

Because he’s an old man now, or at least that’s what Perrie says, Louis doesn’t actually have the twitter app on his phone. He does download it, just because Jade will make fun of him if he admits to not having it, and after he puts all his information in he goes to his notifications.

Harry has followed him on twitter apparently, and has tried to follow him on instagram but Louis has it set to private despite what his sisters say about that being weird. A quick look over his notifications shows that Harry’s been favoriting some of his tweets, which could mean he’s either still drunk or just a stalker.

Curious, Louis clicks Harry’s name only to just about drop his phone when he sees the millions of
followers he has, and the fact that at least a third of them have seen his last tweet.

@Harry_Styles: “That joke wasn’t very apeeling”

Just as a test, Louis retweets a picture Perrie posted earlier of Noah pressed up against the glass of the penguin exhibit.

Harry likes it seconds later.

Louis shakes his head. What in the fuck is happening? The last time he had a one night stand- which was last summer to be exact, when Lottie took Noah for the weekend so Louis could attend a musical festival-he never even found out the man’s name. As soon as he snuck out, that was it, the end, so why in the hell is Harry Styles doing this, of all people?

Are you stalking me? He writes after he gathers all his courage, thumb hovering over the screen for a moment before he hits send.

By the time Harry texts back, Louis has managed to drag himself into the kitchen and down some painkillers along with his coffee. He hesitates, almost worried Harry’s going to be angry with him now that it’s mid afternoon and he’s come to his senses, but of course, that’s not what happens.

I’m sorry, his text says. I’ll stop. You’re just so interesting and I like you :)

Louis frowns. I left this morning you should be angry

I’m not angry I know it’s a lot to deal with, Harry texts back. He continues seconds later with, I’d like to be friends though, if you’d like

Louis bites down on his stupid smile. You’re so weird Harold

I’m taking that as a yes :) .xx

Louis follows Harry back on twitter on and instagram, and then tries to get some work done before Noah gets home.

He’s managed to open his laptop and think about writing, a big accomplishment, when his phone starts ringing. Glancing down, he sees Jade and Jesy’s drunken faces from last years Christmas party greeting him, each wearing reindeer antlers with bells. It isn’t exactly a dignified look for their editor and most senior gossip writer, but it never fails to make Louis laugh.

“What’s up babe?” he greets.

Jade doesn’t even pause for pleasantry, just goes straight in for the kill. “Why is Harry Styles following you on twitter?” she demands.

Louis raises his eyebrows and goes back to mindlessly scrolling through his music in search of something that’ll make him want to write. Maybe he’ll make a playlist, that always kills a few hours at least. “Well, I suppose it could be because of our wedding last night where Niall Horan was my bridesmaid and Liam Payne officiated.”

Jade snorts out a giggle, but then she’s right back to business. “So, there’s pictures of Harry carrying someone around outside the venue last night,” she tells him casually, like she hasn’t spent hours searching through twitter just for those pictures which Louis figures is what she’s done. “Someone around your height with identical tattoos and oh, look at that, he’s wearing your clothes. Any ideas as to who that could be?”
The sarcasm in her voice almost makes Louis well up with pride. He remembers back when they were both just interns and Jade was so quiet, so afraid to say anything lest she hurt someone’s feelings. Louis had coaxed her out of that pretty quickly, but it never fails to fill his evil little heart with joy to hear her talk like this.

“Well, I don’t take rides from strangers,” he quips, trying to keep the smile out of his voice. “Mum would never approve.”

Jade huffs loudly and Louis can hear some frantic clicking in the background. “He was spotted out at a Starbucks this morning, and his neck was practically covered in love bites. What about that, do you know anything about that?” she asks, and Louis is about to reply when she interrupts him and continues on. “Because after he was photographed getting into your car last night, he disappeared completely until he walked out of his hotel today. Anything to say now?”

Louis lets himself actually laugh this time. “I’m very happy he’s alive and well, thank you for the status update Jadey-poo.”

She groans until it ends up sounding a bit like she’s being stabbed. “Lou, please. One old friend to another, just give me something.”

Figuring he’s earned a break after all the staring he’s done at the computer, Louis stands up and heads for the kitchen. He lets Jade dangle and whine for awhile while he searches for something to eat. It’s only after she hasn’t stopped groaning his name for a solid minute that he says anything.

“Do you remember that time on Leigh’s birthday when the entire office got cake and I asked everyone to save me a piece?”

Jade sucks in a breath. “Louis-”

“And you ate my cake, didn’t you? You ate my piece of cake, Jade Thirlwall, and for that you must suffer.”

Jade just about screams his name, and Louis simply hangs up and goes about making himself a congratulatory cuppa. Another terrible gossip article destroyed, he thinks happily.

By six in the afternoon Louis has managed to write something that could probably be an article if it was more coherent and less of a rant on Harry Styles, because honestly, who does that boy think he is walking around looking like that? It should be illegal. Harry Styles should be outlawed, Louis decides, and he writes that down before deleting it and reconsidering ever agreeing to do this story.

The front door opens, slams against the wall, and then Noah’s shouting, “Daddy! Come and see!” so loud that it echoes throughout the house.

Despite that he still has a massive headache and nowhere near enough work done, Louis leaves everything behind to walk to the living room and see Noah. His son is standing in the foyer with Perrie, slipping off his backpack and shoes, and on his head sits an absolutely gargantuan penguin hat.

“Oh my goodness, there’s a penguin in my house!” Louis gasps, clutching his heart dramatically.

Noah starts giggling and runs up to hug Louis around his legs. “Not a penguin, silly. It’s just me, Noah.”

Louis picks him up and tickles his cheeks with the tassels that hang down from either side of the hat. “Oh, it is you,” he sighs in relief. “I was so worried a penguin had eaten my baby.”
By this point, Noah’s face is red from laughing so hard. “Daddy, penguins eat fish,” he teases.

“How silly of me, of course they do,” Louis nods. “How was it, pumpkin? Did you have fun?”

Noah nods enthusiastically. “So much fun, Daddy. My Perrie and me got to see all the animals, baby penguins are chicks did you know? And Uncle Z lifts me up to be like a giraffe, and buyed me ice cream and this hat!”

Louis looks up to see that Zayn is walking in now, loaded down with bags of food. The look on his face, one of complete exhaustion and annoyance, makes Louis want to burst into laughter. He doesn’t of course, because Zayn would probably kill him and then take a nap in his bed.

“I’m so glad you had fun, baby,” Louis says to Noah. “What do we say to Perrie and Zayn for taking you to the zoo?”

Noah turns and gives his aunt and uncle a winning smile. “Thank you my Perrie, and thank you Uncle Z. I love you.”

Of course, Perrie coos at him and rushes up to kiss Noah’s cheeks and fix his hat. “We love you too, bug,” she promises. “Come on, let’s eat, I know your uncle is hungry.”

Zayn and Louis finally lock eyes and Louis sees the look on his face, and it’s a look Louis knows well. The look of a man who’s been beaten down.

“I am starving,” he corrects. “The car ride was ridiculous and I haven’t had anything to eat since those animal shaped chicken nuggets at the zoo.”

“The drive was only an hour, completely worth it.” Perrie says, rolling her eyes at her fiance.

“Yeah, an hour home, and then another almost two to get here,” Zayn defends, before turning to look at Louis, who is barely hiding his smile anymore. “Lou, you have to move back. This is getting ridiculous.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “You’ve been saying that since Noah was born and I’m still not changing my mind. You survived, now pass the curry.”

Before they can eat Noah makes everyone set the table and properly sit down. He’s been a bit obsessed with family dinners after his friend at nursery explained how she eats every night, so Louis is subjected to the torture of letting a four year old set the table almost every night. It makes Noah happy though, and Louis lives to make his son happy.

After the table is set and Noah is happy with how everyone is sat, they all get to listen to him tell the story of how he saw baby penguins over and over again.

“Which do you like better, penguins or dinosaurs?” Perrie asks him, finally interrupting the never ending stream of information about chicks and their parents.

Noah stops mid-sentence to level her with a very serious stare. “Dinosaurs are always the best.”

Louis snorts into his drink. “Yeah Pez, didn’t you know that?”

A spoonful of rice is flung at his head but Perrie goes back to eating like nothing happened.

They make it a whole two hours before Zayn confronts Louis. Perrie is settled in on the couch with her third glass of wine, laughing at the house Noah is constructing out of legos and helping Louis
judge the merits of the newest singer songwriter everyone’s talking about.

“Go for a smoke?” Zayn whispers to him before he pulls himself up off the couch. Louis nods and follows him out to the back garden, grabbing his pack of cigarettes off the top of the fridge on the way.

They light up and puff clouds of smoke up into the sky silently. The sun has set by now and the neighborhood has been plunged into darkness, lit only by the street lamps that provide enough light for the kids off school for summer break to bike around and shout at one another. It makes Louis smile.

“What happened last night?” Zayn asks.

Louis shrugs and heaves a large breath out. “I brought popstar boy band member Harry Styles to Stan’s pub, we got drunk, went back to his, and I got him off. After I snuck out this morning he sent me a banana pun, and the rest is history.”

A normal person probably would have freaked out at that, or at least assumed that Louis was lying, but Zayn isn’t a normal person. He’s almost unbearably laid back, something Louis had tried to get out of him during uni to no avail. So, being Zayn, he just exhales a plume of smoke and says, “Sounds complicated.”

“Well of course it is,” Louis laughs, but then he cringes. “He begged me not to take pictures last night, when we were together I mean. I think maybe he’s a little broken, y’know? When I was interviewing them and I asked some questions about the break they took, he looked really uncomfortable.”

Zayn screws up his face and shakes his head. “Don’t go getting attached.”

Immediately, Louis shakes his head. “Course not. Why would I do something stupid like that?”

They both fall silent, blowing smoke into the air in front of them and listening to Noah and Perrie giggling at something inside the house. It’s calming and Louis finds himself leaning closer to Zayn’s side just because it’s calming. Sometimes he thinks about what would have happened to him if he hadn’t had Zayn all through uni, through his short marriage, through the aftermath. It’s a terrifying image.

“You have love bites,” Zayn mutters, so quiet that Louis almost doesn’t hear. “You never let anyone do that, Lou.”

Louis shrugs and he’s glad it’s so dark out because Zayn would definitely laugh at how he’s blushing. “I was too drunk to notice,” he tries.

Of course, Zayn doesn’t believe that. “You would never get that drunk,” he says. “He’s different.”

Louis groans and tips his head up to the sky. “He’s just a guy, Z, stop trying to turn it into something bigger than that. Besides, the chances of me ever actually seeing him again are almost zero. He’s Harry Styles.”

Zayn thinks about that for a moment, and then nods. “Okay Lou,” he sighs. “You know Jade’s going to murder you.”

Louis just grins.
There’s a full three days of radio silence from Harry, no texts, no tweets, he doesn’t even take the
time out to acknowledge that Louis accepted him on Instagram. So for three days Louis is certain that
Harry has come to his senses and is finished with him, that soon the pictures of him floating around
on the internet and the sudden interest in who he is will disappear and he’ll go back to his normal
life, left only with a funny story to tell his grandchildren.

And then he gets the phone call.

It’s Wednesday morning and Louis has taken the day off, as usual, to meet up with Natalie for lunch.
Natalie was his surrogate, and where Louis is convinced that Noah gets all his sass from. Every time
he tells her that though, she just shakes her head and laughs.

“It’s definitely from you, Tommo.”

Noah loves Natalie, though he doesn’t yet fully understand who she is. All he knows is that she’s
been around from day one, never fails to bring him a new dinosaur every month when they meet up
for a few days, and that she and Louis are very good friends. Someday, Noah’s probably going to
want to know her, Louis figures, but for now he’s content with sitting in her lap and admiring her
nails.

“My Lottie does nails, sometimes,” he tells her. “So pretty. I love them.”

Natalie laughs. “Would you like for me to do yours?” she asks, pulling a bottle of pink nail polis
from her bag.

Louis just about chokes on his tea. “You’re just carrying that around?” he laughs.

Natalie shoots him a look. “Of course I am,” she snarks back. “You never know when they’re going
to chip, Louis, don’t be daft.”

The exchange makes Noah giggle though he quite obviously has no clue what’s any of it meant. He
stretches his little fingers out on the table in preparation to be painted and smiles. “I want sparkles, do
you have sparkles Aunt Natalie?”

“No with me, bug, but tomorrow maybe I’ll bring some over when we do dinner next,” she tells
him, leaning over to meticulously paint each of his tiny nails. She glances up at Louis and a
mischievous smile spreads across her face. “Maybe Daddy wants his nails done as well, what do you
think?”

Noah gasps and looks so excited about it that ten minutes later, Louis has pink nails as well. Both
Natalie and Noah are buzzing with excitement, and Natalie is begging for a picture. Sighing, Louis
lifts his nails up and pulls an annoyed face, which he promptly tweets to Lottie. After that, he takes a
picture of his and Noah’s hands together and posts it to Instagram, definitely not with Harry in mind.

It’s stupid to think that maybe Harry would think it’s funny, or cute even. It’s stupid to think that his
one night stand would care that he painted his nails of all things.

Not even three minutes later, his phone is ringing. Natalie glances over and laughs when she sees the
screen of his phone. “So, it’s true then?”

Louis looks down at his phone and finds Harry’s happily drunk face grinning back at him. “Shutup,”
he mutters, and then he’s pulling the phone up. “Hey, popstar.”
“I like your nails,” Harry greets.

Grinning, Louis drums his fingers on the tabletop. “Yeah? It was Noah’s idea.”

Harry laughs softly. “They’re beautiful. I was just about to call to see how you were, actually.”

Louis laughs and stands up so he can walk away from the table and ask, “How I am? Are you sure you aren’t just calling me for sex, Harold?”

There’s silence on the other end, and then Harry’s sighing. “I’m sorry, I’ll leave you alone.”

Louis frowns. “Hey, Harry don’t hang up on me. What’s wrong?”

“I just wanted to talk to you, that’s all,” he says sadly. “But I mean, if that’s all you wanted from me then-”

“Hey, no,” Louis interrupts, his voice going soft. “Darling, I was joking. If I just wanted to use you for sex I probably wouldn’t have spent all my downtime looking up banana puns to impress you with.”

After another short silence, probably just to judge whether or not Louis’s joking with him, Harry’s letting out a small sigh. “Really?”

“Why did the banana go to the doctor?” Louis asks.

Harry giggles. “I dunno, why?”

“Because he wasn’t peeling well.”

There’s a pause, and then Harry is laughing so hard it sounds like he’s close to dying. Seconds later, Louis hears someone yelling in the background. Harry’s laughter drifts off and he calls back, “Fuck off, Li!”

Louis smiles. “I’m great by the way,” he says. “Since that’s the reason you called.”

Harry hums happily. “I’m glad you’re great,” he decides, which makes Louis chuckle. “I was just wondering what you were doing tonight?”

That’s a bit of a surprise, Louis had thought he’d come to his senses by now and start ignoring him. “Attempting to proofread a piece of trash I’m going to pass off as a review, why?”

“I was just wondering if maybe you’d wanna get dinner?” Harry asks, the hope in his voice undeniably cute. “Or drinks, drinks are fine too.”

“Are you still in Manchester?” Louis asks.

“Yeah, Li and I are here writing, we’ve sort of been holed up since the show ended Sunday night,” Harry says, and then he’s whispering. “If I don’t get out of here soon we’re going to kill each other.”

Again, Liam can be heard shouting in the background, “Shutup, Harry!”

He smiles. “I’d love to babe, honestly, but I don’t have a babysitter.”

“You could bring him,” Harry replies quietly.

As sweet as it is, and as much as Louis wants to agree, he can’t. There’s a voice in the back of his
mind that sounds suspiciously like his mum warning him about what happens when children get attached. Not as if he doesn’t know firsthand, of course.

“Babe, I know you mean well, but I don’t think that’s a good idea right now. Noah’s really…he latches on quickly. Like, the first time he met my best friend’s fiancee, back when they were only dating, he was calling her Aunt Perrie and asking her to take him to the park.”

“Oh,” Harry says softly. “Could you tell him we’re friends?”

It’s so sweet that Louis has to close his eyes and take a deep breath to be able to deny Harry anything. “Even then, I don’t want him to get used to someone and then have them leave. I don’t want to drag men through his life, y’know?”

“That’s alright,” Harry decides. “I’m only here until the morning, we’re taping an appearance tonight and then we leave for Edinburgh, but I have a week long break after.”

That’s too long, Louis thinks, but he obviously doesn’t say it. Instead, he asks Harry to wait a moment and then he’s hanging up to call his sisters.

Phoebe answers first and when Louis asks her if she could babysit tonight, she sighs loudly. “I will,” she relents. “But only if you buy me burgers and chips.”


Again, Phoebe sighs, and Louis is reminded of when Lottie was her age. His lucky mum gets to deal with that all over again. “I need more than one burger, Louis, I’m not a child. Is it a deal?”

Back at the table, Louis sees Noah talking to Natalie excitedly as their food arrives. “Fine, but only because I’m desperate,” he gives in.

Phoebe laughs. “Thanks Lou. Are you going on a date?”

Louis rolls his eyes and glances back to check on his son. Noah is shoving pieces of chopped up chicken into his mouth and grins proudly when he sees Louis looking. “Yes, as a matter of fact I am,” he says. “And surprisingly, it’s none of your business.”

That just makes Phoebe laugh harder. “Fine, just text me a time and I’ll be ready. Should I plan on spending the night or-”

“Don’t be disgusting,” Louis scolds. “I’ll text you back in a bit, babe. Thanks for this.”

“You’re welcome, Lou,” she replies sweetly, and Louis hangs up before she can try to convince him to pay her double what he normally would.

When he sits back down, Natalie is watching him with that stupid knowing smile of hers. “You’ve got a date tonight?”

Louis rolls his eyes. “It’s nothing, just a few drinks probably. I’ve got work in the morning.”

Natalie’s grin widens. “Louis, you’re actually going out with this guy aren’t you? I haven’t seen you go out with anyone on an actual date since…” She trails off but Louis definitely gets the message.

The two of them had actually met in uni, freshman year during an introduction to drama class. Natalie was taking it as a requirement, Louis just loved it, and he practically pounced when Natalie asked for help. Over the next four years they grew closer and closer, so by the time he and Luke
were ready to have kids there wasn’t really a question as to who Louis was going to ask.

“He’s a bit different, yeah,” Louis admits with a sigh.

Natalie reaches over to pinch his arm. “How could you not have said anything to me yet?” she demands, before dropping her voice into a low whisper. “Honestly, Lou. It’s really Harry Styles, isn’t it?”

Louis chuckles and shakes his head. “Just don’t worry about it, yeah? If it gets serious I swear you’ll be one of the first people I tell.”

She sighs loudly and put out, like she isn’t really satisfied with that, but goes back to helping Noah cut up his chicken. After watching the two of them for a moment with their nearly identical eyes and smiles, Louis texts Harry back and lets him know he’ll be able to make it tonight.

Harry responds with a smiley face and an address of where they can meet.

When Louis gets to the address Harry’s sent him he finds he’s at a radio station that’s swarmed with girls and flashing lights. Fucking Harold, what was he thinking?

I’m outside and there’s a mob. What do I do?

Harry Styles: shit I’m sorry

Harry Styles: I’ll send someone out for you

I’m going to be crushed and my son is going to end up fatherless. Is that what you want Harold?

Harry doesn’t reply, so Louis simply parks his car a block over and gets out. There’s barricades set up and Louis sort of lingers near them awkwardly, eying the screaming girls who don’t really seem to pay him any mind until a giant of a man comes walking out. Louis has never met him in his life but some of the girls apparently know who he is because then they’re screaming and then the rest all join in.

When exactly this became Louis’ life, he isn’t sure.

The man makes a beeline to where Louis is loitering outside the crowd of girls who are wrangled in like cattle. He shoots Louis a smile and says, “You Louis Tomlinson?”

“Most people call me The Tommo, but yes that’s me,” Louis replies, having to yell to be heard over all the screaming.

The man nods. “I’m Alberto, c’mon.”

Louis raises his eyebrows when the barricade is opened just enough for him to slip through, which of course sends the fans into a frenzy. “This is insanity, you realize that yeah?” Louis tells Alberto when the girls spot him being led into the building and start taking pictures at an obnoxious rate.

“You get used to it, I guess,” he replies, steering Louis towards the door with a hand on his back.
“They boys are in the middle of an interview, but you can watch if you’d like. They’ll be done soon.”

Louis motions for Alberto to lead the way and soon finds himself in a room attached to a studio where the boys are stood in front of microphones and someone who’s voice Louis just barely recognizes is teasing them about the crowd outside.

“Honestly, it’s a bit mad,” the host is laughing. “How do you deal with that? It must be hard to do normal things, I’m sure your dates don’t appreciate it.”

The boys give him good natured pity laughs and Louis practically cringes from secondhand embarrassment. Despite looking a bit less exhausted and lot more annoyed, One Direction is just as unfairly attractive as Louis remembers.

Especially Harry, of course, but Louis isn’t biased at all. He also definitely is not staring at the shadowy mark of a disappearing love bite just under Harry’s jaw.

When Harry finally spots him standing outside, Louis crosses his eyes and sticks his tongue out. Harry bursts into giggles and immediately covers his mouth with his hand, but everyone catches it. All four heads in the booth turn to look for what’s so funny and Louis greets them all by smacking himself against the glass and sliding down it like he’s being pulled.

Harry starts cackling and has to slap both hands over his mouth to stop everyone on radio from hearing. Niall is shaking with withheld laughter as well, and even Liam is trying to reign in it while he keeps the interview on topic. Alberto groans and picks Louis up off the floor like he weighs nothing, pulling him away from the glass. Despite the fact they hardly know one another Alberto seems comfortable enough to manhandle him, so Louis starts kicking and struggling dramatically. Louis catches the bodyguard trying to hide his snickers, so he figures no one is too upset about it.

The radio host tries to continue on, bless him, but Louis can see that the boys have been distracted fully. He feels a bit bad for it because he would hate if someone did this to him, but the questions are dead awful. When Louis finally gets close enough to the studio to hear what’s being said again, he finds Niall and Harry explaining what they like in a person. Louis scoffs and pulls his phone out to check it.

Surprisingly, when he opens his freshly downloaded Twitter app he’s greeted by the sight of hundreds of new followers and a picture of himself disappearing into the studio, Alberto leading him with a hand on his back. Jade’s posted it, along with an article attached about him. Him, Louis Tomlinson, the same man she spent three hours hiding under the break room table with on Monday so they wouldn’t have to face their annoying coworkers.

He replies to it with, mind your own business love before I tell everyone about ur shrine to the jonas brothers xxx and looks up to see Harry standing in front of him.

“Jesus, Harold,” he breathes, putting a hand over his pounding heart. “I should put a bell on you.”

Harry beams. “You came,” he replies, sounding delightfully surprised.

Louis rolls his eyes. “I said I would Harold, don’t be stupid,” he teases, reaching up to straighten the collar of the jacket Harry has on over the button up he’s wearing today. “You really should button it up at least once, it would maybe save me from being crushed when I grace you with my presence.”

Of course Harry laughs, just like he did when he was drunk, although this might actually be worse because he has no reason to think Louis is that funny without some sort of alcohol in his system. Not
for the first time, Louis is a bit worried that Harry has lost it. It wouldn’t be much a surprise, what with spending the last practically ten years being hounded by those fans and having to listen to shit questions like that. And Louis tends to attract train wrecks, he’s noticed.

“You’re funny, Lou,” Harry tells him, like his laughter hadn’t given that away. “I like you a lot. I’m sorry for um, for what happened with us.”

Louis raises his eyebrows. “Sorry? Why are you sorry, love?” he asks, dropping his voice low so no one else hears them.

Harry bites his lip. “Well I mean like, um,” he pauses, and then sighs again. “I get sort of sloppy when I’m drunk I guess, and I didn’t mean to be that forward with you. You’re just…really lovely.”

That makes Louis smile, but if anyone asked he would absolutely deny the way his cheeks heat up at the compliment. “Harold, you sap,” he teases gently. “Don’t worry about it love, alright? I’m sorry I left you, I’m kind of shit with dealing with the whole morning after thing. If it ever happens again I promise I’ll be right there when you wake up so I can take advantage of your fancy hotel’s room service.”

Again, Harry laughs but when he speaks again he sounds so hopeful it almost hurts. “You think it’d happen again? You don’t like, hate me or anything?”

Louis scoffs. “Who could ever hate you Harold?”

Before Harry can open his mouth to answer, Louis grabs him by the hand and starts dragging him through the studio and almost out the door when yet another body guard catches them.

“Where are you going?” he demands with a very serious frown. “There’s a crowd outside, you can’t just drag him through it.”

Louis decides right away that he doesn’t like this man. “We’re not going out the front, I’m not daft,” he snarks. “Harry and I are going out for dinner, I’ll make sure he’s well taken care of tonight. Ta, love.”

The man does not look the least bit impressed by him. He turns to Harry with his eyebrows raised. “You trust him?”

Harry beams. “It’s fine, Preston, I promise. If we even have the least bit of trouble I’ll call you.”

Preston sighs and fixes Louis with a glare. “If he’s the least bit hurt, I’m coming for you yeah? The least bit, Tomlinson.”

In an instant, Louis’ perception is changed. He can definitely get behind people protecting Harry, considering he sort of resembles a baby deer who has just found his legs. “Got it. See you, boys!” He calls, raising a hand to wave to Liam and Niall.

Liam waves back and Niall cackles, “Have fun love birds!”

Harry shoots him the finger and drags a chuckling Louis out of the room.

“Where are we going?” Harry asks after Louis finds his way to the back entrance of the building and pulls them into an alley. It opens up to another road where they’ll easily be able to sneak off to Louis’ car, so he intertwines their fingers and starts walking.

“Tacos sound good, right?” Louis asks Harry, glancing back to see him grinning whilst biting down
on his bottom lip. He looks a bit mad like that, but it’s also strangely cute so Louis doesn’t say anything to him.

They get to Louis’ car with no incident, surprisingly, and Louis drives them to his favorite place for cheap late night mexican food. It’s only a jump away from the dorms where he lived during uni, which makes Harry smile when Louis tells him so.

“I’m trying to imagine you in uni,” he admits. “Were you anything like you are now?”

Louis snorts and shakes his head. “Believe it or not, I was worse. Irresponsible, a troublemaker, and I had a thing for these horrible scarves. I’m sure Zayn has some pictures stashed away for blackmail.”

Harry grins. “I bet you were fantastic.”

Louis makes a retching noise in response and Harry gasps in offense, but he’s still smiling. He probably never stops smiling, actually. It’s weird but Louis isn’t going to pretend that it doesn’t make him feel great about himself.

The restaurant is quite literally a hole in the wall, smashed between a fast food joint that has definitely seen better days and a bakery, it has barely enough room for a single table in the front window and a small area to stand while you wait. Louis pulls the car to a stop and smiles at the restaurant reverently.

Harry looks a lot less impressed.

“This is it?” He asks, raising his eyebrows when a group of drunk uni students come pouring out the door, laughing uproariously.

Louis scoffs. “Get your nose out of the air, Harold,” he teases. “It isn’t going to kill you to eat something that doesn’t cost as much as my car.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “I'm not that rich-”

“How much is that jacket you’re wearing?” Louis interrupts, gesturing to the simple black jacket Harry’s wearing that’s embroidered on both the back and front. If the way he blushes and immediately shuts his mouth is anything to go by, it probably cost more than Louis’ car.

So Louis manages to drag Harry into the dump, all while he protests about how very not stuck up and billionaire-ish he is. As much as he complains about being just a normal lad, he looks very out of place against the shitty lighting and water stained walls, and Louis thinks it’s hilarious. Harry follows him up to the counter where he orders basically one of everything.

“I’ll get it,” Harry offers when the total comes up. “Since you paid for drinks the other night.”

Louis raises his eyebrows but lets Harry through to hand some cash over to the woman running the register. “I’ve had a tab at Stan’s since I could walk, Harold, and I’ve yet to pay for anything.”

Harry shrugs. “It’s the thought that counts,” he decides, and Louis bursts into laughter.

Once they’ve arranged their mass of food on the tiny table in an unstable tower, Louis plops down in one of the creaking chairs and sighs happily. “I’m really quite proud of myself, honestly,” he admits, stealing a styrofoam box of the most delicious tacos on the planet from the top.

“For what?” Harry asks while grabbing a box for himself.
Louis shrugs and stuffs over half a taco into his mouth, which only makes Harry laugh even harder. “I’ve pulled you, gorgeous super model type person, which is brilliant in itself considering that I’m shit,” he explains, ignoring Harry when he tries to protest that. “And I’ve managed to get you to come here with me, despite the fact that it looks like the kind of place that you could catch a strange disease in. So, all in all it’s been a great few days.”

Smirking, Harry points to his hands. “Plus, you’ve got brilliant nails. That should make you even more proud.”

Louis sighs dramatically and picks at his still bubblegum pink nails. Whatever Natalie used on them could probably withstand a nuclear blast, so he had to come on his date with painted nails. That doesn’t mean he can’t own it, of course.

“Do you think so? I wanted something more sparkly, but it’s so hard to find good help these days.”

After Harry stops giggling, they launch into trying to get to know one another, something they didn’t really get to do the last time. It turns out the woman Louis had seen after the show on Friday was in fact his sister Gemma. When his niece comes up, Harry beams.

“Eva,” he tells Louis, pulling his phone from his pocket and tapping through it. “She’s a little over a year old, but she’s already the cutest child I’ve ever seen in my life.”

Louis gives him a soft smile when he sees there’s an entire album on Harry’s phone dedicated to his niece. He’s a bit smitten with the girl, which is quite obvious by the way he proudly points out the onesies and dresses he’s bought her, and Louis thinks it’s adorable.

“Her dad isn’t.”

Harry frowns, obviously angry about it. “He’s a dick,” he says coldly. “I mean, I never met him but…yeah. I don’t like him.”

“Sounds it,” Louis says, and he leaves it at that.

They talk about Louis’ siblings, all six of them which delights Harry to no end, about his work and Zayn and Perrie. Harry talks about the other boys and the tour they’re on now, all the places he’s been and everywhere he wants to go back to, about songwriting, about what prompted him to audition for X-Factor in the first place.

“I almost auditioned that year,” Louis admits, which makes Harry pause halfway through a bite of a truly monstrous burrito they’ve split.

“You did?” Harry asks breathlessly.

Louis laughs. “Yeah, ended up getting pissed with Stan the night before and slept right through the auditions though.”

Harry’s eyes light up and he looks even more beautiful than he did only moments before. “Louis, it’s fate.”

Groaning, Louis shakes his head. “Harold, there’s no such thing as fate.”

It’s quite obvious that Harry isn’t listening though and he continues on. “What if you had gone, though, and we would’ve met and—even though we didn’t we still met now! All these years later, Lou. That’s fate.”
Louis rolls his eyes. “Harry, babe, it’s was almost ten years ago. Besides, we probably wouldn’t have met there were thousands of people at those auditions, I never would have gotten through.”

Harry huffs and kicks him under the table. “You aren’t any fun,” he complains.

“You’re a child,” Louis laughs.

They manage to eat almost everything, save for half a plate of nachos that Louis can’t stand to even look at or else he might get sick. Sighing, he leans back in his chair and pats his stomach.

“Well, so much for my new years resolution.”

Harry frowns. “Louis, it’s June.”

Louis shakes his head. “It’s the thought that counts.”

The two of them get up with a chorus of groans and curses about how full they are. Louis forces the nachos into Harry’s hands and walks away, heading out onto the street and tipping his head back to look up at the lack of stars in the sky. The sun has just set and it’s dark and cloudy, but still barely any stars.

“What’re you looking for?” Harry asks, coming up to stand beside him and look up as well.

Louis smiles. “Aliens.”

Harry nods quite seriously and squints a bit, like maybe he can see them then. Louis snorts out a laugh and reaches for his hand. He tries not to shiver when Harry intertwines their fingers without so much as a word, but it’s hard.

“What next?” Harry asks, swinging their hands between them and grinning.

Because he told Phoebe he’d be home late, Louis decides they should get milkshakes. It isn’t that far to walk, so Harry agrees and they set off.

“Sometimes I sort of wonder what I would’ve done if this hadn’t worked out,” Harry blurs out, squeezing Louis’ fingers. “Like, what would’ve happened if I never auditioned too. Is that ungrateful?”

Louis shakes his head. “I think the same things, I think most people do. Like, what would have happened if I had picked a different uni. I probably wouldn’t have Noah, yeah? So I mean—you just have to look at the good. You can’t focus on everything that went wrong, because shit would have gone at least a bit wrong either way. That’s life.”

Harry hums and smiles softly over at him. “You’re quite wise.”

“Are you trying to say I’m old?” Louis gasps, and he shuts Harry’s protests up by kissing him.

It’s tame compared to what happened on Friday night, but when Louis pulls away Harry is still smiling and flushing in the street lights. He’s unbelievably attractive, Louis thinks when he leans forward to press his lips to Harry’s once more, and this has got to be a dream.

Harry nibbles at Louis’ bottom lip and then pulls back with a sigh. Their foreheads stay pressed together and he sighs, brushing at Louis’ cheekbones with his thumb. From this close Louis can truly appreciate every speck of color in his green eyes, the curls brushing his forehead, the gorgeous bow of his lips.
“You’re gorgeous,” Louis muses, and their lips brush together once more before Louis can even think to protest.

By the time they make it to get their milkshakes, it’s quite obvious what they’ve just been doing. Harry’s lips are practically swollen and even more red than before, and his cheeks are still flushed. Louis has no clue what he looks like but just judging from the way Harry keeps trying to discreetly fix his hair, it isn’t good.

While they wait for their milkshakes to be done, strawberry for Louis and chocolate for boring Harry, Louis jumps on his toes and rubs at his arms. It’s freezing in the shop, and he tries not to attribute that to the fact that he and Harry are no longer pressed together.

“It shouldn’t be this cold, it’s June,” he grumbles.

Harry frowns and shrugs off his jacket, holding it up for Louis to slip into. Louis raises his eyebrows and looks it over, picking up the sleeves to feel the material before dropping them.

“I get the feeling that the minute I put this on I’m going to ruin it.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “Just wear it Louis, you’re freezing.”

Doing his best to look reluctant about it, Louis takes the jacket and slips his arms through the sleeves. It’s softer than any piece of clothing he’s ever worn in his life and he’s more than a little paranoid that he’s going to spill strawberry milkshake all over it and Harry will hate him forever.

“Thanks, you’re a doll,” Louis drawls, winking at him dramatically.

It’s so easy to forget that Harry is who he is that it sort of startles Louis when he catches a group of girls stop in the doorway and stare at them in shock. For a minute he almost thinks it’s because of how ridiculous they look, Louis texting his sister for an update on Noah while wearing the coat that was obviously tailored for Harry, Harry holding both their milkshakes and smiling every time that Louis ducks in to take a sip, but then it comes rushing back. Harry’s actually properly famous and he has fans who are watching them while they get their ice cream fix.

When the girls don’t seem to be moving, Louis elbows Harry in the side and gestures towards them. He beams his most popstar smile and promptly waves. “Hi girls!” he calls to them. “You alright?”

The three of them nod about a dozen times each and slowly approach with their ice cream in hand.

“Hi Harry,” one of them whispers, and then she looks at Louis and grins. “Hi Louis.”

“It’s Lou-ee, like the French.” Harry corrects her happily.

“Wait, how the hell do they know who I am?” Louis blurts out.

All three girls laugh and then one quickly explains. “Harry followed you on twitter, plus we saw pictures of you earlier.”

Louis sighs and looks to Harry. He shakes his head sadly. “Soon everyone will know about mine and Alberto’s secret relationship. It’s tragic, really.”

Harry sputters out a surprised laugh and the girls all burst into giggles as well. Louis leans over to sip at Harry’s milkshake and then his, ignoring Harry’s protests about germs. He’s about to mention the fact that they had their mouths all over one another not even five minutes ago, but quickly stops himself. However, the girls still watch them with strange happy looks that Louis mostly ignores.
After Harry asks them if they’d like a picture and they agree quite loudly, Harry stupidly tries to hand Louis the milkshakes.

“Get those away from me, Harold, you’ll ruin my new jacket,” Louis scolds, jumping back from him. “I’d never forgive you.”

“I thought it was my jacket,” he says slowly. “You’ve been reminding me ever since you put it on that it’s my jacket.”

“Well I’ve lifted it.” Louis sniffs.

Because he’s an idiot, Harry leans in to peck him on the cheek before he just sets the milkshakes down on a table. Louis ignores the fact that the girls squeal at the kiss and pushes the sleeves up on the jacket, trying to look intimidating which is completely ruined when Harry laughs right in his face.

“You look like a hedgehog.”

Louis gasps and pushes him away, ignoring how Harry grins and how the girls bark out surprised laughs. He rolls his eyes and refuses to acknowledge when Harry starts whining his name and apologizing to him.

“Pass me a phone, I’ll take some pictures for you girls.”

Almost immediately Louis’s handed three different phones that he quickly cycles through, taking about a million pictures for each girl. While he takes the pictures he talks to the girls and finds out they all go to the same university that he did and that they’re celebrating finishing their exams for the semester. He’s laughing with them about a particularly terrible professor who’s apparently still around and still terrorizing students when he notices the time.

“Harry,” he starts, but when he looks up he finds that Harry’s attention is already on him just as it has been all night. “I turn into a pumpkin at midnight, babe.” Louis finishes softly.

Harry looks down at his watch and then nods. It’s nearing midnight now, and if Louis wants to get home before he passes out he’ll have to leave soon. The girls retrieve their phones and thank Harry about a million times before they leave. Because he’s feeling nice tonight, and because they were all really lovely girls, he pretends not to notice when one of them sneaks a picture of him in Harry’s jacket before they disappear outside.

“You have to leave?” Harry asks him, keeping his voice quiet and dropping a hand to Louis’ waist.

Smiling sadly, Louis reaches over to tickle at Harry’s wrist. “Really do, babe. My sister’s watching Noah and I’d hate to leave her alone over night, and Noah will worry if he wakes up and I’m not home.”

Harry nods and searches Louis’ eyes. Finally he pulls away and grabs both of their milkshakes. It feels awkward all of a sudden and Louis doesn’t quite understand why, so he reaches for Harry’s hand and squeezes it tightly in his own. When he looks up, he finds that Harry is watching him with a confused look on his face.

“I’m sorry if um,” he pauses and takes a deep breath. “If the fans made it weird. I get why you wouldn’t want that attention.”

They walk out onto the quiet street and Louis doesn’t let go of his hand. “I promise that isn’t it, I really do have to get home.”
It doesn’t really seem like Harry believes that, but he nods anyway and they slowly make their way back to Louis’ car. They walk in silence until Louis can’t take it anymore and he rounds on Harry, tugging him down for a quick kiss. Harry makes a surprised noise but it’s soon lost in a moan when Louis’ fingers scratch at his scalp.

“Do you honestly believe,” Louis growls against his lips. “That I would cut this short if I didn’t have to?”

Harry fumbles around a bit and the two milkshakes crash to the ground in a mess of melted ice cream and cherries. Louis looks down and a giggle bubbles up through his lips. He falls forward against Harry’s chest and lets himself just laugh because this is ridiculous. This is insane.

Only moment’s later, Harry’s chest is rumbling with laughter under his ear. The two of them stand there for awhile, Louis holding onto Harry and Harry holding him back, both smiling so fondly that if someone saw them they’d definitely assume things.

“I think I could really like you, Harold,” Louis giggles into Harry’s shirt.

“I think I already really like you, Lewis,” Harry teases back.

Louis groans and pushes him away, catching the front of the boy’s shirt before he stumbles into the road. “You just had to go and ruin it, didn’t you?”

Despite Louis’ scathing tone Harry nods, looking quite pleased with himself. Louis puts on his best frown and tugs him back towards the car, but as soon as he turns his face from Harry he’s biting down hard on a smile.

Louis drives Harry to his hotel, cranking the radio up and singing along loudly on the way. He even manages to get a couple of dance moves in before Harry barks at him to get his hands back on the wheel.

“You’re such a spoil sport, Harold.” Louis scolds, but he reaches across the seat to pat Harry’s thigh so he’ll stop pouting.

He drops Harry off in the garage of the hotel which they get into only after Harry smiles and charms the security working there. They come to a stop and Louis is about to say his goodbyes when Harry blurts out, “Please don’t like…forget me, yeah?”

Despite himself, Louis laughs. “You’re not going off to war, Harold, it’s only Scotland.”

Harry sighs and leans back against his seat. “I’ve only just met you, though. This isn’t fair.” He avoids Louis’ eyes on purpose, focusing on the windshield and the dim lights of the garage beyond it.

It isn’t fair really, Louis agrees. They get on and it’s been years since that’s happened for Louis, and no telling how long it’s been for Harry. He isn’t sure what he expected to happen tonight, maybe that he’d find Harry Styles really was nowhere near as charming and perfect as he seemed, but he’s sure he wasn’t expecting it to be this hard to say goodbye.

“You’ll be back soon, yeah?” Louis asks, trying to stay upbeat. When Harry nods, he smiles. “So it’s settled, you can come visit then. You’re not getting rid of me that easily, babe.”

Harry bites down on a smile and ducks his head. “This is stupid, isn’t it,” he mutters. “We haven’t known each other long enough for me to like you this much.”
“Excuse you, I am incredibly endearing,” Louis scoffs. “You had no chance.”

Harry laughs. “You’re probably right.”

There’s a moment of quiet, and then Louis is whispering, “I had no chance either, honestly.” Harry practically launches himself across the car and covers Louis’ laughing mouth with his own.

“You’re so stupid,” Louis giggles. “You’ll break my car like that.”

“I’ll buy you a new car,” Harry laughs back, pulling away only to press soft kisses to Louis’ neck. “More room for dinosaurs.”

Louis loses it, falling forward to wrap his arms around Harry’s neck. “You’re fucking ridiculous, do you know that?”

Harry smiles against his neck. “I’m so glad I met you,” he sighs. “I’ll see you soon, right?”

They separate and Louis reaches up to fix his fringe, beaming so wide his cheeks hurt. “You’ll hardly have time to miss me, Harold,” he declares. “For the record, I’m really glad I met you too.”

The look of pure joy on Harry’s face almost hurts. He kisses Louis on the cheek just once, and then he’s out of the car and heading into the hotel. Louis watches him go with the most ridiculous smile on his face that doesn’t disappear the entire drive home.

His house is dark when he arrives, save for the blue light of the television that flickers behind the curtains. Phoebe is laying on the couch fast asleep, feet propped up on the end of the couch and telly set on what ever terrible reality program she’s obsessed with this week. Rolling his eyes, he tiptoes up to the couch and shakes her shoulder softly.

“Pheebs, hey,” he murmurs, smiling when she bats his hands away. “Come on babe, you’ll kill me if I let you sleep on the couch.”

With a truly over dramatic groan, his little sister pries her eyes open. She looks him over and frowns. “You told me you wouldn’t be gone all night.” Phoebe mumbles.

“It’s hardly two thirty,” Louis automatically defends. “Come on darling, you can borrow some pajamas and take Noah’s bed.”

“Noah’s bed has a guard.” Phoebe whines.

Louis groans and points her in the direction of the hallway. “Then there’s no possible way you could roll off it, unlike a couch. Thank you for watching him.”

She yawns and stands up, turning to head for the hall when something catches her eye. She frowns and then points at Louis. “Whose is that?”

Both siblings look down and Louis curses. He’s still wearing Harry’s jacket, his ridiculously expensive jacket that was probably specially tailored to him. It looks ridiculous hanging over his cheap band tee like this, and Louis would laugh if Phoebe wasn’t watching him.

“It looks expensive,” she points out suspiciously.

Louis shakes his head. “You’re tired, you must be seeing things. I’ll see you in the morning babe.”

She shakes her head. “Who were you with? It’s too big to be Zayn’s.”
Louis ignores her and walks off to his room to text his mother that Phoebe’s staying over and to hide the jacket in the back of his closet. Noah is laying in his bed like he always does when Louis isn’t there to tuck him in at night. His mum has warned him a million times that he needs to break that habit, but Louis can never say no to the little pout his baby puts on.

After his sister steals a pair of joggers and a shirt, Louis changes into his own pajamas and climbs into bed.

Noah’s sleeping soundly, his little thumb stuck in his mouth and his legs thrown all over because he never stops moving, even when he’s sleeping. Louis smiles and reaches up to gently brush a curl away from his forehead.

It’s moments like this that remind Louis of how lucky he is. He has never loved anything or anyone as much as he loves Noah, and every little struggle is absolutely worth it. Sure, it would have been nice to stay with Harry, but this has no comparison. He would sacrifice a thousand wonderful dates for this one moment.

On the bedside table his phone buzzes with a call. Louis reaches for it and smiles when he sees Harry’s name there.

“Hey,” Louis whispers. “I stole your jacket.”

Harry breathes a soft laugh. “Thank god, I thought I’d lost it,” he jokes. “I just wanted to make sure you got home alright, I know it’s a bit of a drive.”

Louis tries not to smile too much at the fact that Harry is checking up on him. For an international popstar who has probably spurred many a sexual awakening, Harry Styles sure is adorable. “I’m home. Noah and I are cuddling now, I’m about to pass out,” he admits. “What should I do with your jacket? I mean, I could just sell it online of course, become a millionaire off it.”

“Just hold onto it for me, yeah?” Harry chuckles. “You can wear it if you want, it looks good on you.”

“Harry-”

“I like you in it,” Harry interrupts, his voice dropping to almost dangerously quiet.

Louis closes his eyes and breathes out slowly. If there’s one thing this night has made clear it’s that he’s falling so fast, too fast, and he’s starting to worry about what exactly he’s gotten himself into here.

“Then I’ll send pictures,” he teases, trying to keep his voice light. “Go to sleep. Goodnight Harry, thank you for tonight.”

It’s quite obvious that Harry’s smiling when he whispers back, “Sweet dreams, Louis.”

They hang up and Louis is about to roll over and go to sleep when he sees an unread message on his phone from Luke. He glances to where Noah is still soundly asleep before opening it.

It’s a simple text, saying only I need to talk to you, but it still makes Louis’ heart pound.

A moment’s hesitation is all it takes for Louis to decide to leave it until the morning. He wants to remember this night as perfectly wonderful as it is now with nothing to tarnish it. With that thought he turns his phone off and falls asleep with a smile on his face and Noah’s little toes jabbing into his side.
Louis knows he’ll always remember the first time he saw Noah.

It was three weeks before Noah was supposed to be born, so naturally Louis was absolutely mad with worry. Waiting for hours in an uncomfortable chair while his mum whispered to him that everything would be okay didn’t exactly help, and the fact that Luke didn’t say so much as a word of comfort definitely didn’t help.

Finally, after what felt like years, the doctor called both Louis and Luke into the room where they found an absolutely tiny baby squalling from a little bed they were using to weigh him. Natalie was smiling at the both of them tiredly from her own bed and Louis went straight for her out of instinct.

“It’s a boy,” she’d laughed through her exhaustion. “Go see him, Lou.”

Looking back on it Louis probably should’ve noticed the way Luke sort of just stared down at their son like he had no idea what was going on, but of course he didn’t. All he saw in that moment was the most adorable baby in the universe, his little fingers and toes, the tuft of dark hair on his head.

A nurse finished wrapping him up in a soft blanket and smiled when she saw the look of pure awe on Louis’ face. “You can hold him now, if you’d like,” she whispered, gently lifting the still screaming baby up.

Louis nodded like an idiot and didn’t stop until the nurse handed his son over to him. He has held probably hundreds of babies in his lifetime, but that one moment was so different. Louis was so careful, more careful than he’d ever been with any of his siblings honestly, mostly because of the fact that this was his baby.

Noah stopped crying long enough to blink his eyes open and frown and that’s all it took for Louis to fall completely.

“Oh,” he gasped, reaching up to gently trace Noah’s cheeks. “Hi. Hi baby, oh my goodness. You’re perfect, aren’t you?”

While Luke watched on from his side, Louis tickled at Noah’s little palm and almost burst into tears.
when his son squeezed his whole hand around one of Louis’ fingers.

“T should probably go let your mum know,” Luke muttered, interrupting the moment.

Louis looked up and had found his husband watching their baby with furrowed eyebrows. “Babe, don’t you want to hold him?”

In an instant Luke’s expression changed and he smiled, but after so many years together Louis knew what his fake smile looked like. “You look great like this,” he had whispered softly, dropping a kiss to Louis’ forehead. “I’ll be right back.”

Louis could actually feel his heart breaking as he watched Luke leave. He hadn’t even held their son yet, hadn’t shed a single tear. It made Louis sick to his stomach.

Natalie who had been watching the whole exchange through her drug induced stupor, sighed and patted the small bed she was on. “Come sit here next to me, Lou. He’ll come around.”

The same kind nurse helped Louis pull up a chair next to Natalie where he would eventually end up spending hours at a time in over the next few days. He sat down carefully, making sure not to jostle Noah who had finally stopped crying.

Natalie looked over and smiled at the baby in his arm. “I did pretty good, huh?” She breathed, which made Louis smile again.

“He’s beautiful,” Louis said quietly, looking down to where his baby is still holding onto his finger tightly. “Thank you, Nat, honestly. I love you so much.”

Natalie laughed softly and reached out to pat his head. “I love you too, Lou. Do I finally get to hear a name for him, then?”

The nurse who’d been hovering around for apparently that very reason perked up at that. With both of them watching, Louis tried to remember what he and Luke had picked out for a boy. Luke wanted something truly awful, something like Tyler, and Louis was so sure that the baby would be a girl that he went along with it.

“Well, uh,” he stuttered out, wishing Luke was back already. “We agreed on Tomlinson for the last name.”

His mum entered in that moment, which had Louis searching behind her for his husband. He needed Luke, he needed someone to help him make this decision, because now that he’d met his son he knew the baby wasn’t a Tyler.

But Luke didn’t follow his mum in, and when he asked she said he’d gone home to grab some things for the baby.

Louis made his decision right then. “Noah,” he said firmly. “He’s Noah Tomlinson.”

And from then on the two of them had been more or less alone.

Sure, Luke had been around. He’d been around when he kicked Louis awake at night because Noah was crying, he was around when he stumbled home drunk and yelled until Louis finally screamed back and showed up at his mum’s doorstep with a crying baby in the middle of the night. When Louis had little moments of joy, Luke mostly sat on the sidelines at watched. He watched Louis cheer over Noah’s first smile, and only briefly looked up from his work to acknowledge the first time their son laughed.
When he watched them, there was always a confusing frown on Luke’s face. “When does he start talking?” He’d asked one day when Louis was tickling Noah’s little tummy while he squirmed around and laughed.

“Not for a year almost,” Louis had replied.

Luke looked like that wasn’t good enough for him, but said nothing else.

He only ever stopped being around when Louis finally kicked him out after finding him on top of another man on their couch while Noah screamed from his room. Louis threw Luke and his friend outside, ignoring Luke’s pleas and excuses, and locked all the doors before going to Noah.

“Baby I’m sorry,” he cried, holding Noah to his chest. “I’m so sorry, sweetheart, never again. I won’t ever leave you again.”

Noah heaved little hiccups against his father’s chest and Louis wanted to scream, wanted to track Luke down and tear him to pieces. He’d only been gone the night, only long enough to do his very first official solo interview with an artist, and this is what happened.

Louis knew then that he could never trust Luke again, and he knew that he wanted to be completely finished with Luke when it became obvious that he hadn’t fed or changed Noah since Louis left for the night.

He spent the remainder of that night sitting on the couch quietly crying while he fed Noah a bottle, the baby’s sharp blue eyes focused on his father who had failed him.

“It’s just me and you now, huh baby?” Louis had whispered, brushing a piece of Noah’s downy soft hair away from his forehead. “You deserve so much better than this, my sweet boy. I’m so sorry.”

Noah reached up and hooked the fingers of one tiny hand around one of Louis’ fingers on his bottle. Louis smiled down at his son and leaned in close to kiss his forehead.

“You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me,” he whispered. “And I promise I’m always going to protect you.”

Louis took Noah falling asleep right then as a sign of trust, and he never once looked back.

“I don’t like this.” His mum informs him for about the hundredth time.

Louis rolls his eyes and reaches over for her mug of coffee, pretending not to hear her squawk of protest when he downs all of it. He then stands up and grabs his coat and bag and heads out of the kitchen. Noah was asleep when they arrived at his mum’s house, and is still asleep with half his face pressed into the couch cushion.

“Louis, I really don’t think you should be doing this.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Louis murmurs, pressing a kiss to Noah’s forehead. “I’m doing it anyway. I can’t just cut him from my life completely, Mum, we have a child together.”

When he straightens up to face her again, he finds that his mother is watching him with tears in her eyes.
“Aw, Mum don’t do that,” he groans, pulling her into a hug.

She brushes at his messy hair with her fingers, a habit she never let go of even when Louis became taller than her. Louis smiles and lets her “fix” it, knowing that he’ll be able to set it back to where he likes it in the car.

“Boo, you’re just going to get hurt more than the first time,” she whispers. “He’s terrible, we both know that.”

That’s the very fear Louis’s been fighting ever since he gave Luke a call back and said that yes, they could meet up and talk. This is probably a bad idea, he realizes, probably very high up on the list of worst ideas he’s ever had actually. But he made a commitment and he’s going to stick to it, he isn’t going to let Luke win this time.

Besides, he needs to talk to the man about the fact that he hasn’t paid child support since last month before he brings it up to anyone else.

“I’ll be okay and I’ll call you straight after, I promise.”

Jay nods and presses another kiss to Louis’ forehead before she lets him go.

The entire ride to work Louis tries very hard not to think about his ex-husband. Instead he tries to focus on everything he has to get done today. The end of the week is the deadline for next month’s magazine, the edition that’ll feature Louis’ article on One Direction. He finished his first draft over the weekend and sent it off to Jesy, but has yet to hear anything about it yet.

That silence is broken the moment he walks into the mostly deserted office. It’s a half hour before anyone’s shift is really supposed to start, but Louis left early purely out of the nervous restlessness that’s settled in his stomach.

“What in the fuck did you send me?”

Jesy’s shout from across the office makes Louis jump and just about spill tea all over himself. He whips his head up and fixes her with a glare, but before he can spew out every terrible word he can think of Jesy starts talking again.

“Lou, I love you but that interview was disgusting,” she says plainly.

Louis walks over to his desk and sits down, taking a large gulp of tea before trying to understand what she’s saying. “My interview with the boyband?”

Jesy tugs a chair away from someone else’s desk so she can sit beside Louis and level him with a stare that probably could bring a weaker man to his knees.

“Your love letter you mean?” she asks, saccharine sweet. “Because you literally took out an entire paragraph to wax poetic about how Harry Styles’ eyes sparkle. You compared him to sunshine multiple times-four actually. I counted.”

Louis winces. He hadn’t thought it was that bad really, and he did try to keep the sun metaphors to a minimum. “Um, fuck,” he sighs, pulling a hand through his hair. “Would you believe me if I said that I was a bit drunk when I wrote that?”

Jesy laughs right in his face and Louis knows he’s in deep trouble now. “Your drunken writing is better than your normal writing, so no Tomlinson, I don’t believe that,” she snaps. “Rewrite it, I’m begging you. You’re just lucky I’m the one who read it honestly, anyone else would assume things.”
Louis frowns, trying to remember what exactly he put in that article. Surely it wasn’t that incriminating.

“What do you mean assume things?”

With a devious glint in her eyes, Jesy lifts her phone up and reads from it. “‘Harry Styles is devilishly charming and sweet, and from the moment you meet him there’s really no more question as to why thousands of girls, and boys, have fallen for him over the past nine years. With sparkling eager eyes and a smile rivaled only by the sun, Harry tells us about his dreams for the band’s future.’”

Louis wants the ground to swallow him up completely.

“I didn’t actually write that,” he says quietly, hoping that Jesy has made this up as some sort of joke. He can’t have actually sound that enamored, that disgustingly infatuated.

Jesy sighs and scrolls through her phone a bit more. “Babe, you did. And after that you wrote about how Harry was just delighted by the thought of Liam Payne getting married and starting a family. You didn’t say a single bad word about any of these boys, or the show, or the songs. We both know that isn’t like you, so what is going on?

Louis groans and rubs at his face harshly. The last thing he wanted was to let whatever this thing with Harry is to interfere with his work. “You know that whole, stay objective shit?” he mumbles. “Sort of fucked that.”

Jesy’s face falls and she takes a moment to look around the still empty office before whispering, “Did you literally fuck it?”

Louis takes a sip of his tea and lets the heat of it shock him a bit. He needs it. “I mean, if you’re getting technical then no. But I am definitely falling for him,” he ignores Jesy’s gasp and instead starts to plead with her. “I mean it, Jes. Just don’t say anything, okay? I’m confused enough.”

Jesy reaches over to take Louis’ hand in his own and squeezes. “Babe, you know I’m here for you right?” she whispers to him. “I’ve got your back no matter what. Do you want me to take it? You can send the interview to me and I’ll write it up real quick.”

Louis squeezes her hand back with a smile. Even though he knows his friend’s are here for him, it’s still lovely to be reminded of it. “No, I think my head is a lot clearer now. I’ll fix it quickly, and I promise it’ll sound more like me this time and less like a schoolgirl with a crush.”

Jesy is silent for a moment, just watching him with all the humor from her eyes now gone. “Are you being careful?” Louis sputters out a laugh and she punches him in the shoulder. “You know what I mean, dumbass. I’m just worried about you getting hurt, I really don’t want to have to kill a popstar but I would.”

“Jes, don’t worry about it,” he says, still chuckling. “We’re just friends for now, just hanging out, and he’s every bit as sweet as what I wrote.”

“Well, he sounds decent enough I guess, but I won’t be convinced until it gets serious.” Jesy sniffs.

Louis laughs and shoos her away. “I’ll get you a rewrite by lunch, now leave me be. I’m very important, I have things to do.”

“Go away, Jesy,” Louis shouts. He chooses to ignore the fact that he’s now blushing.

“You let him take your coat?” Caroline shouts at Harry, staring him down with her hands on his hips. Even though it’s been years since they first met, she still has that same disappointed frown she used to give him when he was seventeen. It never really worked of course, which is why Harry isn’t afraid to pout back at her.

“He looked really good in it though.”

Caroline throws her hands up in the air and says, “Oh well if he looked good in it-you know what? It’s fine,” she returns her hands to her hips and scowls at him. “I’ll just scrounge up another tailored designer jacket for you to wear to the show tomorrow, no big deal.”

Harry laughs and grins at her. He immediately regrets it when Caroline reaches over to pinch his side. He jumps back and starts whining about how terrible their stylist is to him while she stomps off to deal with Niall.

Sure, it was probably a bad idea to give away the jacket Caroline had given to him specifically for the fashion show he’s attending this weekend, but Louis looked so adorable in it. Even now, thinking of the way he had to push the sleeves up to let his hands peek out makes Harry smile.

Liam jolts him out of his daydreams of Louis with a slap to his bum. “Stop grinning like that, it’s creepy.”

“You’re such a twat,” Harry mumbles, slapping Liam away.

“You look like a serial killer when you smile like that,” Liam continues on, obviously not concerned with Harry’s anger. “And Louis would not want to date a serial killer, would he?”

Niall trots up right then after having been told off by Caroline for ripping holes into his jeans and jumps into the conversation. “Li’s right, you do sort of look insane that way. Maybe try not biting your lip like that, could help.”

Harry crosses his arms over his chest and glares at both of them. “Anything else you two have to say? Maybe you both and Caroline should gang up on me about my hair again?”

“Nah, I like your hair mate,” Niall says, reaching forward to tug on a loose curl to prove his point. “Besides, there’s more to hold on to. That’s gotta impress your boy, yeah?”

Somehow he manages to bat Niall’s hands away and ignores the both of them while they burst into laughter and congratulate each other on how fantastic and funny they think they are. As much as he hates them both right now, Harry can’t help but smile at them. It’s lovely to have them back.

Their new hair stylist tries to get Niall to sit down so she can fix the mess he’s created out of it and Caroline is off showing Liam a set of new outfits, so Harry takes it as an opportunity to rest. They’ve only been on tour a few weeks but he’s already exhausted which makes him feel old. He can remember being on tour after X-Factor and having enough energy after shows to actually go out, now he just slinks back to his hotel room and passes out for the night.

Harry grabs his phone from his pocket and starts clicking through it, replying to messages from his
friends and his mum. He gets to Instagram eventually and scrolls through it, liking pictures from everyone back home and in Los Angeles. When he sees Louis’ pouting face, his thumb stutters and he stops.

It’s a picture of Louis and a very pretty girl sitting at a desk pulling dramatically sad faces with the caption, Deadline coming up!! Leigh’s excited

After checking and seeing he posted it an hour ago, Harry decides that’s enough time to text Louis a quick good morning and not seem like a creep or a stalker. He sends it and tries not to get his hopes up too high while he waits for a reply.

They have an interview today for an online gossip column and Harry’s already been briefed on Louis. Not that his management has any clue who Louis actually is, outside of what his fans have been speculating online about the pretty journalist who’d been spotted holding Harry’s hand a week before, but they do know he’s been seen with another man. He’s not supposed to say anything if asked about the shadowy pictures that have leaked of them kissing other than that he has friends and people can speculate if they like.

Except there are also clear pictures of them online that Harry’s seen, ones of Louis wearing his coat and ones of them holding hands and smiling at one another fondly—but whatever. He’s done fighting, he’s out and that’s what he wanted all along.

His phone buzzes and Harry opens it to see Louis has texted back. Morning babe :) I’m rewriting your review right now so don’t say anything too charming

Harry stifles a giggle with his hand and writes back, You look lovely today please give us five stars. Also your hair is brilliant.

Louis quickly responds with, You’re so full of shit Harold. Gotta go babe I’ll text later have a great day xxx

Harry bites down on the sleeve of his jumper around a smile and pretends not to hear Niall and Liam yelling at him again.

He’s happy, fucking sue him. After everything, he deserves it.

Leigh-Anne is the first to figure out where Louis’s rushing off to at lunch, and to say she isn’t happy about it would be a massive understatement.

“No fucking aren’t,” she says after Louis tells her why he’s been acting strange all morning. “Louis this really isn’t funny.”

Louis rolls his eyes and continues letting his friend play with his hair. She’d gotten in a box full of new products to review and insisted that Louis let her fix his disaster of a hair style, or at least that’s how she put it. Personally Louis doesn’t think his hair is that bad, but he also thinks that if it takes more than three seconds to fix it isn’t worth it.

“Is my hair going to be crunchy?” He asks, lifting his hand up only to have it slapped away.

“No, asshole,” Leigh snaps. “Now, please tell me this is a joke.”
Louis frowns down at his laptop where all the little red lines under his words seem to be running together. He quickly deletes the whole paragraph and starts again. “I can tell you it’s a joke if that makes you feel better.”

Leigh-Anne tugs on a piece of his hair sharply and smirks when Louis hisses in pain. “This is such a bad idea, I hope you know.”

“What’s he gonna do, Leigh, cheat on me again?” Louis forces out a laugh that sounds fake even to his ears. “There’s nothing he can do to hurt me, no more than he already has at least.”

They fall silent and Louis continues proofreading while Leigh-Anne finishes off his hair. There aren’t many people he trusts with his hair, his sister and Leigh-Anne being the only ones actually. After a series of bad haircuts as a child, he’s very picky about who he lets mess with it. Leigh-Anne only gained his trust after his last truly awful haircut four years ago that she fixed almost as soon as he walked into the office.

So, after he’s sent in his new file to Jesy and Leigh-Anne’s finished with his hair, he lets her take a picture to put in her review.

“It looks a bit like a cinnamon roll, love,” Louis teases when she shows him the picture.

Leigh-Anne scoffs and rolls her eyes. “You’re welcome, Louis. Now let me go get my things and I’ll come with you.”

“Babe, you can’t,” Louis sighs. “Thank you for wanting to help, honestly, but I have to do this by myself. Please don’t tell the girls, okay? And absolutely do not tell Zayn.”

She crosses her arms and glares at Louis. “I’m not going to tell Zayn-”

“You’ll tell Perrie which is essentially the same thing,” Louis corrects. “Now, promise me.”

It takes Louis five whole minutes to convince Leigh-Anne to keep her mouth shut, but he somehow manages to get out of the office without her sounding some sort of alarm. He and Luke had agreed on meeting at a park that’s near Louis’ work but far from Luke’s flat. Honestly, Louis just wanted to make this hard on him.

He spots Luke right away, sitting on a bench with one arm thrown over the back. As usual, he looks effortlessly gorgeous, and as usual Louis doesn’t care.

“Morning, Lucas,” Louis calls, trying to keep the grin off his face when Luke jumps and starts looking for the source of the voice.


And god, Louis hates him.

“*Noah* is fantastic, not that you give a shit,” Louis snaps, refusing to even sit next to the man. Instead he stands in front of him and waits for him to say something.

Luke looks just as he did the last time Louis saw him weeks ago, just before he called and said he didn’t want to see Noah again. They’d only met up for an hour, and Noah had no clue who he even was. He had sort of frowned at his biological father, said hello, and then ran off to the playground while Louis and Luke discussed things. Luke was gorgeous then too, same artfully tousled hair, same piercing blue eyes and smirk that used to give Louis butterflies.
Now it just serves to annoy him even more.

“What did you need that was so important we had to talk in person?”


Part of Louis wants to punch Luke directly in his smug face, while a very small, quiet part of his brain is happy that Luke’s noticed how well he’s doing without him. Instead of letting both sides battle it out, Louis reaches into the pocket of his jeans for a cigarette and tries to focus on the steady burn in his lungs to keep himself grounded.

“I thought you’d stopped that shit.”

Louis narrows his eyes at his ex. “Yeah, well you don’t really know anything about me do you?” he sneers. “I’m not here to be judged by you, Lucas. Let’s get this over with, yeah?”

A shadow of anger passes over Luke’s face before being completely replaced with his usual nonchalant grin. He nods and crosses one leg over the other before saying, “I saw a picture of you online yesterday with that guy.”

A cold shiver runs down Louis’ spine. He clenches one hand in a fist and practically crushes the cigarette between his fingers with the other. “What is that supposed to mean?” he growls.


“Get to the fucking point,” Louis spits out.

Luke sighs, long and dramatic. He stretches his arms out and smiles up at Louis. “Listen, Lou, we both know that I owe you money for Noah. What I’m saying is that if you’re going to be hanging around people like that, do you really even need it?”

For once, Louis has no idea what to say. He opens his mouth and closes it a few times before taking one last long drag of his cigarette and crushing it under his shoe. “Noah is your son too,” he hisses. “You agreed to this, and as much as I know you’d like to drop out and pretend it never happened, it did. You’re responsible for supporting of him regardless of who my friends are.”

“Oh, so you’re friends is that it?” Luke asks, his tone teasing.

Louis shakes his head. “It isn’t any of your business. My life is none of your business and I don’t owe you any explanation. You have a week to pay, Luke, before I do something about it.”

Before Luke can say anything else, Louis turns on his heel and walks away. He can hear Luke yelling his name, but just keeps walking. He can’t turn around, he can’t because god knows what he’ll do if he does. At this point he’s so angry that punching Luke actually seems like the kinder option.

Of course he ends up at Zayn’s desk. Leigh-Anne watches him come in from across the room with a frown on her face, but when Louis shakes his head at her she stays seated.

“Hey babe,” Zayn says when he finally shows up, a bag of takeout in his hands. “You hungry? I’m probably going to end up working through lunch.”

Louis shakes his head and waits for Zayn to sit down before saying, “Luke saw pictures of Harry and I and he was using that as an excuse to not pay child support. He hasn’t paid it in a month, actually, and I haven’t told you or Mum about it so please don’t freak out.”
Zayn looks murderous. His jaw clenches and his eyes narrow in on Louis’, the look of disappointment on his face is one that Louis knows too well. “A month?”

“That isn’t the point-”

“That is the fucking point, Louis,” Zayn growls in a whisper. “Do you need anything? Why didn’t you tell me?”

Louis shrugs and avoids Zayn’s knowing eyes. “I’m fine, I can take of Noah and myself alone. I didn’t come here for a lecture, Z, I need advice.”

Zayn ignores him for a minutes, stewing in his anger. He never was one to explode, even back in university he always chose to deal with his anger quietly and bug the hell out of Louis for weeks with his angry glares. Nothing much has changed since then.

Finally, Zayn shakes his head and starts pulling food out of his bag and slamming it down on his desk. “If you’re asking me whether or not you should stop seeing Harry because of Luke you know what I’m going to say.”

“But I still need to hear it,” Louis mumbles, feeling stupid for it.

Zayn sighs and stretches over to give his best friend a one armed hug. “You do not owe that man shit,” he reminds Louis. “Just because you were together for so long and just because you have Noah does not mean he gets any say over your life. You get to be happy, Louis, it’s okay to be happy. You deserve it.”

Louis nods and leans his forehead against Zayn’s shoulder, breathing out slowly. “Thank you,” he whispers. “He’s just so…well, you know how he is.”

“I know how he is which is why I don’t understand why you’d meet up with him alone,” Zayn sighs, digging through his bag for a couple of plastic forks.

“I just needed to talk to him before I did anything about the money. I didn’t…I didn’t expect him to know anything about Harry and I. I guess I didn’t really understand that he’s actually proper famous until now.”

Zayn breathes out softly and shrugs. “Lou, you know how I feel about that already. I don’t know what to tell you besides what I already have. Just be careful, that’s all you can do.”

Louis reaches for Zayn’s food, ignoring his protests and digging into his best friend’s lunch. While Zayn goes off on a tirade about never getting to eat with Louis and Perrie around, Louis thinks about Harry.

He really doesn’t want to give up what could be something wonderful because of something stupid like Luke’s opinion. Besides, how much worse could it get?

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**Harold:** when does your interview come out?

*It’ll be with the next issue so two weeks*
Harry calls him at work a little over a week later. Louis answers with a simple, “Yeah?”, and continues typing up his take on the newest pop sensation he hadn’t heard of until he listened to the album this morning.

“Oh, shit are you busy?”

Louis tugs his phone away and almost squeals when he sees *Harold* on his screen along with the picture he’s come to love of Harry at the bar.

“Harry, hey,” Louis breathes, trying to tone down his smile. “I’m just trying to finish something up quick, my deadline is creeping closer and closer by the second. What’s up, popstar?”

As always, Harry giggles at the name. “I just wanted to let you know I’m in town, and if you wanted then maybe we could meet up for lunch? You sound busy though, I don’t want to distract you.”

“Darling, you’re a very welcome distraction,” Louis laughs. “Lunch would be great, actually. If I don’t get out of this office soon I’m going to scream.”

Jesy catches his eye from across the room and scowls at him. “Less talking, more typing!” She shouts.

Louis ignores her in favor of listening to Harry laughing like he’s the funniest person to ever exist. “What time, then?” He finally asks, and the excitement in his voice is tangible.

After checking the time and continuing to ignore Jesy’s shouts from across the room, Louis tells Harry they can meet in a half hour. “I just have to get this article finished up and sent in and I’ll meet you in the lobby,” he says, still typing away. “I’ll just text you the address, yeah?”

“Yeah, I’m driving over now,” Harry promises. “I can’t wait to see you.”

Louis ducks his head and hopes no one else notices the heat rising on his cheeks. It’s hardly been two weeks since they’ve last seen each other, only two weeks since he last kissed Harry, and yet Louis is practically shaking with how excited he is to see the boy again. He can’t remember the last time he felt like this about somebody and he can’t tell whether that’s exciting or terrifying.

“I can’t wait to see you either,” Louis whispers back. “See you soon.”

“See you soon,” Harry replies, and Louis hangs up before he says anything else.

Over forty minutes later Louis has everything finished and sent out to Jesy to check over. Harry has already texted to say he’s waiting, so Louis gathers his bag and ducks out of the office. In all the chaos, no one seems to notice he’s leaving which is what Louis wants. The last thing he needs is Jade and her minions bugging Harry.
When the lift doors open to the lobby, Louis spots Harry right away. Besides the fact that everyone seems to be glancing at him in confusion when they pass, Zayn just happens to be standing right in front of Harry.

“Well, hello boys,” Louis drawls when he walks up to them.

Harry whips his head up and steps forward to wrap Louis into a hug without any hesitation. “Hey Lou,” he mutters, giving Louis a quick squeeze before letting go.

Ignoring the look Zayn is giving them, Louis squeezes Harry around the waist and smiles back. “Hey, Harold,” he laughs. “And Zayn, what are you doing here?”

“I work here too, Louis,” Zayn says with a roll of his eyes.

Louis sighs and shrugs as best he can while still wrapped up in Harry’s ridiculously long arms. “I guess, but that’s no excuse for harassing Harry.”

Of course Harry laughs loudly, just like always. When Zayn hears it he rolls his eyes, but Louis just grins and squeezes Harry’s hip.

“You took too long, Zayn found me waiting,” Harry explains. “He was keeping me company and giving me the best friend speech.”

Louis, having a good idea of what exactly a best friend speech consists of, glares at Zayn. “You do realize he has body guards, yeah? Like actual giant men who will kill you if you threaten him.”

Harry gasps and starts to protest the idea of his body guards killing anyone but both Zayn and Louis ignore his babbling.

“We were just talking, Lou, calm down,” Zayn says teasing. “I’m not going to scare him off.”

“You better not, I’ve just started to get used to him.” Louis announces, smiling when Harry stops his babbling mid-syllable.

Zayn looks from Harry to Louis and sighs. “I gotta get back to work, I’ll see you for dinner Lou. It was really nice meeting you, Harry.”

Harry beams and stretches out his hand to shake Zayn’s. “Nice meeting you too, Zayn. Congrats on the engagement.”

When Zayn is a safe distance away, Louis turns to face Harry and take him in. He’s obviously been in the sun somewhere if the tan he’s sporting is anything to go by, and he looks incredibly happy and relaxed. He’s wearing a half buttoned shirt that feels like silk in Louis’ hands and jeans that leave absolutely nothing to the imagination. He’s beautiful, and Louis can’t keep his hands off him.

“He told you he’s engaged?” Louis blurts out.

Harry nods, still smiling. “Yeah, we were just talking and he mentioned it. I love weddings, you know? I can’t wait to get married someday and have a massive wedding.”

Louis stares at him for a moment. “You’re beautiful, Harold, has anyone ever told you that?”

Giggling, Harry shrugs. “A few people, yeah,” he laughs. “Hey, could I kiss you?”

And he says it so quietly, like he’s scared for Louis to even hear. It’s stupidly endearing that he even thinks to ask, so Louis lets him worry over it for a moment before nodding and pulling him down by
the nape of his neck for a kiss. It’s short and sweet and Harry doesn’t drag it out for any longer than it needs to be.

“I missed that all last week,” he mumbles, pressing another kiss to Louis’ cheek before he stands up straight. “You’ve really screwed me, y’know. I was in one of the most beautiful cities in the world and all I could think about were your lips.”

Louis laughs and tightens his fingers in Harry’s shirt. “As it should be.”

Harry grins and nods. “Guess I’ll just have to stick around,” he teases. “C’mon, I’m starved.”

Their hands go for each other almost out of instinct, but Louis doesn’t mind. He intertwines their fingers and lets Harry lead him outside. Louis is a bit shocked when he notices someone take a picture of them, but Harry has him out the door before he can do anything about it.

“I know a good chip shop, if you’d like,” Louis says, squeezing Harry’s hand once they’re out onto the street.

Harry smiles and nods and lets Louis lead the way. Neither one of them tries to separate their hands though, and Harry goes so far as to swing their arms around a bit as they walk. It’s so nice, Louis thinks, it’s been so long since he’s felt this comfortable with anyone other than his family.

“You’ve been busy, then?” Harry asks.

Louis laughs. “Not as busy as you, popstar. How was Scotland?”

At that, Harry launches into a story about their latest concerts and all the radio stations they’ve visited. When he talks about the shows, his face brightens and he has the most contagious grin on his face. Louis squeezes his hand once because he can’t put into words how adorable Harry is.

They walk into the shop and Harry immediately catches the attention of some fans. Louis ignores them while he orders and claims a table for himself. Somehow Harry manages to get away from the crowd surrounding him and takes a seat across from Louis.

“I’m really sorry-”

Louis shrugs and kicks at Harry’s legs under the table. “What is your favorite place to travel to?” he asks, ignoring Harry’s look of surprise and how he continues to try to apologize. “The farthest I’ve been was Australia. Zayn and I went to Perth over the summer once during uni, I loved it.”

“Australia’s beautiful,” Harry agrees, apparently done apologizing. “Did you surf?”

“I did, Zayn was too much a baby to try. He was convinced a shark would eat him,” Louis laughs. “You haven’t answered my question yet, by the way.”

While Harry thinks it over, he picks at the chips Louis had bought him. He shoves a few into his mouth unceremoniously and Louis has to hide his stupidly fond smile behind his drink.

“I think that Los Angeles used to be my favorite place,” he admits quietly. “I’ve got a house there and all but…I don’t like it as much anymore. So I’ll have to say Japan.”

Louis raises an eyebrow but doesn’t comment on the first part of the answer. Instead, he asks about Japan which leads to Harry telling him everything he loves about it and all the words he’s learned in Japanese, which is a grand total of one.
One word that he won’t stop shouting just to make Louis giggle.

“What does it even mean?” Louis says through his laughter.

Harry beams and shrugs. “It means like, I’ll do my best.”

Louis nods and then mutters, “Ganbarimashu,” into his sandwich which makes Harry start cackling.

They eat their food and Harry tells stories about tour so far while absentmindedly playing with Louis’ fingers. He seems interested in them to the point where Louis has to stop eating because he can’t stop laughing.

“What on earth are you doing?” Louis asks, slipping their fingers together so they’re holding hands on the table. “You came all this way just to play with my fingers, is that it Styles?”

Harry blushes bright red and ignores Louis’ laughter.

Louis brings their hands to his lips and smiles at Harry from across the table. It’s so lovely, and Harry is lovely, and Louis thinks that Zayn was right. He does deserve to be happy.

Louis’ office is bright and airy and busy, and Harry falls in love with it instantly.

He was only allowed up here after promising Louis multiple times that he wouldn’t be too loud or too distracting. Though, the last part was said after they’d just kissed so Harry still isn’t sure if Louis actually meant that.

“It’s sort of insane in here,” Harry says, making sure to stay at Louis’ side and not get lost in the maze of desks. “I think I’ve just seen someone make a girl cry.”

Louis laughs and then waves his hand like it’s nothing. “Leigh-Anne, probably. She’s a doll, but she takes no shit and all of the interns hate her. Without her this whole place would probably descend into total chaos.”

Harry takes another look around and wonders what total chaos looks like if this isn’t it.

They make it to Louis’ desk which is mostly set apart from the others and surrounded by a short divider. There’s pictures papering almost all of it, pictures of Louis and his mates, pictures of people Harry’s seen around the office, but mostly pictures of his son.

When Louis pulls up a chair, Harry sits down and continues staring at them all. “Who’s that?” He asks, pointing to a picture of Louis and a girl that looks a bit younger than him.

Louis opens his laptop and glances over. “Oh, that’s my sister Lottie. Makeup artist, she’s brilliant at it too. That was from her first show after uni.”

The pride in Louis’ voice makes Harry smile. He probably won’t ever admit how attractive something simple like that makes Louis, would never want to because shit like that usually scares people away.

“Well, what do we have here?” A voice calls and startles them both. Harry looks up and smiles when he sees a woman grinning at the both of them.
Louis groans. “None of your business, probably.” He answers.

The woman sighs and flips her dark hair over her shoulder before reaching a hand out to Harry. “He’s so rude, I’m sorry. I’m Jesy, Louis’ best mate in the whole world. I’m also his boss.”

“You are not my best mate, and you’re barely my boss.” Louis grumbles, not looking up from his laptop screen.

Harry shakes Jesy’s hand and introduces himself as well. When he smiles up at her, Jesy laughs.

“Aw, Lou you were right! His smile does remind me of sunshine and puppies and My Little Pony.” Louis wads up a piece of paper from his desk and throws it at her head, just barely missing her. “Get the fuck out of here, Jesy.” He growls, but he’s still blushing for some reason.

Harry decides to play into it. “He said that?” he asks breathlessly. Jesy nods and Harry turns to look at Louis with wide eyes. “Oh, Lou, I didn’t know you felt that way.”

“Yeah well, what can I say,” Louis sighs back. “I just can’t resist your charms.”

Grinning, Harry leans over to rest his head on Louis’ shoulder. Louis musses up his curls before his hands return to his laptop.

“This is honestly the most embarrassing and disgusting thing I’ve ever seen,” Jesy decides. “Send me that article when you’re finished and please try to keep the affection to a minimum.”

Louis salutes her and Jesy just rolls her eyes before walking away to yell at somebody else. He turns to give Harry a short kiss on the cheek, just to make Jesy angry apparently.

“So, I’m going to try to finish this article quickly and get it in to Jes. You can hang around here if you want, the kitchen’s down the hall if you’d like tea or something, and if I get too boring you can always talk to Jade. She writes the gossip features, so she’ll be happy to tell you everything you didn’t already know about yourself.”

Harry grins and gives Louis a kiss on the cheek back. “You could never bore me. Let me see what you’re writing.”

While Louis types up his review, Harry watches in pure awe. He’d read Louis’ writing before actually, something he hadn’t mentioned when they first met because he was worried Louis might get the wrong idea about why he was picked for the job. It wasn’t like he’d asked for Louis to be the one to come see their show, but when given the choice even Niall was all for it.

“He’s great,” Niall had cackled. “Bring him in, it’ll be a laugh.”

And it was and Harry’s still grateful for it.

“Where do you even come up with this shit,” Harry giggles when he sees Louis comparing the band’s harmonies to the screams of a hundred angst filled teenagers.

Louis shrugs and sighs loudly. “It’s a gift, truly. I’m known throughout the word for my assholery.”

“Assholery?” Harry snickers.

Louis bites down on a smile and goes back to writing.

Harry brings out his phone and texts his sister for a little while, taking a break to bring Louis tea and
take a few pictures with some starstruck interns. He even takes a picture of Louis at one point, one of his small hands up to his lips, long dark eyelashes framing his beautiful eyes, laptop blurry in the background.

He posts it in black and white to Instagram with the caption, hi @louist91, and waits.

Louis rolls his eyes when he sees it and makes a truly evil comment about how posting pictures in black and white does not make Harry an artist. He pouts about it for a good half hour before Louis shuts him up with a kiss.

It’s so stupid that Harry’s face burns bright red and he has to turn away so Louis won’t see, but he probably already has. If he did, he doesn’t say anything, just keeps writing and working and teasing Harry every so often.

Something about it is so simple and lovely. Harry can’t remember the last time he was comfortable enough with someone to sit in almost complete silence and just enjoy their company. Besides the fact that he barely knows Louis, it’s easy and natural to be around him, almost like they’ve been friends for years.

And he knows that’s a dangerous thought, he knows from experience that there’s no such thing as love at first sight, but he doesn’t know how else to explain it. He hasn’t felt this way about somebody since, well, ever.

They part hours later with a simple kiss at Louis’ car, hidden from the eyes of everyone else. It’s just as sweet and beautiful as any other kiss they’ve shared so far, whether they were in public or not. Harry thinks of his other boyfriends, his girlfriends from years ago even, the ones who only wanted to kiss where they were sure other’s could see. It’s something so simple that makes him feel so safe, but it doesn’t stop Harry from smiling the whole drive back to his hotel.

Im picking up an issue of your magazine tomorrow !

Louis: If you don’t hate me maybe we can do lunch again?

Could never hate you. Absolutely .xx
Walking into work the morning after a deadline always feels the same to Louis. Everyone looks tired and practically dead on their feet from the stress, but then there’s also the gleam of *we did it again* in most of his coworker’s eyes. He’s also pretty sure he’s just heard a couple of the new summer interns discussing whether or not credit was worth all the stress.

Jade confronts him the minute he sits down, Jesy in tow. Both girls are giving Louis sad looks that make him want to laugh.

“Morning, babes.”

“Lou, people are really pissed off about your feature,” Jade starts.

Louis smiles to himself. Once, a long time ago back in his first year of university, Louis had a professor who told him if he wasn’t making at least one person angry he wasn’t doing his job well enough. Looking back on it now he realizes it was probably a bad piece of advice to give an eighteen year old with no experience and no real idea of what he wanted to do yet, but Louis took it and ran with it.

“Aren’t they always?” He asks, reaching for his tea.

Both of the girl’s frowns deepen and Jesy shakes her head. “Louis, it’s really bad. Do you even check twitter at all? Their fans are saying terrible things about you.”

Louis frowns right back them. “What?” he asks, genuinely confused. “Why would their fans be mad, I gave them a good review. I gave them three whole stars, Jes, who was the last person I gave three stars to?”

Jesy rolls his eyes and Jade kicks at his foot. “Yeah, okay so you gave them a good review,” she says coldly, obviously pissed on his behalf. “But it wasn’t good *enough*. You didn’t worship the ground they walk on, and that’s what they were expecting.”

“What the fuck,” Louis blurs out, no longer amused. “What did I say that was so horrible?”

“You called them disjointed, Lou,” Jesy reminds him. “You also said that the new album wasn’t as good as the past albums.”

This is reaching a whole new level of ridiculous, Louis thinks. “I would have given them a better
review if I felt that was what they deserved. Like I said, give them some time and a few more weeks on tour to get used to it again, it’ll be sick. It’s just like starting all over again, it’s not like anyone expects perfection from them just yet.”

The girls share a look that Louis can’t decipher, and Jade sighs. “We just wanted to warn you that’s all, in case anyone says anything,” she says, her frown turning into a smirk. “Maybe you should’ve kept all those parts in about Harry’s sunshine smile.”

When Louis turns to glare at Jesy, both of the girls burst into laughter. “I tell her everything, Louis, you couldn’t honestly think I wouldn’t tell her about that disaster.”

Their laughter slowly drifts off and Louis picks at the top on his tea. He doesn’t really know what to say, he still isn’t sure of what he thinks about this. It’s not like he wasn’t expecting any sort of backlash at all, he always expects that, but he wasn’t expecting it to be so bad that his friends would actually come to warn him about it.

“Louis, are you okay with this?” Jade’s soft voice breaks through his thinking and he looks up to find her frowning at him. “Harry is never not going to have this, you know that right? This is never going to end.”

Louis raises his eyebrows and spins his chair so he can focus on his email and avoid their eyes. “Well, that’s a bit much for someone who’s just friends with him,” he says, and it sounds like a lie even to his ears.

Jade scoffs. “Friends? Yeah, like I believe that,” she crosses her arms over her chest and Louis can see her staring at him from the corner of his eye. “He’s huge, Louis, people want to know everything he does, where he does it, and who he’s doing it with. Honestly, sometimes it’s like you live under a rock.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Louis demands, turning back and glaring at her.

“You honestly don’t know what happened?” Jade asks, seeming confused. “You don’t know anything about the past few years, about his whole group of friends and his boyfriends and-”

Louis shakes his head to stop her. There’s some small part of his mind that’s saying he should listen to her, but it’s overridden by his stubbornness. He’s an adult, he can make his own decisions and judgment about the people in his life.

The petty anger is probably what prompts him to snap, “That isn’t important right now, Jade. What’s important is that we’re friends and he’s fun to be around, okay? Why don’t you try to manipulate a story out of somebody else.”

Jade’s eyes go wide and Louis’ heart sinks when he sees the tears forming there. She opens her mouth to say something, but nothing comes out. Instead, she shakes her head and storms off.

“Jade! Wait, babe I’m sorry!” Louis tries, but she’s already out the door of their office and down the hall.

“You know that wasn’t what she was doing,” Jesy growls, and Louis’s not sure he’s ever seen her this mad. “You’re her friend Louis, she’s just trying to keep you from getting hurt.”

Louis groans and roughly tugs a hand through his hair. “Fuck,” he sighs. “Tell her I’m sorry, yeah?”

Jesy nods and gives Louis one last disappointed look before taking off after Jade. Louis takes a sip of his now ice cold tea and tries to get some work done.
“It was honest,” Harry says, flipping through the magazine. He lands on a page with a full spread of beauty products and smiles when he sees a picture of Louis in the corner of it. A blurb next to it says, *Leigh Loves: Our writer Louis’ hair!* It goes on to list what ever product is in it, but Harry really isn’t paying attention to that.

“Harry, are you listening?”

Both Niall and Liam are staring at him from their respective sides on his computer. Technically, he should probably be in London with them instead of just skyping them, but it’s his break and if he wants to spend it with Louis he can. Or at least that’s what the boys told him when he revealed how guilty he felt for leaving them there alone to be hounded by paps.

“He’s probably staring at that picture of Louis again,” Liam mutters.

Harry snaps the magazine shut and frowns at them. “You have to admit at least objectively that he’s beautiful.”

Liam grins from his side of the screen and scratches at the beard he’s growing again. He says Sophia likes it but Harry thinks it makes him look a bit like a lumberjack. “I dunno mate-”

“Oh shutup, Liam,” Sophia yells, before appearing on the screen over his shoulder. “He’s gorgeous Harry, good on ya love.”

Harry bursts into a grin and Niall dissolves into cackling laughter. While Liam and Sophia quietly argue for a moment and kiss and make up, Harry reaches for his phone.

*How do you feel about lunch today?* He texts to Louis

“I really like it, ya know,” Niall blurts out. “That he was honest. Maybe he’s actually worthy of our Hazza.”

“I have begged you to stop calling me that for years,” Harry grumbles, going red.

Liam laughs, pulling away from Sophia long enough to smirk at him. “What should we call you then, H?”

Harry pouts and is about to tell them off, but his phone starts to ring. He looks down at it in surprise, expecting it to be Louis’ text. Instead, he sees his publicists name across it and picks up.

“Harry, darling how are you?”

“I’m alright,” Harry says slowly. “What’s wrong?”

His publicist laughs softly. “Nothings wrong, Harry, nothing at all. I just wanted to let you know we’ve set up a photographer for today. Maybe head out, do some shopping, go to the gym or something, it doesn’t have to be much, just enough so people know where you are.”

Harry furrows because he knows what she really means, even if she tries to hide it under layers of sweet laughs and smiles. “I was going to take my uh-my friend out to lunch today,” he blurs out.
She makes a happy noise at that and Harry can hear someone whispering in the background. “That’ll be brilliant, Harry. I’m assuming this is the same man we’ve talked about.”

“Well, yeah but I’m not going to let you use him for promotion if that’s what you’re asking,” Harry says firmly. “He’s a normal guy, he isn’t going to play along with this.”

“Listen darling, I’m not asking him to play along,” his publicist says sweetly. “You two are obviously dating, right? So he had to have known this was coming.”

Harry frowns and looks down at his lap. “What if like, before I go to his I let the pap follow me around for a bit? I really don’t want people to know where to find him if they want to.”

She sighs like this is all terribly troubling for her but agrees. Harry promptly hangs up before she can try to talk him into anything else.

The boys are watching him from their respective sides of the call, each with the same sad frown. “Want me to talk to her?” Liam offers quietly. He’s especially good at these things now that he has Sophia, who would rather not be followed by paps if she can avoid it.

Harry shakes his head and picks at his nails nervously. “I guess it’s just what I get, huh?” he laughs, though no part of this is funny. “It’s my own fault that people say shit about me every time I disappear for a few days.”

Neither of the boys say anything because it’s true. Harry watches them stare at him, obviously trying to think of something comforting to say.

“I have to go,” Harry sighs. “I’ll probably ditch the sunglasses, yeah? That way they can see my eyes.”

Niall makes a hurt noise and murmurs, “Harry.”

He grins at them both and shrugs. “It is what it is. I’ll talk to you later lads.”

With that, he ends the call and curls up on the hotel bed for a good cry.

Around noon, Harry texts tell Louis he’s downstairs and Louis practically drops everything to get down there. He ignores the way Leigh-Anne and Jade are both watching him and pulls his bag closer to his body. When the lift dings for the lobby, Louis bursts out.

And sure enough there he is, Harry Styles in all his glory-talking excitedly to a pregnant woman and grinning brightly. When Louis gets close enough he can hear Harry asking excitedly about the baby.

“It’s my third—oh hi Louis!”

Louis smiles. “Hey, Sarah. I see you’ve met Harry.”

Sarah, their editor in chief who Louis is actually slightly terrified of, beams and nods. “And he’s so sweet, what a pleasant surprise. He was just saying how much he loved the article you wrote.”
Louis eyes Harry who’s grinning with his hands held together behind his back. “Is that so?” He mutters.

“Oh yes,” Sarah laughs, and Louis isn’t sure he’s ever actually seen her happy before. “I can see why you’re so enamored. Well, you two have a great lunch yeah? I’ll see you at the meeting tomorrow, Louis.”

Sarah gives them both a winning smile and walks off with a flurry of heel clicks and assistants trailing behind her, leaving Louis to watch with his mouth hanging open.

“What does she mean enamored,” Louis scoffs, turning to find Harry watching him. “And what are you smiling about, Harold?”

Harry shrugs and reaches over to take Louis’ hand and tug him in for a hug. “You’re just cute, that’s all,” he says, like that’s any sort of answer to give a person. “I did like the article, really.”

Louis wraps his arms around Harry’s middle. “You don’t hate me?”

“Of course I don’t hate you, why would I hate you?” Harry laughs.

“Didn’t you read it?”

“I thought it was good,” he replies simply. “I like that you were honest, most people never are. Niall and Liam both liked it too so you have nothing to worry about.”

Louis pulls away and scoffs. “Nothing to worry about? I have millions of your fans out for my blood right now.”

Harry rolls his eyes and reaches for Louis’ hands. “Well, they’re wrong. I liked it and I like you, they can get used to it.”

“What a rebel,” Louis teases, willingly taking Harry’s hand and tugging. “Come along darling, I’m starved.”

They walk out of the building together and Harry starts looking around nervously. Louis doesn’t ask questions and lets himself be led down the street. Soon they’re swallowed up by the crowd of people rushing out to lunch and Harry seems to calm down. He relaxes his hand and brings one arm up around Louis’ shoulders.

“Something wrong?” Louis asks, bringing his other hand up to tangle their fingers together again. He hasn’t held anyone’s hand this much since school, hasn’t really felt the urge to. He’ll add it to the list of reasons why Harry Styles makes him feel so strange.

Harry shakes his head. “No, just I made a deal with my management today. Needed to make sure they kept their half of the bargain.”

“Which was what?”

With a deep sigh, Harry quietly explains that he spent the better part of the afternoon being followed by a pap so he could have lunch in peace. Louis can’t think of a response so he just nods and squeezes Harry’s hand again. Thinking about shit like that sort of makes Louis sick to his stomach, so he sticks close to Harry and tries to make him feel better without saying anything.

They enter a coffee shop and before they find a table, Louis leans over to whisper, “I like you a latte,” in Harry’s ear.
Harry barks out an absolutely ridiculous laugh that only draws more people over. While he politely signs and takes pictures, Louis asks him for his order and goes to buy lunch. By the time he comes back everyone seems to have walked away and are now not so discreetly watching from their own tables.

“I’ve got your disgusting coffee,” Louis announces, placing the cups and sandwiches down on the table top.

“Thanks, love,” Harry laughs. “What’re you up to this weekend?”

Louis smiles. “Well, Friday night Noah and I have planned a thrilling marathon of all his favorite dinosaur cartoons followed by sleeping in and breakfast Saturday morning. I actually have to work Saturday night, though.”

“That’s not fair,” Harry says, frowning.

Giggling, Louis shakes his head. “No, it’s hardly even work. I’ve got an interview with Ed Sheeran at some press thing for his new album and then after I get to stay to see the concert.”

Harry beams. “Love Ed. The new albums amazing, you’ll love it.”

Louis sips at his tea and rolls his eyes. “Of course you’ve heard it, spoiled brat,” he teases. “You could come if you wanted. I have an extra ticket for the show but no one really wants to spend a Saturday night with me.”

“I highly doubt that,” Harry laughs. “I bet if you stood up now and said you needed a date there’d be a line out the door.”

Louis raises his eyebrows and smirks. He slowly starts to slide out of his chair but then Harry’s grabbing at his hand and pouting. “No, I’ll go,” he whines. “Lou, sit down.”

“You’re such a baby,” Louis laughs, sitting back down in his chair and kissing Harry’s knuckles.

“I’ll pick you up if you like, yeah? Do you think they’d mind if I sat in on the interview?”

Louis rolls his eyes. “You could take over the interview and the world would still love you, charming as you are.”

Harry bites at his smile and takes his hand back so he can eat. Louis gets about two bites of his sandwich before his phone rings. He smiles when he sees it’s his mum’s number and answers with a quiet, “Hey, pumpkin.”

Noah giggles. “Hi Daddy! Are you eatin?”

“I am eating, what are you doing?” Louis asks, rolling his eyes at the way Harry’s grinning at him.

Noah sighs very loudly. “My grandma and me are colorin’, and I got up from my nap and we had yucky vegetables.”

Louis laughs. “Baby, you have to eat your vegetables. Don’t you wanna grow up and be a big dinosaur someday?”

“Daddy, I’m a carnivore!” Noah says, carefully sounding out the last word.

Louis snorts into his tea and shakes his head. “Love, you aren’t a carnivore. You have to eat your vegetables, you need them. You did a good job with that word though.”
“I know, I been practicing.” Noah says very seriously.

Across the table Harry starts laughing. Louis kicks him under the table but has to stop his own laughter from bubbling up.

“What’re you doin’ Daddy?”

Louis glances up at Harry and smiles. “I’m having lunch with my friend, Harry.”

“I don’t know Harry,” Noah says absentmindedly.

“Well, maybe you’ll meet him soon,” Louis says. “Was there anything you wanted me to pick up at the store tonight, love?”

Noah hums and then yells, “Dinosaur oatmeal! So much better than Daddy’s boring oatmeal.”

Louis gasps. “Are you calling me boring?”

“Yes,” Noah answers in his matter of fact tone. “But you’re just Daddy, not supposed to be very exciting.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Well if I’m so boring why don’t you just stay with Grandma forever?”

Noah giggles. “No way, Daddy. Grandma doesn’t let me eat ice cream before nap time like you do.”

“That’s our secret, love,” Louis whispers back. “Gotta keep you on my side somehow.”

Noah starts laughing. “Love you, my Daddy. Miss you tons.”

“I miss you too, baby. I’ll be home before you know it. I have to go now, okay? I love you.”

“Bye Daddy, love you too!” Noah shouts, and then there’s a commotion of buttons being hit until he hits the right one and hangs up.

Louis puts the phone down and winces. “He doesn’t understand the concept of inside voices, no matter how hard I try.”

Harry is grinning manically but quickly tries to hide it by sipping at his coffee. Louis rolls his eyes and eats his food. Underneath the table he kicks out a foot and gently drags it up Harry’s leg. The man’s eyes go wide and he coughs loudly, while Louis just smiles and does it again.

“You’re such a shit,” Harry murmurs, reaching under the table to catch his ankle. He squeezes once before letting him go with a barely hidden smile.

Louis sticks his tongue out and finishes his meal quietly. He’s just about to point out that his lunch hour is almost up when there’s a flash of light from the street and Harry’s swearing. Louis whips his head around and bursts into laughter.

“Harold, what is that,” he chuckles, waving at the three men across the street and their huge lenses.

Harry groans and reaches for Louis’ hand. “M’so sorry love.”

“It’s alright, I expected it eventually yeah? Do you want me out there, or no?”

Harry frowns and shakes his head. “No, you shouldn’t have to,” he whispers. “This wasn’t supposed to happen, fuck. Come on we can go out the back.”
Louis nods and grabs his tea to take with him. Harry places a hand on Louis’ lower back and kindly asks the starstruck barista if they have a back entrance. She nods and shows them out into an alley way. Louis pulls Harry out and grins.

“You should go back.”

Harry frowns. “What, why?”

“Because, idiot,” Louis laughs, running his hands up Harry’s shirt. “If they see you disappear without coming out the front door, they’ll put two and two together and find us. I say I go to work and you go to work as well, and I’ll see you Saturday night.”

Harry pouts and looks down to where Louis’ fingers and playing across his exposed chest. “But we hardly saw each other.”

Louis tilts his head up for a kiss and smiles. “My mum’s taking Noah Saturday night,” he whispers against Harry’s lips. “But until then, I’ll give you something to remember me by.”

“Lou, wha-oh god,” Harry groans and tips his head back against the brick of the wall. Louis grins deviously from his place against Harry’s neck.

The man whines high in his throat when Louis sinks his teeth into his skin, sucking the pain away before moving lower and lower until there’s a trail of dark bruises and Louis is giggling against his chest.

“Indecent,” he murmurs. “Absolutely indecent Harold, walking around this way, your shirt barely buttoned.”

Harry giggles. “Do it just so you’ll kiss me.”

“Yeah?” Louis whispers, brushing his thumb over Harry’s nipple. “Doubt that’s the only reason.”

Without giving Harry any time to defend himself, Louis cranes his neck over and latches on. Harry whines, but Louis just sucks harder and bites down gently. Once satisfied, he pulls away and smiles before moving onto the next. Harry’s a mess by the time Louis’ done, cheeks flushed red and long hair tangled in the back from his hands running through it.

“Now you can go,” Louis decides, pecking Harry on the lips once more and fixing a piece of hair that’s brushing at his forehead. “I have to go back to work actually, I’m very busy Harold.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “Yeah, busy,” he breathes out, chest heaving.

Louis winks and starts walking away. “See you on Saturday, love,” he calls over his shoulder.

Behind him, Harry’s laughter echoes in the alleyway and Louis beams the whole way back to the office.

Harry ends up back in his hotel at the end of the day, exhausted and a little angry. The blissful feeling he got from being around Louis only lasted until he walked out the door of the cafe and was
immediately shouted at and practically mobbed by people who appeared from seemingly nowhere. There wasn’t much he could do about the people, but the people were drawn in by the photographers and Harry was promised if he held up his side of the deal his management would hold up theirs. He was supposed to have a quiet lunch, he was supposed to be able to enjoy lunch with Louis. They got it of course, but not for long enough. It wasn’t good enough.

When he complained to his management about it, all they gave him were excuses. “They weren’t our photographers, Harry,” his publicist explained gently. “We didn’t call them in, it must’ve been someone who saw you. We’ve talked about this Harry, you have to trust us and it’s my opinion that you should have a body guard with you at all times to prevent things like this from happening.”

Harry frowns at the memory and rolls over onto his side on the too soft hotel bed. It’s dark out now and the only light comes from the movie he’s left playing on the television. There’s a sick sort of lonely feeling in his chest that makes him nervous. Even though he’s been taught new ways to cope with the stress and the loneliness there’s always the darker part of his mind that whispers to him.

**Hey are you still up?**

**Louis:** of course I am Harold I haven't slept in four years

Harry grins and bites at his thumb. Something about Louis makes him feel better and he can’t pinpoint what it is. Ever since they met in that green room weeks ago he’s noticed there’s just something in the way that Louis talks and the way that he smiles that draws him in and makes him feel safe. It’s stupid and Harry half expects to find out something about Louis that would make him feel otherwise, but so far there’s nothing.

**Can’t wait to see you saturday :)**

**Louis:** cant wait either popstar. you looked lovely today did I say?

**You didn’t actually**

**Louis:** well you did you’re always lovely Harold

They continue to text back and forth about nothing in particular until Harry’s eyes hurt and they drift shut on their own accord. It isn’t until he wakes up in the middle of the night that he sees one last message from Louis.

**Sleep well darling xx**

Harry grins and falls back to sleep almost instantly.

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It’s Friday night when Louis’ picking Noah up from his mum’s that she finally says something. At least she waits until Louis gets Noah into his car seat and shuts the door before asking, “What’s this with you and a boy from a band?”

Louis raises his eyebrows and walks to the other side of the car where she’s waiting and watching him. “Mum, Harry’s just a friend. He’s from that boyband the girls used to like, remember?”
Jay frowns. “No,” she says plainly. “But a friend of mine sent me a picture she found of the two of you yesterday. I was just surprised you didn’t say anything.”

“We had lunch Mum, that’s all,” Louis sighs out, feeling a bit like a teenager again. “He’s nice, Zayn’s met him so you can ask him too.”

His mother’s frown only deepens which was the opposite of what he wanted. “So, Zayn’s met him?”

Louis groans and shakes his head. “Briefly. They met briefly, Mum, stop acting like I’m sneaking around behind your back or something. I’m an adult, I don’t have to run every person I hang out with by you.”

Jay sighs in that motherly disapproval way she has. “I just don’t want Noah getting attached to someone like that Louis, that’s all.”

Louis feels almost like he’s been stabbed. In an instant he goes from caring about what his mum thinks to being angry and hostile. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?” He growls.

“No, you know what? Fuck that,” he snaps. “Don’t you think that that’s all I ever fucking worry about? Don’t you think I spend every second I’m on a date thinking to myself, would he be good for Noah, would they like each other, what happens if I fall in love and they don’t get along? Don’t you think that I spend every second of every fucking day promising myself that I won’t bring a man into Noah’s life and let him get to know and love that man like a father, only to rip it all away from him at eighteen.”

Jay looks heartbroken and close to tears, and Louis tries with everything he has not to feel bad. The quiet street seems awkward after his outburst and when Jay speaks it’s broken and thick with tears and hurt. “Lou, I can’t keep apologizing for that,” she whispers “I’m sorry, you know I’m sorry, but it isn’t my fault we didn’t work out. He loves you Louis, you’re his son-”

“But I’m not, am I?” Louis cries. “I want to be alone Mum, I really can’t talk to you right now.”

“Louis, please darling I’m sorry.”

Louis ignores her and gets into the car. Noah is silent when they drive away but soon pipes up, quietly whispering, “My Daddy, are you angry?”

Louis forces a smile into the rear view mirror and shakes his head. “No sweetheart, I’m not mad. How about we get some ice cream before we order pizza?”

Noah grins and nods back, squeezing Hank in his arms and looking too cute for words. Louis gives him a real smile and feels any sort of residual anger melt away.

When they get home from the store with two pints of ice cream, cookie dough for Noah and strawberry for Louis, he has almost six missed calls from his mum and a text from Harry.

*How’s dinosaur night?*

Louis smiles down at it and writes back, *barely started yet. Any suggestions?*

*Land Before Time!!* Harry texts immediately, following it up with smiley faces with heart eyes for some reason. Louis rolls his eyes and puts his phone down so he and Noah can decide what kind of pizza they want.
Before the pizza comes they make banana splits and start the first Land Before Time movie. They only make it about fifteen minutes in when Lottie calls and Louis reluctantly answers.

“You really upset Mum, y’know.” She tells him after they say a forced hello.

Louis rolls his eyes and looks down to where Noah is resting with his head against Louis’ side, eyes wide and focused on the movie. “Yeah, well she really upset me,” he mutters, pushing Noah’s curls out of his eyes.

Lottie sighs loudly and Louis hears some sort of commotion in the background. She’s at work probably, weekends are always bigger than weekdays for his sister. It makes him jealous knowing she’ll probably sleep until noon on Monday morning.

“Lou, we all know how careful you are with Noah,” she says quietly. “Mum shouldn’t have said that, she knows it was wrong. She wants to apologize but she can’t do that if you don’t answer the phone.”

Louis groans and lifts his hand to rub his face. “Lots, she can’t just say shit like that to me,” he mutters. “I’m already paranoid about liking anyone, her telling me stuff like that just makes it worse.”

“I know, we’re just worried,” she whispers. “Me included. Mum might not know much about Harry but I’ve heard things. Everyone’s heard of the sort of shit he gets into.”

Louis scowls. “You don’t know him, you’ve never met him before or talked to him like I have. No one has any idea what he’s really like-”

“And you do?” Lottie challenges. “How long have you known him, Louis?”

Louis is suddenly reminded of Jade the day before the way she tried to gently warn him about Harry’s past. Maybe there is something he needs to know, maybe he should’ve listened to her, but maybe they’re all full of it. He’s spent time with Harry, he would know if there was something seriously wrong with the man, right?

“It isn’t like that,” he tries. “It’s just like-I feel like I’ve known him for years, I have since the moment I saw him. He’s sweet, Lottie, I don’t care what people say.”

His sister goes silent for a moment and Louis can hear someone shouting in the background. “Lou, maybe you should see what people have been saying and judge from that.”

Louis frowns. “What do you mean?”

“I’ll send you some stuff,” she says hurriedly. “Listen, I’ve got to go I have a show starting in fifteen minutes. I love you both, tell Noah hi for me.”

Louis says goodbye and hangs up. Seconds later, Lottie sends him a list of links to a thousand different gossip sites. He clicks on one and just stares at the photo that starts it off.

Harry is quite obviously drunk and he’s hanging off a body guard who’s trying to corral him into a car. In the next picture he’s laughing and flipping the cameras off, and if his eyes are anything to go by he’s probably too high to even know where he is.

The article is dated over two years ago but it says that this has been the normal occurrence for Harry over the past few months, and that has Louis worried. The other articles are more of the same, and they all come with pictures of Harry looking either drunk or pissed off, or high and blissfully unaware of the havoc he’s creating. In a lot of them he’s taking random men home with him or
kissing them and feeling them up outside clubs.

It’s honestly terrifying, the vacant look in his eyes and the way he lets himself be dragged around by these men and by his body guards. And there’s the most heart breaking part yet, pictures of him before he was out and caught kissing a man in a club. Alongside that are pictures the man, his boyfriend at the time apparently, leaked of him sleeping. He looks peaceful and happy and young and Louis could almost cry at the thought of Harry being betrayed that way.

For some reason that seems to hurt more than the other pictures.

*saw some pictures of you before the trial.*

**Harold:** Lou I can explain.

we should probably talk tomorrow.

**Harold:** please. I’m sorry I wasn’t trying to lie to you.

Louis sets his phone face down so he doesn’t have to see it anymore.

Noah giggles at something the dinosaurs are doing and Louis is brought back to reality. The sound of Noah’s tiny laughter makes him smile and practically well up with pride. His son looks up at him with happy bright blue eyes and says, “Hey, guess what?”

Louis grins. “What, my love?”

Noah sits up straight and Louis leans down so his son can whisper in his ear, but instead he kisses Louis on the cheek. “You’re the very best ever and I love you.”

Tears well up in Louis’ eyes but he quickly blinks them away and pulls Noah into his lap for a hug. “I love you too, Noah, so much. You’re my favorite.”

Noah cuddles close to him and Louis gently tugs the knots out of his curls while they finish their movie.

Harry bites his lip nervously the whole way over to Louis’. It’s a bit of a drive so he has time to worry about it and play every horrible outcome over and over in his mind. The bright side is that Louis didn’t just tell him to fuck off and stop talking to him completely which is probably a good sign, or at least that’s what his sister said when he asked for her advice.

The venue Ed’s playing is in Doncaster so Harry shows up at Louis’ house only an hour before the interview he’s doing is supposed to start. It’s a little house on a cute street with other small houses that all look more or less the same and remind Harry of growing up. He parks his car in the drive and gets out, smiling when he sees a tiny bike laying by the door.

Louis opens the door before Harry can even knock and motions for him to come in. He’s talking on the phone to somebody and laughing.

“No love, of course I won’t,” he teases. “Indie artists are really my thing anyway. Listen I’ve got to
He hangs up and gives Harry a tense smile. “Sorry its such a mess.”

Harry shakes his head and looks around. To some people it probably would seem like a mess, but to Harry it looks happy. There are toys and stuffed animals hanging around everywhere, little shoes strewn around by the door, a jacket or two hung up in the entry way, and dinosaur stickers stuck to the back of the television. On the wall there are framed pictures of Louis’ sisters in graduation caps and of Noah when he was a baby and of Zayn and a girl Harry guesses is his fiance. It looks like a home.

“It’s fine, I like it.”

Louis laughs. “Right, you say that now. Just wait until you step barefoot on a lego, then you’ll be bothered. Do you want some tea before we leave?”

Harry nods and follows Louis into the tiny kitchen. There are traces of the little family in here as well, mostly in the way dishes from the morning are stacked up in the sink and crayon drawings decorate the fridge. Louis pushes a bowl out of the way to start the kettle and stands on his tip toes to reach the mugs on the highest shelf.

“Why are they all the way up there?” Harry laughs.

“My darling son has tried waking me up with tea multiple times,” Louis explains, tugging down two mugs. “If I keep the mugs up here I can usually hear him climbing up and stop him before he can hurt himself.”

Harry smiles. “That’s sort of extremely cute.”

Louis shrugs but Harry can see he’s smiling as well. “He’s a sweetheart.”

They stand in silence while Louis makes the tea and Harry tries to think of how to stat this off. Finally, he says, “Are you angry?”

Louis sighs and shakes his head. “No, just apprehensive.”

“It isn’t like that anymore,” Harry promises. “I was going through some shit, it was terrible, but I’m not trying to defend myself here at all. The way I handled it wasn’t healthy and there’s no excusing the way I was treating myself and everyone else.”

The kettle clicks and Louis pours himself and Harry a cup. While he waits for the tea to steep, he turns to look Harry over. “How bad were the drugs? I mean, like how often were you doing them?”

Harry winces. “God, almost constantly? I know that sounds terrible but I was willing to try anything to make the pain go away and make the real world disappear and-and it almost ruined my life,” he admits quietly. “But I’ve been clean for almost a year and a half now, it’ll be two years in January.”

To his delight, Louis cracks a small smile at that. “That’s so great, Harold, it really is.”

Harry smiles too and shrugs. “Yeah, I mean I guess I’m sort of proud of myself. Is that stupid?”

“No, it isn’t stupid,” Louis tells him firmly. “That’s a big accomplishment, popstar, you should be proud. I’m sorry if you thought I was angry, it’s just with Noah I have to be careful. I couldn’t bring you around him if you were doing that sort of thing, I wouldn’t, not for a second.”
Harry nods back and reaches for the mug Louis holds out for him. “No, I completely understand. Actually, I.” He pauses and sighs sadly. “I didn’t meet my niece until she was almost four months old. My sister didn’t want me around her until she was sure I was clean again.”

The look on Louis’ face isn’t the pity that Harry’s grown to hate from people, it’s just pure sadness and understanding. Maybe that’s why Harry doesn’t feel like this is the end for them, or maybe he’s just too hopeful.

“What happened, if you don’t mind me asking? You just don’t seem like the type.” Louis whispers, taking a sip of his tea.

Harry laughs and fusses with his hair before answering quietly. “It was after my boyfriend at the time broke up with me,” he explains. “After we got caught in that club and it turned out he wasn’t anything like I thought he was. I trusted him and he sold me out without a second thought.”

He stops to breath out softly and try not to cry. It always hurts, thinking of what happened. All he remembers are the nights he spent in bed crying to himself and not wanting to face the world that knew his secret. It wasn’t how he wanted to come out, he wanted it planned and he wanted it to come at a better time, he wanted it to be on his terms and his choice. What he got instead was backlash and a lawsuit and his trust betrayed by someone he thought he loved.

“I was heartbroken and on the edge of ruining my career and the ones of my best mates that I’ve known since we were sixteen. My ex sent everyone those pictures of us together and me at home and there was no way we could try to spin it as anything other than what it was, and I just couldn’t deal with it, so I didn’t. It was easier being high than it was being me.”

Louis quietly sets his mug down before taking Harry’s and doing the same. Before Harry can asks what’s going on, Louis steps forward and hugs him tightly. He rests his chin on Harry’s shoulder and sighs. “I’m sorry, Harry. You’re wonderful, you know that? Wonderful and sweet and charming, you deserve better. He’s a fucking asshole, whoever he is.”

Harry laughs through his tears and wraps his arms around Louis’ waist. “Yeah, but I was too. Liam and Niall even cut me off, can you imagine?”

Louis scoffs. “I’m sure their version of cutting you off was texting you once a week to make sure you were okay.”

Harry smiles and presses his face to Louis’ neck so he doesn’t start crying. He wishes that’s what had happened, that it was that simple. He shakes his head and pushes the thoughts away, instead saying, “I wanted to say thank you, for being so kind to me.”

There’s a sharp pinch to his side and Louis is shaking his head. “I’m just being a decent person, and what have I told you about thanking me for that?”

Harry doesn’t really know how long they stood like that, but it’s long enough to where Louis just pours their tea down the drain instead of drinking it. It makes him feel so much better though, knowing that Louis isn’t really angry with him. Maybe this could work. He hopes it’ll work.

Harry waits in the living room while Louis flits around the house locking doors and grabbing his shoes and fixing his hair. He finally returns with a familiar jacket in his hands that makes Harry burst into laughter.

“Here, we can trade,” he says, slipping out of his jean jacket and offering it to Louis. “Try it on, let’s see how it looks.”
Louis rolls his eyes and passes the coat over so he can pull the jacket on. He rolls the sleeves up once so it'll fit better and that does something to Harry's heart. “Brilliant,” he announces, slipping into his vans. “Come along Harold, we have work to do.”

When they get outside Louis stops in front of his car and laughs. “What on earth is this?” he chuckles. “It's a relic!”

“It’s a classic,” Harry defends, opening the door so Louis can slip inside.

Louis shakes his head and runs a hand along the interior. “I'm almost afraid to sit down, it looks like it belongs in a museum or something.”

“Louis, just get in the car.” Harry sighs.

Obviously thinking he's hilarious, Louis carefully sits down in the seat and gently shuts the door. He then reaches for the seatbelt as slowly as he can, all while keeping eye contact with Harry who just groans and walks to his side. When he gets inside he's greeted by Louis' manic chuckling. Instead of responding, he rolls his eyes and pulls out of the driveway all while fighting a smile.

“I usually put my feet up when someone else is driving,” Louis points out. “But I'm sure a scuff on this car could cost me my retirement.”

That actually does make Harry laugh and Louis looks quite proud of himself for it.

"I have a bodyguard for tonight," Harry blurts out after driving in silence for a little while. He looks over to see if Louis reacts but he doesn't. "It's just because it'll be so crowded at the show."

Louis nods. "Makes sense. Don't worry so much, Harold, I'm sure he'll be a great addition to the party. Is it one of the same one as last time?"

Harry rolls his eyes but smiles. "Alberto, yeah. He really liked you y'know, thought you were hilarious."

Louis grins. "I am hilarious. Is he meeting us at the interview?"

Harry shakes his head. "No, not until the show. You'll have to protect me from all the mean journalists by yourself."

Louis sighs, all put out and burdened. "I guess if I must." He then glances over to Harry and smiles softly.

The interviews take place in a small room set off the side of a conference room in a hotel. The room is covered mostly in black curtains with Ed Sheeran's new album cover hanging behind the chair he'll be sat in. Harry smiles because it's all so familiar and let's Louis drag him around while they get their passes.

"He's my plus one," Louis says when the woman handing out the passes scowls at Harry. "He's an intern, aren't you Harold?"


The woman simply sighs at their antics and hands the two passes over. Harry slips his on over his neck and Louis does the same before leading him to their spots in the room. Louis takes a seat at the little directors chair they show him to and Harry sort of hangs back while people buzz around the room and send him awed glances. Louis pulls out his phone and texts somebody.
"My sister doesn't believe you're real," he announces out of nowhere.

"Why not?" Harry asks, fixing a stray piece of Louis' hair.

Louis shakes his head and smiles. "She says I'm making it all up. She was obsessed with you as a kid, y'know?"

Harry grins. "Take a picture and send it to her."

“She actually asked for one earlier, that’s who was on the phone when you showed up,” Louis smiles down at his phone and shrugs. “You don’t have to, though. I know you probably get sick of the pictures after awhile."

Harry shakes his head and reaches for Louis’ phone himself, opening the camera app and resting his chin on Louis’ shoulder. “I haven’t taken a single picture for you yet. Now smile, love.”

Instead of smiling, Louis crosses his eyes and pulls a face. Harry on the other hand smiles quite nicely and hands it back to him.

“You’re a shit, did you know that?”

Louis just nods in response and Harry watches him send the picture to someone named Fizzy in his phone. “So I’ve been told. Hey, give me a kiss would you? I haven’t gotten one all day.”

“‘You’re so badly treated,’” Harry teases before leaning over to press a soft kiss to Louis’ lips.

Louis smiles up at him, eyes crinkling up at the sides and seeming even more blue than they were just moments ago. He returns to getting ready for the interview while Harry watches on, sending a few texts off and turning the notifications off for his phone so he can set up the voice recorder.

“Don’t people normally film these things?” Harry asks when Louis starts pulling things from his bag.


Harry nods and drifts off to the side while Louis talks to the aides and the people running the whole thing. He’s endlessly charming and funny and Harry is a little jealous when one of the camera men for another publication won’t stop trying to chat him up. Louis of course just flirts back and bats his eyelashes and laughs at all the man’s terrible jokes. Even Harry tells better jokes, which is saying something he thinks.

“Okay kids,” someone shouts. “Are we ready?”

Louis whips his head up and laughs when he sees Ed Sheeran coming in with a flurry of assistants and bodyguards. Harry smiles as well, mostly because he hasn’t seen Ed in awhile, but also because the camera man finally sneaks off and leaves Louis alone.

Ed bursts into laughter when he sees Harry. “Fuck, mate what are you doing here?”

“He’s my intern,” Louis says quickly. “Aren’t you Harold?”

Harry nods and steps over to let Ed hug him. “Yeah, I’m an intern.”

Ed laughs again and shakes Louis’ hand. “I remember you,” he says suddenly. “You compared me to a ginger kitten, with pictures.”
“Louis Tomlinson, Mod Magazine, and it was a poll actually,” Louis says quickly. “A poll which determined you do in fact resemble a ginger kitten. The people have spoken, Ed Sheeran.”

“How flattering.” Ed responds, looking up and smirking at Harry.

Louis smiles back and Harry falls just a little bit further for him. “That’s all I aim to be.”

“What if he were to walk off a cliff, would you still have to follow him then?” Louis asks Alberto as they slowly make their way into the venue. The seats Louis has are up in a balcony where no one will really be able to bother them, but the girls waiting outside now seem already frenzied by Harry’s appearance.

Alberto sighs and Harry bites down on a smile. “I suppose I would, Louis.”

“What if-”

“Louis, babe,” Harry interrupts, bursting into giggles.

Louis shrugs and looks around the crowd of people who are just persisting to get closer and closer. “Just trying to make conversation, Harold, don’t be rude.”

Harry rolls his eyes but he also stretches a hand out to rest on Louis’ lower back, so he figures the man can’t be too annoyed. They break through the crowd with Alberto leading the way and head up to their seats, Louis moving Harry’s hand so they’re together. He gives Harry a moment to pull away before squeezing and smiling over at him.

“You’re brilliant, you know?” Harry whispers.

Louis laughs and ignores the pleasant heat Harry’s words leave his stomach. He drags Harry up the stairs to their seats, past the protesting body guard. Harry willingly follows and the two of them push their way to the edge of the balcony while Alberto stays somewhere behind to watch.

“Oh, Harold. I’m busy.” Louis whispers back, tilting his head up so his mouth is pressed to Harry’s ear.

“Hey,” Harry whispers while the opening act sings her way through a perfectly great song he’s ignoring. Louis is a bit offended on her behalf.

“What is it Harold, I’m busy.” Louis whispers back, tilting his head up so his mouth is pressed to Harry’s ear.

Harry grins. “I really like you.”

For some reason it feels more important than anything else Harry’s said to him so far. It’s so simple and so juvenile but it almost prompts Louis to say something just as stupid back. Instead, he smiles and kisses Harry’s cheek and says nothing. Harry doesn’t seem too concerned though and they sing and dance their way through the concert just like everybody else.

Later that night they’re crashing into Louis’ bedroom, drunk on cheap beer and the post-concert adrenaline rush. Harry pins Louis against the wall and laughs open mouthed against his throat and for some reason Louis feels compelled to giggle out, “I really like you too, Harold.”
And Harry smiles so brightly the whole room seems to light up. “Good,” he teases. “Because I really, really like you.”

And then he sinks to his knees and Louis finally stops laughing.
easy now with my heart

Chapter Notes

So an absolute ton has happened since I posted the last chapter. It took me a really long time to figure out what I wanted to do but I’ve decided to ignore it all and keep going. I’m way too deep with this story and I love it too much to let it go.

I hope you enjoy the chapter and thank you for all of your comments, I love reading them!! And thank you all for being so kind about how long it takes me to update, I’m awful. Stop by my tumblr if you’d like :)

Harry blinks his eyes open when he feels a pair of lips pressing lightly on the back of his neck. For a moment he thinks it’s Niall, stranger things have happened, but then he sees the room. It’s much too small and too messy to be a hotel room, and then he notices his clothes thrown on the floor and a stuffed dinosaur hiding behind the alarm clock on the bedside table.

“Louis?”

There’s a loud sigh behind him and Louis throws his arm over Harry’s waist, tugging him closer. Harry carefully turns his head and smiles when he sees Louis still asleep, his eyelashes casting shadows on his cheeks. He’s shirtless so Harry gets to see all of his tattoos, even the little dinosaur on his forearm he rarely gets to see.

Trying to be stealthy, Harry picks up Louis’ arms and rolls out from under it so he can stumble to the bathroom. When he returns he finds Louis still fast asleep, but now with the pillow Harry was using crushed to his chest.

After pulling on a pair of Louis’ joggers, Harry tip toes out of the room towards the kitchen.

He really isn’t surprised when he sees that Louis doesn’t have much food in his fridge, and what he does have is nothing Harry would normally eat. But there are eggs and he finds bacon shoved into a drawer and he figures that should be good enough.

Only minutes later Louis appears in the doorway of the kitchen, frowning like he hates that he’s awake. “Thought you’d left,” he mutters, rubbing at his eyes sleepily. He’s wearing nothing but boxers and the shirt Harry was wearing the night before. It hangs to his mid thigh and he’s only buttoned it haphazardly a few times and Harry’s heart should not be beating this fast over something so simple.

He doesn’t realize he’s staring until Louis clears his throat.

“I wouldn’t,” Harry says, turning his attention back to the pans on the stove so that maybe Louis won’t notice he’s blushing. “I’m making breakfast.”

Louis smiles and pads over to kiss Harry’s cheek. “Good morning, love.”

“Morning, Lou.”

“You’re quite beautiful in the mornings,” Louis comments, rubbing a hand over Harry’s stomach and
gently pinching a love bite on his chest. “Where’d you get that from?”

Harry’s face goes even redder, he’s sure of it. “Just friend.”

Louis hums, sounding quite pleased with himself as he brushes over the mark again. When he lifts his chin Harry dives in for a kiss without a second thought. It should probably be gross given that they’ve both just woken up, but it’s incredibly sweet. Louis pulls away first, gently biting down on his lower lip and smiling.

“I’ll make the tea, try not to burn those eggs Harold.”

After Harry manages to salvage the eggs and Louis makes them both tea, the two of them set up on the couch.

“I never get to eat in here,” Louis says, carefully moving a pile of coloring books so Harry can sit down. “Noah likes to eat at the table, he’d have a fit if he saw.”

"Who's the parent here again?" Harry teases.

Louis rolls his eyes and switches the tv on. "Oh, shut up Harry. I've been meaning to show you something actually."

Harry waits while Louis runs off to his room and returns with his phone in hand. He plops down next to Harry and scrolls furiously before passing it over with a smile.

"Oh my god," Harry laughs when he sees the pictures. "Lou, that's so cute."

It's Noah in a One Direction shirt, hands held up to make tiny thumbs up at his sides. It's far too big on him but he looks so happy and giggly that Harry almost could cry.

"God he's got your eyes hasn't he?" He says softly.

Louis sort of stiffens up at that. "I'm not his biological father," he says, and it sounds strained

Harry frowns and looks down at the boy in the picture again. "But I thought you said you had a surrogate?"

Louis nods and picks at his plate to avoid Harry's gaze. "I did but um, we decided my ex should be his biological dad. I was going to be for the next one-obviously that didn't work out."

Louis quietly takes the phone back and eats his food. Harry feels terrible for bringing it up, especially after the great night and morning they've had together. There’s a part of him that feels like he’s crossed some sort of line, but then again Louis probably wouldn’t have said anything if he didn’t trust Harry with the information.

And then he notices the way Louis is nervously bouncing his foot on the ground and decides he has to say something.

"Well he's lovely, I can already tell," Harry says carefully, reaching over to brush his thumb across Louis’ hand. "And he's very lucky to have you as a father."

Louis smiles at the compliment but still doesn’t look up. "Yeah I'm probably more lucky to have him. He's the cutest, yeah?"

"Adorable." Harry agrees.
Louis knocks their feet together and they go back to eating in comfortable silence.

Harry leaves that afternoon for the first leg of the band’s tour in North America. They say goodbye with an innocent kiss that turns into Louis picking Noah up much later than he intended. His mum frowns at him the entire time he’s over, but says nothing. It’s probably because Louis has only just forgiven her and she doesn’t want to get back to meddling too soon, but Louis will take it.

Everything seems to go back to normal for Louis, back to how it was before Harry Styles ever showed up. He’s back on his cycle of work, sleep, see Noah, and work again, except it’s now often interrupted by Harry.

As much as he hates to admit it Louis assumed whatever it was that was happening between them would stop when Harry left, or at least be put on hold. He was proven wrong almost immediately when Harry sent him a video of the fans waiting for them at the airport, and it only escalates from there.

The boy won't stop calling and texting and their conversations tend to last all day long. Harry’s really stepped up his terrible pun game in an attempt to impress Louis. He’s also taken to face timing whenever he catches Louis on a lull in the day.

Not that Louis is complaining of course. He’ll take any excuse to stare at Harry, however blurry he may be.

"Louis!" Harry shouts over the sound a thousand screaming girls during one call. "Louis, wave!"

Louis cringes at the noise when Harry turns his phone around. He's on a balcony somewhere and Louis can see through the blurry glitching screen a hundred fans down below, all screaming and holding signs. He smiles softly and raises a hand to wave even though they'd never be able to see him. Harry whips his phone around and laughs.

"Isn't it awesome?" He shouts.

Louis nods, watching the way his eyes sparkle even through the shitty connection. "Amazing, babe."

Harry blows him a kiss and then the call gets dropped. He texts him seconds later with, Sorry! Shitty connection :( miss your face though !!!!

Louis rolls his eyes and tries to focus back to work instead of Harry’s stupid smile that's still playing itself over and over in his mind. It’s starting to become a problem, but he’s finding he really doesn’t mind all that much.

Jade approaches his desk about a month into Harry’s tour with a nervous look on her face and a cup in her hand. "Here," she says, thrusting the cup towards him.

Louis frowns. "What's this?"
"It's your tea, I made it perfect," she explains. "Drink it."

"Jade you're scaring me a bit," he mutters, but he does take a sip and he’s pleasantly surprised. "Shit that is perfect. What have I done to deserve this?"

Jade bites at her lip. "I have to tell you something and that's my apology in advance."

"Fuck, what've you done?" Louis groans. "I swear if you tried shoving paper bags into the printer again-"

"That was one time Lewis, and you said it'd be a good idea!" She defends.

"I said it looked nice, I didn't say that you should try everything you see on pinterest!"

Jade groans and shakes her head. "I didn't do anything this time I just...I wanted to run a story by you."

Louis frowns and takes another sip of his tea. It's so good that it makes him a bit worried. "Babe, why don't you run it by Jess as she is, you know, the editor."

Jade avoids his eyes and shrugs. "No, I want you to read it first."

Louis sighs but takes the laptop she's holding under her arm and let's her show him to her rough draft. He gives her a look but Jade just shakes her head and taps at the screen.

Louis skims over the article, picking up the words Harry Styles and then boyfriend, and then his heart sort of stops beating in his chest. Harry Styles has a boyfriend is what it's saying, and it's not Louis.

"There's um, pictures as well." Jade says softly. She moves in front of Louis and clicks over to an email where there are hundreds of pictures attached of Harry walking the streets of Los Angeles with another man. They're holding hands and drinking smoothies and at one point the man leans over to whisper something into Harry's ear that sends him into a fit of laughter.

A horrible sick feeling settles low in Louis’ stomach, but he quickly pushes it out of his mind.

"Who's the guy?"

"He's mostly unknown right now but he has a band that's coming out with a debut album next month,” Jade says softly, and he hates that she sounds sorry for him. "It looks like publicity Louis, honestly."

"I don't really care," Louis says quickly. "You can publish it babe, you don't have to ask me."

Jade frowns. "But Lou, I thought you might...I dunno. I don't have to print it, we can run something else."

Louis shakes his head and shuts the laptop closed when he sees Harry smiling stupidly over at the other guy again. "It's fine, I told you we were just friends." He says, even though he's mostly trying to convince himself of that fact. His chest hurts.

"Lou," Jade sighs.

Louis smiles and he knows it must look horribly fake. "It's fine, honestly. I'm gonna run out for a smoke, cover for me yeah?"
Jade nods and watches as Louis flees the room. He takes his tea with him and quietly sneaks out of the office, shutting the door softly behind him and heading downstairs.

There are people milling around outside the building but no one really seems to notice him leaning against the brick, smoking and frowning at nothing. He finishes the first one far too quickly to calm himself down and instinctively pulls out another one.

"You really shouldn't do that y'know?" Someone says to him. Louis glances over and finds a well dressed man frowning at him from beside the door.

"What's it to you?" He challenges.

The man shrugs and steps closer. "Just thought I'd mention. You're far too pretty to be killing yourself that way."

Louis laughs and tips his head up, blowing smoke into the sky. "And you're full of shit, love."

To his delight, the man smirks. "Suppose I should ask your name, since you’ll be dead soon enough."

Louis snorts and switching his cigarette from one hand to the other. “I’m Louis.”

The man shakes Louis’ now outstretched hand and smiles beautifully. “Sam. Are you on your lunch? Assuming you actually work in the building and you’re not just loitering outside looking broody.”

“I do work here, but no I’m not on lunch,” Louis laughs. “Try again.”

Sam’s eyes sparkle in the sunlight. “Dinner then.”

“I hardly know you Sam, you could be a serial killer,” Louis scoffs. “What makes you think I’d let you take me to dinner?”

The man smirks again and Louis can’t help but find it terribly attractive. “Well you’ve been staring at me this whole time like you plan on eating me.”

Louis bursts out laughing but doesn’t deny it, even though it really isn’t true. “Here, I’ll give you my number and then I’ll decide on whether or not you’re going to kill me.”

Sam happily hands over his phone and lets Louis put his name and number in. Louis is hit with sudden guilt, thinking about Harry. Then he remembers the pictures of Harry and the stupid boy from some other band laughing together and he beams up at Sam.

“Text me, love. I’ve got to get back to work.”

Sam nods and gestures to the bad at his side. “Me too, actually. I’ll see you soon, yeah?”

“Maybe,” Louis winks to him and leaves Sam laughing on the sidewalk.

He spends the rest of the day ignoring how guilty he feels and instead thinks of Harry holding someone else’s hand.
Harry bites at his thumb and quietly scrolls through his phone. Liam’s attempting to convince their tour manager to let them go out to get burgers while Niall hops around beside him and provides backup argument. He smiles when he hears Niall harping on about how well it went the last time they went out for food. He’s thinking of joining in on the argument when he sees a post from Louis on Instagram that makes him stop.

It’s a picture of him making a face in a lit up mirror while three girls Harry recognizes from his office and another he’s seen pictures of in Louis’ flat stand around him, smiling. He’s absolutely adorable, even if he is making a strange face, but it’s the caption that makes Harry stop.

*date night!! thanks for the help girls xx*

Harry frowns. What does he mean, date night? He thinks to himself.

Without thinking too much about it, Harry opens up a new message.

*hey : ) how’s your day so far?*

**Louis:** alright babe, you?

*alright. Big plans for tonight?*

**Louis:** got a date Harold wish me luck !! Have a great show tonight babe

Harry’s frown only deepens when Louis says nothing else and doesn’t reply to his message which is just a series of question marks. He looks up and finds Liam watching him from the other side of the room.

“What’s wrong, you look upset?”

Harry bites his bottom lip hard before he speaks. “Louis’s just texted me.”

Niall lets out a loud whoop and launches into the room. “Was it a picture of his dick, does he miss you that badly yet?”

Harry shakes his head and he’s too upset to even smile. “He’s going on a date,” he says softly, almost like a question. “With some guy I guess, a date.”

“What the fuck,” Niall blurs out, going from giddy to angry in a split second. “Why would he do that, I thought you said everything was great between you?”

Harry just shrugs and runs a hand through his hair. Even though it’s terrible, all he can think of is the night they spent together before he left, about how Louis looked in the moonlight and how he moaned beneath Harry. The thought of anyone else knowing Louis that way makes Harry want to fly straight there and find whoever this guy is. Quickly he realizes that sounds insane and instead turns to Liam for help.

“Call him and talk to him,” Liam says firmly. “It’s just going to be more confusing if you keep texting him Harry, you have to talk to him.”

Harry nods and gets up, leaving Niall’s hotel room in favor of his own. He thinks about just ignoring it all and going out but quickly decides that’s a bad idea. Instead, he calls Louis and waits.

“Harry?” Louis answers, sounding surprised.
“Hey,” Harry breathes out. “I uh, sorry are you busy?”

“No, I’m just about to feed Noah and head out,” Louis says, and then Harry can hear him whispering, “Baby, no you cannot have chocolates for dinner.”

For some reason it makes Harry smile, even though he really doesn’t feel like it. “So you’re going on a date tonight?” He asks before he can chicken out.

There’s the sound of some quiet babbling in the background and Louis answers back just as quietly before returning his attention to Harry. “Yeah, just dinner with this guy I met. Why?”

“I guess um,” Harry stutters. “I guess I didn’t know we were doing that?”

Louis starts saying something but is interrupted by his son who’s yelling about something. “I mean, isn’t that what you’re doing as well? Noah sweetheart, please don’t do that. We don’t need to yell.”

Harry bites at his lip. “Louis, I’m not-”

“Aren’t you?” Louis laughs, and he sounds angry but almost like he’s trying to hide it. It’s slightly terrifying, actually.

And then it hits Harry suddenly. He’s an absolute idiot. “Is this about Patrick?”

Louis sighs. “Hey, Harry can we talk about this later? Noah has somehow managed to get applesauce into his hair and I have to leave in twenty minutes.”

“I-I guess yeah, it’s just Louis-”

“I’ll call you later on love,” Louis says, his scarily sweet tone fading away to something that sounds just sad. “Have a great show tonight, I meant it.”

And then he hangs up and Harry’s left in his quiet hotel room by himself.

Instead of wallowing, he digs his laptop out of his bag and gets on twitter. Sure enough he finds pictures of himself and Patrick on the twitter Louis’ magazine runs for their gossip section. There’s even an article about it and if Harry remembers correctly, Louis and Jade are good friends and there’s no way she wouldn’t have told him about it.

And even though he agreed it would just be a small thing and not a full on PR relationship, Harry can see how Louis could think that’s what’s going on. They’re smiling and laughing but it was really only because Harry thought that Patrick was sweet and funny and a great performer. There was absolutely no connection and it was only to get promotion for his band’s new album.

But of course he never told Louis that, so of course he had no way of knowing it wasn’t true. Even now Harry isn’t sure if he’s allowed to tell Louis it’s fake, but that doesn’t matter because he’s going to anyway—as soon as Louis finishes his date. Even the thought makes Harry uncomfortable.

A loud banging on the door startles him and then Niall’s shouting that they’re going out to get food. Harry sighs and grabs his phone just in case Louis calls before the show for some reason. He can’t help but pray that he does.
Louis’ date is a complete disaster.

It started out well enough, Louis left Daisy watching Noah and Sam picked him up at his door. They talked about their jobs, Sam being a freelance photographer, and he even held open the door for Louis at the restaurant.

And then Louis mentioned Noah and it all sort of went downhill from there.

“That’s your-you have a kid?” Sam had stuttered out when Louis had excused himself for texting his sister.

“Uh, yeah,” Louis answered, and he knew the look on Sam’s face all too well. It was the face every man he’s ever dated has made when they found out about Noah, a combination of shock and panic. Shock at the fact that hey, Louis had a living breathing human depending on him, and panic at the thought of ever having to deal with that.

The awkward silences seemed to last on for hours, the conversation became stilted and odd, and Louis called for the check before either of them were really finished. The ride back to Louis’ house is quiet and absolutely awful. Sam spends the majority of it opening his mouth like he’s going to say something, but then quickly thinking better of it and saying nothing.

It isn’t until they pull into Louis’ drive that he finally says, “So I guess I’ll text you?”

Louis smiles and shakes his head. “It’s fine. I probably should’ve mentioned him from the beginning, huh?”

Sam’s eyes go wide and he tries to say something, but Louis is already saying goodbye and getting out of the car. He pretends it doesn’t bother him when the car immediately pulls away and speeds off down the road.

Louis quietly enters the house and finds it dark except for the television that Daisy’s sat in front of, her eyes stuck to her phone. She lifts her head when Louis comes in and frowns.

“You’re back early.”

“Yeah, it didn’t work out. What are we watching?”

He drops down beside his sister and lets her explain the plot of the romantic comedy that’s mostly over by now. They watch the end of it together, eating handfuls of popcorn while the guy gets the girl and they kiss. An obnoxiously loud pop song plays in the background and it slowly fades to black. Louis scowls.

“You don’t believe any of that, right?”

Daisy laughs. “Did it go that badly?”

Instead of answering, Louis shoves another handful of popcorn into his mouth.

His sister snorts and turns her attention back to her phone. “I thought you were dating Harry Styles. Phoebe told me the last time she babysat you were definitely with him, and I’ve seen pictures of you online and from Fiz. It’s getting weird Lou, I don’t know what to tell my friends.”

“We’re just friends,” Louis tells her quickly, just like he tells anyone else who asks but it sounds so much more bitter now.
“Friends enough to get him to sign something for me?” Daisy asks, shooting Louis her most convincing smile. There are popcorn kernels stuck in her teeth and she looks so much older than he ever remembers her getting.

“Of course babe,” Louis chuckles, reaching over to muss up her hair. “Are you sure you’re okay to drive home, you could always sleep here.”

Daisy rolls her eyes. “I can drive, that’s the whole point of getting your license you know.”

Louis rolls his eyes right back at her, but he still walks her out to the car. “Thanks for tonight,” he says.

She looks at him strangely for a bit, and then finally says, “We all want you to be happy you know? There’s someone out there for everyone, at least I think so. You just have to find him that’s all.”

Louis pretends not to notice his eyes tearing up and pulls Daisy in for a hug. “Thanks love,” he whispers, and he absolutely means it. “Let me know when you get home, okay?”

Daisy nods and gets in the car. Louis watches her drive away until he can’t anymore, the realization hitting him that someday Noah’s going to be that old. The thought of Noah ever noticing how heartbroken and lonely Louis really is, the way the rest of his family seems to, scares him more than he cares to admit.

His mind is running a mile a minute and he tries to quiet it by keeping busy. He cleans up the mess Noah’s left on the floor of the living room, washes the dishes from the day, and throws a pile of clothes into the wash. With nothing else to do Louis decides to grab a beer from the fridge and pick something at random to watch.

He’s halfway through a documentary about whales when Harry texts him.

*Are you busy?*

Instead of answering, Louis just calls him.

“Hey Lou,” Harry answers right away. “How was your date?”

“Disastrous. How was your concert?”

Harry makes a noise that sounds like a pitiful sigh. “It was pretty great, actually. What happened on your date?”

“It was fine, everything was going great actually,” Louis says with a sigh. “And then I mentioned Noah and it was all downhill from there.”

“Oh, Lou,” Harry murmurs.

Louis snorts and shakes his head. “It’s fine—I mean he was going to find out eventually. It is sort of hide a child, and I’d rather know now than wait until I actually start liking him.”

“I’m so sorry babe,” Harry says, and Louis realizes it’s completely silent in the background so he must be alone for once. “That’s awful, he just wasn’t open to it all?”

Louis snorts and shakes his head. “No, he basically shut down completely and we ended up leaving before he was finished eating. You would’ve thought I told him I had some sort of flesh eating
Harry groans. “Then he’s an asshole. God, that’s so ridiculous Louis, I’m sorry.”

Louis takes a sip of his now lukewarm beer before continuing on. “It’s just, he was so nice and lovely and then-I mean it’s alright. It always ends up like this, and it wasn’t like I was expecting him to be like-” He stops himself short before he can finish the sentence, but he hears Harry breathe in sharply like he knows what was coming next.

*To be like you,* Louis was going to say. To be so wonderful and so accepting like Harry has been this entire time. To be the person Louis thinks of when his sister says there’s someone out there for everyone.

They both go quiet and Louis quickly downs the rest of his beer. He sets the empty bottle down onto the coffee table and lays down on the couch, bringing his knees up to his chest. Harry’s still there but he makes no noise, just breathes. It’s awful.

“Is he nice at least?” Louis murmurs, picking at the places where the couch is fraying.

“Who?” Harry asks, like he doesn’t know. “Patrick?”

Louis makes a face at that. “*Patrick,* what a stupid name,” he grumbles. “And I bet he’s American too.”

Harry chuckles softly and it only makes Louis angrier. “He is actually. Louis-”

“Well, I hope that you’re happy then.”

“Louis, Patrick and I aren’t dating.”

They both speak at the same time but Louis still hears him. “Well you sure looked like you were,” he says, now tugging at the couch. “It’s okay if you are, I’d rather you not lie about it. We never really talked about what this was anyway.”

Harry sighs loudly. “Lou, I’m not supposed to tell you this so you can’t say anything okay?” he waits until Louis agrees before saying, “It’s all for publicity. My management set me up on a few dates with him to promote his bad, there’s nothing going on between us. We had never even met up until a few days ago.”

“But you were holding hands,” Louis says stupidly. “And I thought that…”

“I know and it’s my fault,” Louis groans out, though it’s mostly muffled. “An absolute dick.”

Suddenly feeling awful, Louis shoves his face into the couch cushions. “I’m a dick aren’t I?” he says, now tugging at the couch. “It’s okay if you are, I’d rather you not lie about it. We never really talked about what this was anyway.”

Harry sighs loudly. “Lou, I’m not supposed to tell you this so you can’t say anything okay?” he waits until Louis agrees before saying, “It’s all for publicity. My management set me up on a few dates with him to promote his bad, there’s nothing going on between us. We had never even met up until a few days ago.”

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“No, Louis there’s no way you could’ve known,” Harry assures him. “I’m so sorry, I should’ve said something before we ever went out. Even if I wasn’t allowed to tell you, it wasn’t right of me not to warn you.”

Louis turns his face so he can see the whales swimming around on the telly. It makes him feel a bit better for no real reason. “Do you hate me now?”

“No, love,” Harry laughs softly. “No, I don’t hate you. Do you hate me?”

“Of course not,” Louis groans again, louder this time. “God, I can’t believe I went out with that
prick, even if he was gorgeous.”

Harry makes an odd noise that Louis can’t decode. He’s about to comment on it when he hears Noah yelling, “Daddy!”

Louis shoots up instantly and starts to stand. “Noah?”

Small feet smack against the floor and then Noah bursts into the room, face red and sniffling. “Daddy, thought you were gone.”

“Oh, sweetheart no I’m right here,” Louis says, holding his arms open. “I was just watching a movie darling, that’s all.”

“I can go,” Harry murmurs. “We can talk tomorrow when it isn’t so late.”

“Yeah, sorry,” Louis sighs, settling Noah into his lap. “Suppose this is why the date went so badly.”

Harry sounds angry when he speaks next, though not at Louis. “No, he comes first. Go take care of him and we can talk later love.”

Louis nods and quickly says goodbye so he can hang up and pull Noah into a hug. His little chest is heaving and he has his thumb stuck in his mouth, something he usually never does unless he’s sick or scared. “Baby, what’s wrong?” Louis murmurs, rubbing his back softly.

Noah hiccups and buries himself closer to Louis. “Daisy said you’d be there when I woke up,” he sniffles, grabbing hold on Louis’ jumper. “And I woke up and you weren’t.”

Just the tone of his voice makes Louis feel awful even though he’s not really done anything wrong. He squeezes Noah into a tight hug before gently moving him off his lap. “I’m sorry love, you just woke up a little early that’s all. Wait here and we’ll go to bed, okay?”

Noah nods and grabs Louis’ phone while Louis gets rid of his beer bottle and turns the television off. When he picks his son up he looks at his phone to see Noah’s somehow managed to send Harry five pictures of himself making faces at the camera.

“Cheers, love,” Louis laughs.

“That’s my kiss face,” Noah says, pointing to the third one and hiccuping softly. “And my Daddy, look that’s my silly face.”

Louis smiles and kisses his forehead. “I’m sure he’ll love them, darling.”

Noah wipes at his teary eyes with his hand and then promptly sticks his thumb back into his mouth. “Drew you some hearts while you were gone.”

“Some hearts, huh?” Louis asks, shifting around so Noah can sit on his hip while he babbles on about Daisy helping him color.

Sorry about that left him alone for a whole ten seconds my mistake, he texts Harry quickly.

“It’s hearts so you know I love you,” Noah explains finally, after going off on a speech about using just the right red crayon.

Louis smiles and gently sets him down on his bed. “I know you love me sweetheart, and I love you right back. Let me find some pajamas and we’ll go to bed okay?”
Noah kisses Louis’ cheek and quickly gets under the covers. Louis heads to his wardrobe and then to the bathroom to brush his teeth and get dressed. When he returns he finds Noah taking more pictures of himself, although this time he hasn’t sent them to anyone thank god.

“Alright you monster, put the phone down,” Louis teases, taking the phone away and switching the light off. He opens Harry’s latest text and reads it over with a smile.

*He’s so cute :) Goodnight babe sleep well- both of you xx*

Louis puts his phone on the bedside table and sighs.

Noah kicks him in the shin not so gently and whispers, “Daddy?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you happy?”

“Of course I am, darling,” Louis says quickly. “I have you don’t I?”

Noah kicks him again, gentler this time. “Just like when you’re happy. Maybe could get married like Perrie and Zayn, be happy too.”

Louis laughs and leans forward to kiss his son’s forehead. “That’s sweet love, but there isn’t really anyone I’m looking to marry right now. Besides, I don’t need to get married to be happy and it’s sweet of you to worry, but you shouldn’t. I’m the adult, I’ll worry.”


“I love you too sweetheart, go to sleep.” Louis gently combs through Noah’s curls with his fingers until he falls asleep as well. And if he dreams of Harry, then that’s really no one business but his own.

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They’re all in an interview the next day when the question is finally asked, “Do you have a boyfriend?”

Harry bites down on his lip hard and goes red. The small crowd there bursts into cooing and laughter and both the other boys start laughing as well. Harry shakes his head and laughs. “I don’t think I’m really supposed to answer that,” he says.

Even though he knows they’re probably asking about Patrick, Harry still feels like suddenly everyone knows about Louis. They haven’t talked about last night yet, but he’s still hopeful it will go well. He ducks his head before they can ask anything else and lets them move onto the next question. When he looks back up the whole room is still smiling at him and his face is still probably red.

“And what do you think, Harry?” The interviewer asks. “Any big artists you’re looking forward to next year?”

“Um, well yeah I have a few to look out for,” he says, and again the crowd bursts into laughing and cooing. He frowns, realizing they think he’s talking about Patrick and quickly makes up for it. “Ed Sheeran’s new album looks great. I went to a concert actually, a few weeks back with a friend of mine.”
Niall snorts out, “Friend?” quietly and Harry kicks him under the table.

“A friend,” Harry reiterates with a grin. “Niall’s got quite a few of those, hasn’t he?”

Liam bursts into laughter and Niall rolls his eyes. “Shut up, both of you.”

They make it through the rest of the interview with no more mentions of boyfriends, Harry’s thankful for that, and Liam leads him out with one arm around his shoulders.

“So, it’s went well with Louis last night,” he teases. “Just judging by your face.”

Harry rolls his eyes and pulls his phone from his pocket on instinct. Sure enough he has a couple messages from Louis that he opens quickly.

*Morning’s been shit my kids got gum in his curls somehow* the first one says, followed by a row of skull emojis.

The next one says, *asshole from last night tried calling me whilst my sister was telling me how to get the gum out. Should’ve answered and let Noah scream at him :)*

Harry frowns and quickly texts back, *yes you should’ve*

The three boys are ushered through an absolute mob outside the television studio and straight into a van to drive them back to the hotel so they can finish up a couple more songs for the next album. Harry’s exhausted he feels like his eyes could drop closed at any moment, but Louis entertains him enough to keep him awake.

*its a shame he was so terrible he was beautiful :(*

And Harry really does not want to think about beautiful or wonderful the man was that Louis went on a date with, but he still plays along. *How awful. What will you do now?*

*I’ve got a couple backups, Louis texts him. Call me later love xx*

Harry grins and quickly hides his phone before Niall can pounce and steal it away to see what he’s so happy about.

Louis would really rather be napping right now than being dragged through the park by Noah, but his son doesn’t seem to care. He tugs Louis along by the hand towards the slide, Hank bouncing along in his other hand.

The night before had been an awful idea, Louis realized that as soon as he’d spoken to Harry, and he’d really like to go home and sulk a bit about his horrible date but he can’t. Noah has his heart set on the park and after a morning spent tugging gum out of his hair and listening to him cry, Louis wants to make him smile. Even if he does feel awful.

And even if he is bitter about the fact that it’s been four hours and Harry hasn’t texted him back, or called for that matter.

“Daddy, come on slow poke!” Noah whines.
Louis smiles and starts walking even slower. “I’m very old Noah, you have to give me time to catch up.”

“You aren’t that old,” Noah scoffs.

“How old am I then?”

Noah stops at the edge of the playground and turns to look at Louis with a thoughtful frown. “Probably fifty,” he says finally, sounding quite sure of himself.

Louis bursts out laughing and scoops his giggling son up into his arms. He kisses Noah on the forehead and manages to hug him tightly even though he’s squirming to be let down. As soon as his feet touch the ground he’s sprinting to the slide, shouting “Love you!” over his shoulder.

All of the mums that take up the benches with their diaper bags and prams smile at him and he nods back politely. Normally he’d let himself be dragged deep into a conversation about the best kind of baby bottles and who’s sleeping with the neighbor’s husband, but today he takes a bench for himself and just breathes.

Noah holds onto Hank tightly the whole time he plays, tucking the dinosaur under his arm while he orchestrates a game with the other kids. He’s very obviously the leader and very obviously Louis’ son, loudly deciding who’s going to play what part in the game he’s just made up on the spot. All of the other kids stare at him with wide eyes and for the most part actually listen to him, which makes Louis smile to himself.

If someone wants to be in his life and can’t see how wonderful his son is, then Louis really doesn’t need them around. It’s their loss really.

Harry finally calls just after Louis finishes helping Noah tie his shoe. He grins down at the phone and sends his son back to play before answering.

“So you’re alive, that’s good. I was getting worried.”

Harry laughs and Louis notices right away that his voice sounds sore and tired. “Sorry love, got caught up with work stuff. Good news is we’re done with almost half of the next album.”

Louis grins and leans back on the bench. “Harry, that’s fantastic. Won’t be long now, will it? You boybands, spitting out a record every year. Who has the time?” Harry laughs again and Louis feels like his face might split in half from smiling.

There’s the sound of the door closing and then some shuffling around that sounds like Harry’s dropping face first onto his bed. “I almost forgot what it felt like to be so tired,” he groans. “I want my own bed, I’m sick of hotels.”

“Oh, I’m Harry Styles,” Louis says in a horrible imitation of Harry’s slow drawl. “Being a popstar is horrid, I hate traveling to beautiful places and making hit records. Pout pout.”

“I don’t sound like that,” Harry shoots back with a muffled giggle. “I’m grateful really it’s just-I miss home. And right now I miss you.”

Louis’ mind goes completely blank. Part of him wants to admit he misses Harry as well, but then he remembers last night and the conversation they never had.

“We need to talk, don’t we,” he says softly so the eavesdropping housewives don’t hear. “About what we’re doing, about last night.”
Harry sighs and Louis would give anything to be there in bed beside him again, watching him falling asleep and gently tracing his profile with one finger. It was so lovely, he was so lovely and Louis doesn’t want to think about it never happening again. It’d be too unfair for life to give him just a bit of Harry, just enough to get Louis addicted to the way he smiles and the way he acts, and then rip him away.

“I don’t want to hold you back from anything,” Harry murmurs, breaking the silence. “It feels like I’m hardly ever home, Louis, and when I am I’m working. You deserve better than that, you deserve someone real.”

Louis rolls his eyes and tries to sound himself even though his heart hurts. “You’re not real?”

“You know what I mean,” Harry whispers. “You deserve someone who’s going to be there and take care of you, a real relationship not someone who’s jetting off to god knows where at a moment’s notice. Not to mention the gossip.”

And, Louis can’t really argue with that can he? Because it would be a problem, Harry just disappearing and showing up in magazines days later. “We could make it work,” he says firmly, because he needs this to work. He can’t let this end just yet.

“How?” Harry asks, and the hope in his voice does not go unnoticed.

“Well you’re on tour now, but you’re not always on tour,” Louis says carefully. “And when you are here it could be like before, just maybe less going out since you’re apparently dating that child.”

Harry chuckles. “Lou, Patrick’s a year younger than me that does not make him a child,” he teases. “But don’t worry, we had our last date this morning and by next week we’ll be broken up amicably. There’s no need to sound so jealous.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “I’m certainly not jealous,” he lies. “But that is another thing. I don’t…I mean, I guess I don’t mind if you have to do that again I’d just rather not be blindsided by it.”

“No,” Harry says firmly. “No, it’s not happening again so long as we’re doing this. I’m so sorry Louis, I should’ve said something before it ever happened.”

Louis sighs. “It’s okay.”

“I’m a fucking asshole.”

“Well, that does make me feel a bit better,” Louis says.

Harry giggles and it sounds muffled again. The thought of him trying to hide his laughter in the pillow makes Louis’ heart ache. He listens to Harry laugh while he watches Noah run across the playground playing a game of tag with the other kids.

“It’s not easy,” Harry says, suddenly serious again. “Nothing with me is easy.”

“Don’t be so dramatic, Harold,” Louis teases, gently kicking at the ground with the toe of his shoe. “Who says anyone even has to know we’re dating anyway? It can be a secret until we get our shit together, it’s our business not anyone else’s.”

“People will try to make it their business,” Harry points out.

Louis shrugs. “But it won’t be, will it? Just ours and whoever we decide to tell. It’s not like I could go out clubbing with you in London or something like that anyway, not with Noah at home.”
“We can make it work, can’t we?” Harry asks, sounding desperate for the answer.

“Of course we can,” Louis answers, trying to sound absolutely sure of himself even if he isn’t.

Harry sighs quietly and it turns into a quiet little laugh. “God, Lou. Sometimes I’m so sure you’re not real, that I’ve dreamt this all up.”

“Dramatic,” Louis replies weakly. “I have a dramatic boyfriend.”

Across the phone Harry’s breath hitches. It’s the first time either of them have ever said it and Louis loves how right it sounds.

“I guess you do, don’t you?”

Louis is about to ask to hear it back, but then he spots Noah running his way.

“Daddy!” He shouts, almost crashing right into Louis’ knees with how excited he is.

“What, sweetheart?” Louis laughs, fixing a strand of Noah’s hair that’s hanging in his eyes.

“I found a frog,” Noah says, still breathing heavily. “He’s hoppin’ around.”

Louis makes a face and Harry starts laughing. “Did you touch it?” Louis asks, almost afraid of the answer.

“I tried!”

“Oh, Noah that’s so gross,” Louis moans.

Apparently forgetting that they were having a serious moment only seconds ago, Harry chimes in. “Ask him if he’s kissed it.”

Louis rolls his eyes but asks anyway. Noah’s eyes light up and he gasps, “My Daddy, good idea! It can be a prince for you!”

“As sweet as that is, please don’t go kissing frogs,” Louis says, reaching over to brush a bit of dirt off his cheeks.

Noah dodges his father’s thumb quickly in favor of putting on his best pout. “But Dad—”

“No kissing frogs,” Louis tries to sound stern, but he can’t help laughing. “Here, hand me Hank so you can go play for a little while longer. He’s getting all dirty in the mud.”

After practically throwing Hank into Louis’ arms and giving him a quick peck to the cheek, Noah’s running off again, shouting about frogs to the other children. Louis can only imagine what the other parents will think when they find out his kid has them chasing frogs in the mud. He relays this information back to Harry who’s still stuck hysterically giggling.

“Louis, he’s adorable.”

“Of course he is, he’s mine,” Louis says seriously. “If I find him kissing frogs though, it’s all your fault.”

“He’s trying to find you a prince, Louis, that’s the cutest thing I’ve ever heard.”

Louis smiles over at Noah who is now hopping around in search of the frog. “Yeah, he’s kind of
great.”

“I’ll be home in a couple weeks,” Harry blurts out suddenly. “Just for two weeks, I promised my mum I’d come visit for some of it. She’s constantly calling and complaining that she never sees me.” Harry’s nervous babbling almost makes Louis laugh, but he somehow manages to hold it in.

“That sounds nice,” he says, trying to sound oblivious.

“And then maybe I could come see you for a little while,” Harry says finally. “I won’t really have anything going on and-”

“That sounds really nice Harry,” Louis agrees, putting the poor boy out of his misery. “By the time you get here I will have missed you so badly I probably won’t be able to let you go.”

He could swear he hears Harry take a relieved breath. “Well, who says I would let you? Seeing as how you’re my boyfriend and all, that’s sort of your job.”

Louis smiles and tries not to think about it. He fails. “Miss your mouth.”

“No dirty talk in the park, they’ll never let you back,” Harry scolds.

Louis rolls his eyes, but he’s smiling. “What are you doing tonight?”

“We have to head off to another interview in a few minutes,” Harry sighs. “And then we have a show tonight. You’ll be asleep by the time I get home, Lou.”

“Well, then I’ll just have to send you pictures then,” Louis says sweetly.

“Pictures of what?” Harry asks quickly.

Louis grins to himself and sighs, making it as loud and dramatic as he can. “Oh, Harold I’m so sorry I have to go.”

Harry groans. “No, Louis pictures of what?”

“Have a great day love,” Louis sing songs, and then ends the call before Harry can yell a reply.

Only seconds later Harry is texting him, begging for an explanation. Louis ignores it and gathers up Noah’s things, shouting his name across the playground.

“Tried to catch the frog for you,” Noah says when he slides to a stop in front of the bench. “He was too fast and slippery.”

Louis smiles and shakes his head. “Come on love, let’s wash your hands and go get dinner. What are you thinking?”

“Pizza!” Noah cheers. Louis smiles and picks him up, settling him on one hip and carrying him to the car.

It’s not until they’re driving away that Noah finally says, “I saw you’re on the phone.”

Louis looks up into the rear view mirror and sees Noah grinning to himself and gently brushing his dinosaur’s back. “It was my friend Harry, love, you haven’t met him yet.”

Noah leans over to gently whisper to the dinosaur and then sits back up. “Hank says you we’re smilin’ a lot on the phone. Maybe you have a crush.”
Louis chokes out a surprised laugh. “Where on earth did you hear that from?”

“Daisy says if you’re smiling a lot it means you have a crush,” Noah says, quite matter of fact. “So I know you do.”

“I don’t have a crush, Noah, and if I did you’d be first to know I promise.”

Noah nods, but his eyebrows furrowing together. He looks down at Hank again and looks deep in thought for awhile. “Gotta find another frog then,” he says to himself finally.

Louis spends the rest of the ride home trying to hide his laughter.
“So Harry Styles broke up with his boyfriend.” Jade says one day, pulling up a chair to the break room table. Leigh-Anne is not far behind, pulling up her own chair. Louis raises his eyebrows and leans back in his own chair, bringing his cup noodles up and twirling some onto his fork.

“Pity,” he says.

Leigh-Anne scoffs and gives Jade a look. “I told you he’d know already. I bet they were never even together to begin with.”

Louis smirks and takes another bite. “I’m not saying anything,” he says, because he isn’t really.

Jade frowns. “Well, I still don’t like it. You can’t fool me, Lou, you really like him.”

“I really like my cup noodles right now,” Louis says. “And I’d love it if one of you would make me a cuppa. Noah had me up until all hours with that cold of his.”


Louis nods and stands up, shooing Leigh Anne away from the kettle. “Yeah, he puked it all out I think,” he then winces and quickly apologizes. “Sorry, probably ruined your appetite now.”

“You’re fine, babe,” Leigh laughs, grabbing his mug and her own to wash out quickly. “Poor bub, he’s too sweet to be sick. Give him a kiss for me.”

Louis smiles and scoops out the rest of his noodles while he waits for the kettle to boil. Suddenly his phone is ringing, buzzing across the table where he’s left it, and he freezes. Louis watches almost in slow motion as both girls pounce for it, Harry’s smiling drunken face disappearing under their hands.

“Louis’ phone, Leigh Anne speaking,” Leigh chirps happily, jumping up and backing away when Louis tries to chase her. “I’m sorry, you said Harry? Harry who?”

Jade laughs and reaches for it as well, shouting into it, “Harry, you have to come right away Louis is asking for you.”

“Oh he’s absolutely incorrigible,” Leigh agrees, jumping away from Louis’ attempts to get his phone back. “There’s been tears and everything. It’s always Harry this, Harry that.”

Louis makes one last desperate grab for his phone and snatches it from her hands. “You can both fuck right off,” he shouts, before bringing the phone up to his ear. “Harry darling, how are you?”
Harry’s giggling hysterically. “I’m wonderful now,” he says. “How are you?”

“Annoyed,” Louis says, glaring at the girls who are practically collapsed one on another laughing. The annoyed look on his face only serves to make them laugh even harder and he scowls. “Oh yeah, you’re both just fucking hilarious, I can hardly stand it.”

Jesy walks in to inspect the noise and after the other two explain what’s going on, bursts into laughter herself. Louis rolls his eyes and decides to take his cup of tea back to his desk.

“Oh, don’t you start too,” Louis mumbles when Harry doesn’t stop laughing. “You better be calling with good news Harold.”

“I’m home,” Harry says, and neither of them comment on how good that sounds. “Mum’s got dinner on already, she’s so excited.”

Louis smiles at the thought of Harry’s mum and he really doesn’t want to think too hard on why that is. “Of course she is love, you’re her baby.”

Harry laughs softly and Louis hears a door gently snick shut in the background. “You’d probably get it more than me, I guess. How are you, you sound exhausted.”

While logging onto his computer and navigating back to his latest piece, Louis fills Harry in on Noah. “I got barely three hours of sleep,” he sighs.

“Oh, babe,” Harry murmurs. “I’m sorry, I feel bad for complaining now. This jet lag is killing me.”

Louis sighs and shrugs to himself, sipping at his tea. “I’m going to head home early, I hate to leave him when he’s sick.”

“Well when he’s feeling better maybe I could come to take you out?”

Louis smiles just at the thought of going to dinner with another adult instead of eating dinosaur chicken nuggets and discussing cartoons. He’s a bit starved for attention right now.

“That sounds lovely,” he says softly, and then hesitantly adds, “And I think you should meet Noah as well? Only if you want to of course.”

The line goes silent and Louis hates himself. He moved too fast, he should’ve waited. All he’s going to do is scare off Harry just like he scares everyone else off. Sure, Harry hadn’t fled at the first mention of Noah like most people have, but he’s sure to now.

“You’d trust me to meet him?” Harry asks quietly, and Louis’ train of thought stops short.

“I-well of course, Harry. I mean we aren’t going to tell him anything’s going on obviously,” Louis says. “I just…this can’t go any further if he doesn’t like you, you know? And I’d rather know now before we get in too deep.”

He doesn’t mention that he’s never had anyone he was seeing meet Noah before. His heart is hammering in his chest at the thought of them meeting, and it feels like it goes double time when he thinks of them not getting along. Not that he thinks it would happen, honestly he thinks they’d get on just fine, but there’s always that fear in the back of his mind that reminds him about not letting Noah get attached. No matter how Louis feels about Harry, if Noah didn’t like him then that would be the end of it.

“I’d love that,” Harry says quickly. “Louis as long as you’re absolutely sure, I’d love to. I just-I
“really like you, you know? You’re my boyfriend and he’s the most important part of your life and I would love to meet him Louis. He’s everything to you, I want to know him.”

Louis glances over to the picture that sits directly beside his computer, the one of himself and Noah at his last birthday party. “Yeah,” he sighs, smiling without really noticing. “He’s sort of the most important. Meeting the family after that will be easy.”

Harry laughs and Louis can hear a woman’s voice calling somewhere in the background. “Your mum will be a piece of cake then compared to him?”

“Can’t promise that exactly.”

“Well, let me hope at least,” Harry teases. “I’ve gotta go love, my mums calling me down. Some relative I hardly remember has probably dropped by to tell me how tall I’m getting. I’ll call you tonight, yeah?”

Louis nods and starts packing his things away. Just talking about Noah has made him miss his baby so bad that he’s decided to get home as quick as he can. “Yeah, now that you’re finally in the same timezone as me there’s no getting out of my goodnight calls.”

It’s easy to tell when Harry’s smiling, Louis almost has a sixth sense for it now. He wishes for the hundredth time in the past month that he could see Harry, could just reach out and sink his finger into his shallow dimple and kiss him full on the mouth.

Soon, he reminds himself just like always. Soon he’ll be back and Harry will be his again.

“I’d never want to get out of your goodnight calls,” Harry sighs. “Drive safe babe.”

“Bye love,” Louis murmurs, and he hangs up before he says something stupid.

Three almost unbearable days later, Harry finally drives in from his Mum’s house. They decide to meet at a restaurant after Louis gets off work and Louis even takes the train into work that morning when Harry promises he’ll drive him home. No one knows about it, not even Zayn who obviously notices something’s up when they eat lunch together and Louis doesn’t stop smiling once.

“Having a good day?” He’d asked, eyeing Louis’ phone that he was keeping in his hand just in case Harry texted.

Louis had just nodded and went right back to smiling at his shitty microwavable meal.

By the time the workday is over and everyone else is starting to pack up, Louis is shooting out the door and trying to keep his excitement down on the way to the lobby. The last thing he needs is for every other office in the building to be talking about that weird writer from Mod who jumped up and down in the lift.

They had arranged to meet at the restaurant but when Louis walks outside he hears someone shouting his name. He whips his head up and bursts out laughing when he sees Harry leaning against his car and smiling at him.

“You’re such a sap,” Louis calls, but that doesn’t stop him from running over and wrapping Harry
up in the tightest hug he can manage.

“Did you miss me?” Harry laughs, kissing Louis’ neck and his face and anywhere he can reach.
“Look, I’ve got a tan.”

Louis squeezes him tightly around the neck, savoring the feeling of Harry’s arms around him and the familiar smell of his cologne and the mint gum in his mouth. He finally pulls away but just enough to look at him. He’s dressed in yet another ridiculous hat and silk shirt combination, and Louis wishes he didn’t find it so damn hot. Instead of saying this he reaches forward and does up two of the buttons on Harry’s shirt.

“You can’t walk around like this, it isn’t decent,” he scolds, trying to look as serious as possible even though Harry is grinning at him like a maniac. “At least keep it buttoned past your belly Harold, you’ll start a sex riot.”

“No one’s complained yet,” Harry sounds put out but there’s a sparkle in his eyes that coaxes Louis to ignore him and do up one more button.

Somehow in the chaos that the end of the day always brings, Louis still manages to find enough calm to look straight into Harry’s eyes and tug him closer for a kiss. Harry makes a quiet pleased noise in the back of his throat that Louis loves.

“I did miss you,” he murmurs, pulling away to press kisses to Harry’s closed eyelids. “Of course I missed you, you idiot.”

Harry giggles and pulls Louis in by the waist to kiss him again.

“Oi! Hands off him, Styles,” A voice that is unmistakably Jesy calls. Louis groans and looks back long enough to see all three girls standing just feet away.

“Those are your friends, yeah?” Harry laughs, taking one hand away from Louis’ waist to wave to the girls.

Louis shakes his head and pushes Harry towards the car. “I use that term loosely.”

“Would they like to come for dinner with us, do you think?” Harry asks, suddenly excited. “Louis, please let’s invite them!”

Louis barely gets to protest this before all three of the girls are fighting their way over.

"Of course we'd love to come to dinner, wouldn't we girls?" Leigh-Anne laughs, wrapping an arm around Jades shoulder. "We were heading out to meet Perrie anyway."

"I haven't met Perrie yet," Harry says excitedly. "Lou, isn't that Zayn’s girl?"

Louis ignores how the girls are coo over him and nods. "Yeah, his fiancee. She'll be the only one on my side."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Jesy asks, knowing full well what it means.

"Well we can meet you at the restaurant right? I mean, I don't think we'd fit in my car." Harry looks back to his car and frowns at it like he’s thinking about how to shove all five of them inside. The girls giggle again and Louis kind of wants to throw himself into traffic.

They split up after agreeing to meet at the cafe and Harry opens the door for Louis to get in the car.
"Are you angry with me?" Harry asks quietly when he’s back behind the wheel.

Louis shakes his head. "No, darling I'm not mad."

"I just... I mean, you've met the boys. I want to meet your friends too."

Louis smiles and gently reaches for Harry's hand over their center of the car. "How could I be mad about that, love? Just keep in mind that nothing they say is true."

Harry laughs and brings Louis' hand up to his lips. "Sure babe."

All four of the girls meet them at the restaurant and are loitering around outside when Harry and Louis arrive. And Harry being Harry of course opens Louis’ door for him and takes his hand like the perfect gentleman he is. Louis is sure he can hear the girls whispered squeals from across the street.

“Hi,” Harry says, reaching the hand that's not wrapped up in Louis’ out to Perrie. “I’m Harry Styles.”

Perrie laughs at the gesture but still shakes his hand. “Hello love, I’m Perrie.”

“I met Zayn, he was telling me all about your wedding,” Harry says excitedly.

Louis rolls his eyes. “Harry is obsessed with weddings, and babies actually.”

“Are you making fun of me?” Harry asks, and he looks honestly confused about it though Louis knows it’s probably an act.

“Of course not darling,” Louis teases, squeezing his hand. “Can we eat now? I’m starving to death.”

Harry presses a kiss to Louis’ temple and tugs him forward. “Of course love, we wouldn’t want that would we?”

The six of them easily find a table after Harry apologizes and smiles his way into it. The poor hostess is too starstruck to say no to him and Louis finds it all a bit ridiculous. Harry sits down beside Louis and drapes an arm around the back of his chair. The girls notice immediately but Louis pretends nothing’s amiss and is suddenly very interested in his menu.

“I saw your pictures of Louis,” Harry’s excited voice brings Louis out of his fog of trying to decide between steak and fish. “He looked like the guy from Grease, babe who’s the guy-”

“Kenickie,” Louis says in unison with Leigh-Anne who’s smiling proudly.

“Didn’t he look handsome? So much better then the mess he usually wears it in.”

Louis gasps and tries to look as offended as possible. “Hey, I like my hair this way. Besides it’s not like I have a full hour of time to twist my hair into a roll every morning, I’m a very busy man.”

“Harry, tell him his hair looks sexy pushed back,” Jesy jokes.

Harry coughs out a laugh but recovers quickly and reaches up to gently muss up Louis’ fringe. “I like his hair anyway he wears it. He always looks lovely.”

“How charming,” Louis deadpans.

“I am quite charming, aren’t I?”
Louis says nothing, just gives the girls a look that makes them all laugh. Harry pouts for a solid minute before their waiter turns up and he’s forced to behave like a normal human for awhile. After they’ve all ordered and the waiter has finished making eyes at Jade, they return to their conversation.

“So Harry,” Jesy starts. “Are you still on tour?”

Harry nods and Louis tries not to startle when he feels the other man’s fingers pressing gently on his shoulder. “For a few more months, yeah. I’ve just been home visiting my mum and my sister and niece.”

“And you’re staying with Louis now?” Jade pipes up, resting her chin in her hand innocently.

“Um, well I’m not staying with him. But we’ll be spending time together, yeah.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Let’s not interrogate the poor guy, he’ll never come back.”

But the girls don’t let up. By the time their food comes Harry’s neck must hurt from turning to each girl every time they ask a question. He takes it like a champ of course and smiles the whole time, never once fumbles for an answer. The hand he has on Louis’ shoulder gently drifts to his neck and then to down to his waist and Louis can see Jade watching it like a hawk.

“We should probably say sorry, yeah?” She says as soon as the waiter has walked away again after giving them their meals. “About your break up, I mean. Must’ve been awful.”

Harry finally stumbles and Louis is surprised it took this long. He hadn’t even stuttered when Jade had challenged him about his past or when Perrie had politely asked about meeting Noah. He looks over at Louis quickly and then back to the girls. The rest of them at least have the decency to look confused or focus on their food, but Jade is staring right at him.

“I-I mean there’s not much I can say about that is there?” Harry stutters out.

Jade looks surprised. “What does that mean?”

Harry smiles softly and rubs Louis’ shoulder gently. “I think you know what I mean.”

Jade watches his hand, and then looks at Harry before nodding. “Well, as long as that’s settled. I could start to like you Harry Styles.”

Harry beams like this is the best news he’s ever heard. “Good. That’s-thank you.”

Louis rolls his eyes and kisses Harry’s cheek. “Your food is going cold Harold.”

They finish their food while Harry and Perrie talk animatedly about her hair and her work. The other girls and Louis join in once in awhile. Perrie reaches out to touch his curls once which immediately leads to a conversation with her and Leigh-Anne about the products he uses.

The other girls and Louis get deep into a conversation about music. Louis is passionately defending his favorite girl band when he feels Harry’s fingers drumming on his waist. He glances over and sees Harry grinning.

“What are you so happy about?” Louis teases.

Harry shrugs. “You’re just hot when you get all passionate. So you’ll listen to girl bands but boy bands are beneath you?”

“I grew up with younger sisters,” he says. “All of which at one point or another probably had your

Louis pats Harry’s hand and shakes his head. “On my honor as a gay man, I have a duty to protect girl bands with my life.”

“Maybe you should leave me for Posh Spice then,” Harry jokes.

Louis nods. “She does remind me of you a bit. Suppose that makes you Posh Direction?”

“Does that make Louis David Beckham?” Jesy laughs.

“Of course it does,” Louis says seriously. “Don’t sound so skeptical, how dare you.”

Harry smiles and presses a chaste kiss to his temple. “You’re even more handsome than David Beckham,” he says. “And I’ve actually met him quite a few times, so I know just how lovely he is up close.”

“Get off me, sap,” Louis jokes, but he still smiles when Harry places another kiss to his cheek.

The girls are all smiling at them the way you do when you see a new couple being disgustingly cute, and Louis loves it. Even Jade seems won over and by the time they reach dessert, Louis is far less worried about how Harry fits into his life.

It’s only been a day since Louis has last seen Harry but that’s apparently long enough for him to work himself up into a frenzy. Despite what Harry says, Louis is still worried he’ll bail as soon as he meets Noah. Not that Harry is that type of person of course, but Louis is so used to it he’s grown to expect it.

Noah on the other hand is excited to meet Louis’ new friend. Louis thinks that that might mostly be because they’re going to the park, though. He’d decided they’d meet Harry there because then if Noah doesn’t like him the day isn’t completely wasted.

“Noah baby, we’re meeting Daddy’s friend today,” Louis gently reminds him in the car, having to yell to be heard over the nursery rhymes blaring through his speakers. “You’re okay with that right?”

Noah doesn’t even look up from where he has Hank dancing across his car seat, just shrugs. “I like your friends Daddy, very funny like Stan and Jesy. Is your friend funny?”

Louis smiles. “He thinks he is.”

Noah grins back at his father in the rear view mirror. “I’ll like him then.”

They pull into the park after ten minutes of Louis’ worrying. Noah is already tugging at his seat belt before the car is fully stopped, eyes on the playground.

“Hey, kid I need you to listen to me okay?”

Noah groans and puts his hand on the window dramatically. “But Dad,”
Louis rolls his eyes. “We need to have a big kid talk, look at me,” he waits until Noah pulls his eyes away from the park to speak. “If you don’t like Harry, I want you to promise to tell me yeah? I don’t want to be around anyone you don’t like. You’re what’s most important to me.”

Noah smiles at that and squeezes Hank tightly. “Thanks Daddy. I promise.”

As soon as Louis opens his door, Noah is off like a shot. He ignores Louis’ calls for him to be careful and practically launches himself up the slide just like he always does. Louis sighs but lets him go.

Luckily he only gets to worry for a few minutes before he sees Harry’s car pulling up. He strides up in all his glory, a blanket tucked under one arm and a few bags in the other. He beams when he catches sight of Louis and gives him a quick peck on the cheek.

“I’m scared shitless,” he whispers in lieu of a hello.

For some reason it makes Louis feel immensely better. “Careful, kids can smell fear,” he teases. “What’s all this?”

“I thought we could have a picnic, and I wanted it to be surprise so I went and picked up food. And don’t worry, I asked Zayn what Noah’s allergic to so I made sure there’s no weird nuts or anything and—why are you looking at me like that?”

Louis shakes his head. “How did you talk to Zayn?”

“We exchanged numbers before, when we met,” Harry explains, his mouth turning down at the sides. “Oh no, do you hate this? I wanted to impress you both.”

Louis laughs. “Babe, he’s four he isn’t that hard to impress. You didn’t have to do all of this.”

“But I wanted to,” Harry says firmly. “So if you aren’t saying you hate this can I put this down?”

Louis helps Harry over to a picnic table and they set down their bags. Before Harry can chicken out, Louis turns and yells out, “Noah!”

Across the playground Noah pops his head up from the slide and yells, “Comin’ Daddy!”

Harry groans. “Shit, he’s even cuter in person. I’m so screwed.”

Louis laughs and turns just in time to catch Noah when he comes barreling into Louis’ legs. “There you are, darling. Are you having fun?”

“Uh huh, only I tripped a little and hurt my knee, but I’m okay.”

Louis kisses his cheek. “You’re clumsy aren’t you? Are you hurt?”

Noah shakes his head and dusts his hands off on his pants. “No, I’m okay Daddy. I’m pretty tough.”

Louis smiles and turns so they’re facing Harry. “Noah, this is my friend Harry I was telling you about. Do you want to say hello?”

Noah narrows his eyes and looks Harry up and down. Harry smiles back cautiously but it’s clearly obvious that he’s terrified. There’s a few seconds of awkward silence but finally Noah grins and says, “Why’s your nose so huge?”

Harry cackles and Louis gasps. “Noah Tomlinson! That’s horribly rude, apologize to Harry right
Noah giggles. “Sorry Harry.”

“It’s alright, Noah, my nose is sort of gigantic isn’t it?”

“How do you know my name?” He asks with his eyebrows furrowed.

“You’re all your Dad talks about,” Harry laughs. “You’re his very favorite person.”

Louis’ heart feels like it might burst. Noah bites down on his lip and then grins. “I am pretty cool, my Zayn tells me,” he agrees. “I know you from my shirt.”

Harry smiles and nods about a half dozen times. “Yeah, I’m in a band. My two best friends and I, we travel around and sing.”

And that’s the most insane description of One Direction Louis has ever heard, but Noah still seems impressed. “What do you sing? Wheels on the bus?”

“Well not usually, but I could sing it for you if you’d like.”

Noah grins and tugs on Louis’ shirt. “I like Harry,” he whispers.

Louis kisses his forehead and smiles. “Yeah? He’s brought food as well.”

Noah gasps like he hasn’t eaten in ages and scrambles down from his father’s arms. Louis and Harry sit down across from each other, Harry reaching out underneath it with his foot to gently tap Louis’. When Louis looks up at him in question he only smiles and shakes his head.

“Can I see your music?” Noah asks while Louis helps him cut up the chicken Harry’s bought.

Harry nods and reaches into his pocket, pulling out his phone and a pair of earbuds. He clicks around a bit and offers the headphones to Noah who gladly accepts. Louis glances down at the screen and raises his eyebrows.

“What’s that?”

“New stuff,” Harry says simply. “Mostly stuff that will make the next album.”

Louis laughs and pushes Noah’s plate back over to him. “You’re trusting my four year old with this?”

“He looks like he likes it,” Harry grins and nods to where Noah is wiggling in his seat in an attempt to dance.

After listening to two more songs Noah takes the headphones off and finally stops wiggling.

“So? What did you think?” Harry asks him very seriously.

“It’s okay,” Noah replies, just as serious. “No wheels on the bus though, could be better.”

Louis barks out a surprised laugh and Noah grins, looking quite proud of himself. Harry just shakes his head and kicks at Louis’ leg under the table. “He’s a miniature you.”

Instead of answering, Louis smooths down Noah’s curls and kisses him on the forehead. “Eat your food darling, we can make fun of Harry later.”
Noah grins at that and the three of them start into the monstrous amount of food he’s brought. Who would willingly eat this much kale Louis really isn’t sure, but he somehow manages to finish a salad himself and force Noah to eat an apple before he lets his son run back off to the slide.

Harry takes a deep breath almost like he’s been holding it this whole time. “God, Louis he’s wonderful,” he whispers. “He’s adorable and sweet and—he’s just great Louis, really.”

Louis smiles and shrugs. “Well, he is mine.”

Harry laughs and stabs at his salad nervously. “So do you think he likes me? Like, I can stick around for a little longer?”

“We’ll see,” Louis says, just to be an asshole. He already knows the answer to that question and judging by Harry’s smile, so does he.

After Harry somehow convinces Louis to try a million different green leafy things he’s never heard of, Noah runs back up to the table and tugs on Louis’ shirt.

“Daddy,” he says. “Daddy, Dad—”

“Noah,” Louis interrupts, raising his eyebrows. “Was there something you needed?”

Noah nods and stands up on his tip toes so he can whisper in Louis’ ear. “I need ice cream.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “You need it?”

“It’s important,” Noah whines.

“Fine, we can get ice cream as long as you’re polite and help to clean up.”

Noah nods and climbs up onto the bench to kiss Louis’ cheek. “Thanks Daddy, I want strawberries.”

Louis smiles. “You always do, love.”

“Should I go?” Harry murmurs while Louis helps Noah collect the trash up so he can throw it out.

Louis shakes his head. “Of course not, you brought us lunch I’ll buy ice cream. It’s our treat, right Noah?”

Noah nods. “Yeah Harry, gotta have ice cream. I put everythin’ on mine, I’ll show you.”

While Noah explains exactly how he manages to fit every topping imaginable onto his ice cream, Louis finishes cleaning off the table. His phone beeps with a new message and he checks it without thinking.

It’s paid back, the message from Luke says simply. Stop bothering me and go back to taking that idiot for all he’s worth.

Louis’ walk stutters and he feels like all the oxygen has been punched out of him. On the one hand he’s glad that Luke’s finally paid the back child support he owed, maybe now he can afford to buy Noah a new pair of trainers instead of getting them secondhand for once, but on the other he’s shocked.

And he knows he really shouldn’t care what Luke thinks, he knows Luke has no clue what he’s talking about, but still. It hurts more than it should.
“Lou?” Harry calls, frowning deeply. “You alright?”

Louis nods and puts his phone back into his pocket, trying to forget about it. “Yeah,” he lies. “I’m fine. Come on boys, ice cream awaits.”

Harry wants so badly to hold Louis’ hand. He can’t of course, because Noah is in his arms talking animatedly about all his favorite music, but he wishes he could. Instead he listens intently to what Noah is telling him because he makes it sound incredibly important.

“You’ve got quite a good taste in music,” Harry remarks.

Noah nods and pats Louis’ shoulder. “I’m pretty cool. Coolest, probably.”

Louis grins and Harry has to hide his laughter behind his hand. He spent the whole week practically worrying about meeting Louis’ son, only to find there was nothing to be worried over. Noah’s just as charming as his father if not more so, and Harry is caught right in their web.

Not that that’s a bad thing, of course. He can’t think of anyone else he’d rather be with right now than the two of them.

“I think your hat is cool though,” Noah says, pointing to the large black hat Harry has perched on his hair. “And got long hair. Daddy, I want long hair.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Your hair is long enough, Harry’s a bad influence.

“Excuse you,” Harry scoffs. “My hair is wonderful, Noah thinks it’s cool.”

Noah nods and giggles, “Yeah Daddy, his hair is cool.”

“Just for that you can borrow my hat,” Harry decides, carefully taking his hat off and settling it onto Noah’s head. It falls down to cover his eyes which sends him into a fit of giggles until Harry manages to fix it so he can see.

Noah is red in the face from laughing and Harry’s stomach swoops. “Do I look cool?”

“You look incredibly cool,” Harry confirms.

Louis grins and presses a kiss to Noah’s temple. “You look great, pumpkin.”

Noah beams and hugs Louis tight around the neck. He eyes Harry and then leans up to whisper something in Louis’ ear.

“I don’t know baby, you’d have to ask him,” Louis whispers back.

The boy frowns and turns to look up at Harry. “We got a party on the weekend,” he says quite seriously. “My Fizzy’s goin away for awhile.”

Harry looks at Louis in confusion. “My sister,” he stage whispers. “She’s taking a gap year, backpacking to wherever she ends up. We’re having a going away party at mine on Saturday.”

Noah nods. “So you can come to our party, can’t you? And you can help me and Daddy decorate
too, it’s fun. There’s gonna be cake.”

Harry laughs at that. “Well, if there’s going to be cake then I can’t say no can I?”

Noah’s face lights up and he grins at Harry so wide his cheeks are probably aching. He’s so adorable that Harry can barely stand it. He claps his hands happily and wraps his arms around Louis’ neck again.

“I like you, Harry,” he decides.

When they get their ice cream Harry sits beside Noah at one of the small tables outside and lets the little boy try on his hat again. It falls into Noah’s face and he definitely gets ice cream on it, but Harry can’t bring himself to care about that when they’re having such a riveting conversation about dinosaurs.

Somewhere in the conversation Louis manages to sneak a picture that he sends to Harry. He grins so wide his cheeks hurt. “Can I put it on Instagram?” He asks cautiously. “I don’t know how you feel about that sort of thing yet.”

Louis makes a face and shrugs. “I dunno, I don’t want him to be fifteen and hating me because his face is all over the internet. You can post that one though, if you want to, you can barely see him.”

Harry nods immediately, quite serious about it. “As long as you’re okay with it,” he says, because the last thing he wants is to overstep and make Louis think he can’t trust him. There’s no way he could stand losing Louis at this point and he’s realizing it now.

“It’s okay with me, love,” Louis says softly.

Harry nods and then quietly taps away at his screen while Noah continues to theorize about what Hank’s favorite flavor of ice cream would be if he was real. The picture is just of the two of them, Harry smiling at Noah with his arms crossed over the table and a half eaten ice cream cone in one hand. Noah is turned to face him but the hat has fallen into his face and his hand has ice cream dripping down the side. Harry picks a black and white filter and just captions it with a ice cream cone emoji.

Louis laughs at it when he shows the picture, but gives him a good natured smile. “Adorable babe.”

Harry’s quite proud of it as well.

Their ice cream is finished far sooner than Harry would have liked and they’re soon making their way back to Louis’ car. Noah’s perched on Louis’ back and before Harry knows what’s going on he shouts, “Race you!” and Louis is taking off running down the path.

Harry follows, catching up with only a few quick strides. He does hold off a bit though, just enough so that the two boys reach the car first and Noah cries out in happiness.

“Daddy we did it,” he giggles, clambering down from Louis’ back. “We beat you Harry, you’re slow like a turtle!”

Harry laughs and stops beside Louis, pretending to be out of breath. “You did, didn’t you? You’re quick boys, I had no chance.”

Noah giggles and covers his smile with both hands. Louis gives Harry a smile that makes his insides feel all sorts of strange things. He thinks for a moment that maybe it’s just the fact that this has been one of the most fun days he’s had in a long time, but then he glances to where Louis is now holding
onto Noah’s hand and his heart drops.

Because fuck, he could get used to this and that thought terrifies him.

“Well we best head home, Noah’s got important business to attend to,” Louis says quite seriously.

Noah nods as well, his eyebrows pulling in and his whole face turning into a scowl. “It’s bath night.”

Harry somehow manages to stop his laughter. The boy is the spitting image of his father from the little vans on his feet to the way he talks and acts. He can’t wait to spend more time with both of them.

“I'll see you Saturday, yeah?” Harry asks, kneeling down so he’s at Noah’s level.

Noah nods and then rips his hand from Louis’ so he can surge forward and give Harry a quick hug. It takes a moment for Harry to realize what's going on but he quickly hugs Noah back. Louis is covering his laughter with his hand behind the both of them, shaking his head when Harry gives him a look.

“Thanks for lettin’ me wear your hat,” Noah says, pulling away and reaching up to take the hat off.

Harry shakes his head. “Keep it, yeah?”


“Just until Saturday,” Harry corrects himself quickly, waiting for Louis to give him an exasperated nod to keep talking. “You can borrow it, it makes you look cool.”

Apparently this was the right thing to say because Noah is giving him another hug and giggling. “Daddy, Harry says I can borrow his hat,” he says to Louis.

Louis rolls his eyes. “Come on love, before he spoils you rotten.”

Noah nods and gives Harry a quick high five. Louis opens the door for him and helps Noah strap into his car seat.

“That went well love,” Louis murmurs as soon as he’s got the door closed.

Harry grins and leans over to give Louis a peck on the cheek, very aware of the little eyes that follow his every movement from Louis’ car. “I’m so glad,” he says, letting out a relieved sigh. “I have never been so fucking nervous in my life.”

Louis laughs and reaches over to squeeze his hand. “He likes you. He’ll like you even more when you come over on Saturday to help with that party. I swear I’m in so far over my head with it it’s insane.”

“I can bring something,” Harry says quickly. “Like cupcakes? Can we make cupcakes?”

Louis smiles and pulls Harry in for a hug. He kisses his neck and nods. “Of course love,” he murmurs. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

There’s no answer, Louis just shakes his head and places a soft kiss under Harry’s ear. Harry squeezes him around the waist and then lets go so he can open the door for Louis’.
“Text me when you get home, yeah?” He murmurs.

Louis smiles and nods. “Sure mum,” he teases. “See you Saturday.”

“See you Saturday,” Harry promises.

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Louis’ mum isn’t exactly excited at the prospect of meeting Harry Styles, and she makes that known by calling him at exactly seven in the morning on Saturday to talk about it.

“And he’s going to be there the entire time?” She asks for probably the fifth time, but Louis isn’t keeping count any longer. He’s exhausted and Noah has gotten into the streamers and his living room is covered in glitter already.

“Yes Mum,” he says, catching Noah around the waist and giving him a look that stops him in his tracks. “He’ll be here any moment actually, so I’m afraid I have to go.”

Jay sighs, long and drawn out. “Well I suppose if you have to-”

“Right, I’ll see you at one then Mum. Noah say goodbye to your grandmother.”

Noah perks up and shouts, “Bye Gramma!” into the phone. Louis lets her say a quick goodbye back and hangs up.

“Is your room clean Noah?” Louis asks.

Immediately Noah’s eyes are going wide. “Oh no. Hank spilled finger paints on my bed this mornin’ Daddy.”

Louis sort of wants to bang his head against the wall repeatedly. He’s about to scold Noah when the doorbell rings and his son is tearing off towards it.

“I get it!” He shouts.

“No you will not,” Louis says, catching up to him easily. “I’m sorry, are you the adult here?”

Noah huffs. “I know it’s Harry.”

“That doesn’t mean you open the door,” Louis says, rolling his eyes. “Christ kid, you’re doing my head in today.”

Noah sighs but patiently waits while Louis unlocks the door and pulls it open to reveal Harry Styles standing on their front step in all his glory with grocery bags in his hands. “Hello my favorite Tomlinsons,” he sings, stepping inside and pressing a kiss to Louis’ cheek.

“Your only Tomlinsons I hope,” Louis mutters, reaching to take one of the bags in Harry’s hands.

Noah looks up at Harry and waves slightly. “Hi Harry. My Daddy said I can’t open the door for you.”

“Sorry Noah, but he’s probably right about that.”
“That’s dumb,” Noah mutters.

Louis frowns. “Language,” he snaps. “Go get your sheets off your bed, and try not to get paints everywhere, yeah? Why were you even into them?”

Noah shrugs, peering into the bags that Harry’s holding. “Makin’ a card for my Fizzy. Harry, what you got?”

“What do you have,” Louis corrects him out of habit.

Harry is smiling at him strangely but then again Harry is always sort of strange, so he’ll let it slide. “I’ve brought stuff to make cupcakes with. Maybe when you’re done cleaning you can help me.”

Noah’s eyes light up. “Daddy, can I? Please, I’ll be extra careful.” He begs, tugging on Louis’ shirt and pouting.

Louis sighs. “If you get your room cleaned then yes, you can help Harry make cupcakes. Is your room clean?”

In an instant Noah is tearing off to his room, shouting at Harry to wait for him. Harry laughs and pulls Louis into a hug as soon as Noah’s out of sight.

“Love, you’re exhausted,” he murmurs, kissing Louis’ cheek.

Louis shakes his head and pulls Harry in for a real kiss. When they pull away, Louis sighs and leans his forehead against Harry’s collarbone. Harry wraps his arms around Louis’ waist and just waits.

“He’s spilled finger paints all over his bed apparently,” Louis mumbles finally. “And my mother is dead set on hating you, Fizzy has no clue you’ll be here which will probably result in some screaming, and Zayn’s just texted to say they’ve messed the cake up and it’ll probably take another hour or so to fix it. That, and I can’t reach up high enough to get the stupid streamers up.”

When Harry starts laughing Louis immediately pushes him away. Harry just laughs harder at that and pulls Louis back in. “Love, I’ll fix it I promise. Don’t worry about a thing, your mother is going to love me, I can help put the decorations up, and I’ve dealt with enough screaming girls in my lifetime to know how to handle it. And if all else fails, we’ll at least have some kickass cupcakes.”

“What’d I do to deserve you?” Louis mutters against his jumper.

Harry shrugs. “Not sure, really. I am quite lovely.”

Louis rolls his eyes and pulls away only to find Noah watching them with a smug smile on his face. “Hello my Daddy,” he sing songs. “See you’re hugging Harry.”

“Have you cleaned your room?” Louis asks. Noah’s eyes go wide and he runs off again with a squeak, making Harry burst into giggles.

They empty the bags of ingredients Harry’s bought onto the kitchen counter. It’s an insane amount of things Louis thinks, but Harry insists on needing all of it. Seeing as Louis’ baking skills really don’t go past emptying a box into a bowl and adding water and maybe an egg if he’s feel adventurous, he decides to trust Harry and help him look for everything they need.

“We need a mixing bowl,” Harry says quite seriously.

Noah pops his head into the kitchen and frowns, taking in the mess Harry’s making of their kitchen
already. He’s wearing the hat Harry let him borrow which he’s hardly taken off since they left the park that day. The sight of it makes Harry smile.

“Don’t think we got that.” Noah says.

“We do have a mixing bowl,” Louis says, suddenly remembering the stash of things he’s buried deep in one of the bottom cabinets. He digs through the random shit he’s collected over the years and pulls out a set of dusty mixing bowls that he and Luke got as a wedding present. He stares at them for a second and then quickly shoves them in Harry’s direction.

Harry either doesn’t notice his reaction or just doesn’t mention it. “Right, well then let’s get started. Noah, have you cleaned your room?”

Noah nods. “Did so and I got my blankets off Daddy, they’re by the wash. Can I help now?”

Though Louis doesn’t exactly trust the fact that Noah’s cleaned up well enough, he still nods and helps him up onto the counter. He giggles and kicks his feet against the cabinets under him, watching how Harry starts sorting the ingredients and washing out the bowls.

“How you know this?” Noah asks.

Harry smiles. “Used to be a baker.”

Louis snorts at that and goes to stand at his side. “You’re twenty-five love, you didn’t ‘used to be’ anything.”

Harry pouts. “I was so a baker,” he says. “I worked at a bakery when I was sixteen, you know. Maybe I’ll take you there someday, Babs still makes the best cupcakes.”

The story seems to delight Noah. “You can bake and sing?” he asks, reaching for a measuring cup and diligently handing it to Harry who scoops out some flour.

“Harold’s a regular renaissance man, love.”

Noah scrunches up his face. “Don’t know what that means.”

Harry bites his lip to hold in laughter. “You’re dad’s teasing me, Noah. He’s being very rude, actually.”

“Daddy, you have to be nice,” Noah scolds, pushing Harry’s hat up and getting flour on the brim. “Harry’s not gonna come back if you’re rude.”

Louis shakes his head and kicks Harry’s foot. “Harry will get over it.”

Instead of answering, Harry blows a puff of flour onto Louis’ shirt and bursts into laughter right along with Noah. Louis rolls his eyes at the both of them and motions for Harry to get on with the cupcakes.

To Louis’ surprise, Noah actually sits still and listens to Harry’s instructions. He helps with all of the measurements and manages to get egg all over Harry’s hat somehow which makes Louis want to cry. That stupid hat probably cost about a thousand pounds and his son is currently wiping his hands all over it. Harry must notice how distraught he is because he soon banishes Louis out to the living room to start getting the decorations up.

From the living room Louis can hear their quiet conversation that makes him smile.
“Now what do we do?” Noah asks Harry, all business.

The oven goes off and there’s some crashing noises that are a bit disconcerting. “Now we put them into the liners. Do you like them?”

“Nice sparkles,” Noah replies. Louis snorts out a laugh and goes back to stringing up the fairy lights Perrie bought him across the room.

“There,” Harry says soon after. “Now we just have to wait.”

“How long we wait?”

“Twenty minutes and counting,” Harry replies. “Maybe we should go help your dad with the decorations. He’s quite short, I’m not sure he can reach up high enough.”

Louis scoffs. “I can hear you,” he shouts.

Noah shrieks and dissolves into laughter. Harry soon walks into the room, Noah on his back looking comfortable like they’ve known each other for years. He drapes his arms around Harry’s neck and smiles at Louis.

“Daddy, I made cupcakes,” he says. “Harry says I’m a good baker, probably the best.”

Louis smiles and walks up to him, leaning up to kiss Noah’s cheeks. “You’re the best at everything, aren’t you my love?”

Noah nods. “Probably, yeah. Gotta clean my hat so I can be cool for the party.”

“Why don’t you get dressed and then we can worry about the hat, okay? Let poor Harry go, he’s got a bad back.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “He weighs hardly anything Louis, I’m fine,” he grumbles, but he still bends down so Noah can stand up.

As soon as Noah’s out of the room Louis winces. “Harry, I’m sorry about the hat.”

“Babe, don’t worry about it,”

Louis shakes his head. “No, he’s completely destroyed it hasn’t he?”

Harry just shrugs. “It’s not that big a deal love,” he says. “He’s four years old, the fact that it’s intact at all at this point is surprising. Don’t worry, okay?”

And Louis is of course going to worry about it because there’s no way in hell he could ever pay to replace that hat. At the end of the day he hardly has enough money left over to justify taking Noah out to do something once in awhile, let alone buy expensive clothes he doesn’t need.

“Louis,” Harry says, putting his hand on Louis’ shoulder. “I don’t want you to worry about it, okay? It’s a gift, he can keep it.”

Louis frowns. “Harry-”

“Nope, no more talking,” Harry interrupts. “Which of the streamers are going on the ceiling?”

Louis sighs but let’s it go, as much as he hates to. Harry kisses his forehead and distracts him by lifting him up to place the rest of the decorations around the room. Louis’ stomach hurts from
laughing by the time Harry lets him back down and he almost forgets why he was ever upset in the first place.

Somehow the party manages to come together. Zayn gets the cake in just in time, setting it up in the middle of the sea of cupcakes Harry and Noah have decorated with copious amounts of frosting and sprinkles. Louis’ house looks like a party store threw up on it and Noah has been wrestled into his best jumper and Harry’s hat that has been cleaned of any egg stains.

People begin trickling in and Harry deals with the surprised squeaks of Louis’ sister’s friends with a patience Louis could never possess. By the time Fizzy shows up there are people shoved into what feels like every corner of Louis’ small house and Noah is entertaining everyone with his best dinosaur stories.

“My Fizzy, you’re here!” Noah shouts, interrupting his thrilling retelling of his favorite bedtime story.

Felicete laughs and bends down so Noah can make a run for her and jump into her arms, almost knocking her back into Lottie who’s directly behind her. Harry stiffens up a bit at Louis’ side which he hasn’t left since guests started arriving.

“There’s so many of them,” he whispers.

Louis laughs and tugs Harry over to the door where slowly but surely his sisters are trickling in. Lottie spots them first and barks out a shocked laugh.

“Louis what have you done?”

The other girls all look up and Fizzy goes pale. The twins give each other a look of pure panic and Phoebe whispers, “I told you so.”

“Hi,” Harry says, still smiling despite the four sets of eyes that are scrutinizing his every move. “I’m Harry.”

Fizzy stares at him for a moment and then looks to Louis, back to Harry, and then she punches Louis in the arm.

“What the hell?” Louis demands. “I’ve brought your idol to your birthday party and this is how you repay me?”

Noah frowns. “My Fizzy, that isn’t nice. Harry and me made you cupcakes.”

Daisy gapes at him. “You, you made cupcakes with Harry Styles? How is this fair-how is the world fair? Louis gets Harry Styles, and who do I get? No one except that idiot in my lunch hour who won’t stop texting me.”

“I think we need to sit down,” Phoebe says, taking Daisy’s hand and leading her away. “Lovely to meet you Harry.”

Harry, who seems to be trying his hardest to keep his laughter in, nods at them. “You too, girls.”

Fizzy still doesn’t seem to be over it. “Why didn’t anyone tell me he was going to be here?” She
demands, looking around the room and landing on Zayn and Perrie with a scowl. “I bet you all knew, didn’t you? A little warning would’ve been nice, I look like shit Louis.”

“I think you look lovely,” Harry pipes in. It doesn’t help in the least and Fizzy blushes bright red. Lottie is still behind her, biting down on her cheek to stop a smile.

“I told you that…” Louis trails off and Fizzy seems to get it because she lets Noah back down and tells him to run off and play. He waits until his son is out of earshot before finishing the thought in a whisper. “I told you I was bringing my boyfriend Fiz, who’d you think I meant?”

Harry makes a pleased noise at that and tugs Louis closer by his waist which does not go unnoticed by either of his sisters. Lottie just smiles softly but Felicite seems halfway to a heart attack.

“I didn’t think you’d actually pulled Harry Styles,” she hisses. “I assumed you thought you were funny, which you aren’t Louis. You are not funny, do not be proud of yourself for this.”

Harry smiles. “Well, he has pulled me hasn’t he? Noah and I made all the cupcakes if you want to try one, hopefully they aren’t too awful.”

“I can’t even believe this,” Fizzy breathes. “I cannot believe that out of everyone, you pick my stupid brother.”

“Well, he is quite handsome.” Harry says sweetly.

Fizzy looks ready to explode. “I cannot, oh my god,” she stammers. “I worshiped you, is that creepy? I’m sorry I didn’t mean to say that, I think my mouth is just moving without my permission. I need a drink, excuse me.”

They all watch her stumble her way to where a group of her shocked friends are stood around the alcohol and Lottie laughs. “I think you broke her,” she teases, turning to give Harry a once over. “I’m Lottie by the way, totally used to celebrities at this point so don’t expect any screaming.”

“I know who you are,” Harry says excitedly. “You know Lou Teasdale, don’t you? I’ve seen some of your portfolio, you’re brilliant.”

“Well he’s charming Louis, I’ll give you that,” Lottie laughs. “Is this you’re way of telling me she’s looked at my application?”

Harry’s face goes pale. “Oh, god don’t tell her I told you. She was going to call you and-I promise it’s not like-I didn’t tell her you’re Louis’ sister or anything, she really doesn’t care.”

Lottie laughs and pats Harry’s shoulder. “Don’t worry, okay? I know how great I am, I don’t need your help. But thank you, Harry, that means a lot.”

Harry smiles again and nods. “Sorry if I ruined the surprise,” he says sheepishly.

Lottie just rolls her eyes and looks to Louis. “I see what you meant. Excuse me for a minute, I have to try one of those cupcakes before all of the twins’ friends get them.”

“What’s that about?” Louis asks once they’re alone again.

Harry blushes, still looking embarrassed about it. “My old makeup artist Lou, she’s looking for an assistant and she was showing me some of the people she’s narrowed it down to and one of them was Lottie. I didn’t say anything though, but I think that’s who she’s going to pick.”
Louis smiles. “Why didn’t you say something love?”

“I didn’t want you to think I was like, trying to bribe you into liking me by getting your sister a job with my friends.”

Louis laughs and shakes his head. “Trust me darling, I don’t think that. Besides, Lottie is talented enough, she doesn’t need your help. Come on, I think I need a drink after that.”

Harry makes Louis something fruity and strong and he seems quite proud of it. They stay on the sidelines of the party, watching Fizzy and all of her friends celebrate. Louis sighs and leans against Harry’s side.

“She’s practically an adult now,” he says.

Harry smiles. “What’s going to happen when Noah goes traveling the world on a gap year somewhere?”

“Noah is never leaving me,” Louis says simply. “He’s going to live here with me forever so he can take care of his ailing father.”

Harry stifles his laughter with his hand. “You’re not ailing, Louis.”

Louis just shrugs. “At the rate he’s going, I probably will be,” he decides. “Noah, come tell Harry about us.”

From across the room, Noah runs out of Daisy’s arms and lifts his arms up so Louis will hold him. “Harry, me and my Daddy are a team,” he says quite seriously. “It’s Daddy and Noah forever.”

“That’s right,” Louis agrees. “We take care of each other, don’t we love?”

Noah nods and holds out his pinky for Louis to hold.

Harry smiles at the two of them but his eyes look sad. “Well, you two have it all figured out huh?”

Noah nods and kisses Louis’ cheek. “Daddy, when can I have a party?”

“No until November,” Louis teases, tickling his side. “My little blizzard baby.”

Noah giggles. “Harry’s gotta come too. Can sing me Happy Birthday.”

Louis’ smile falters but he quickly recovers and says, “I’m sure he’ll try to be there, darling.”

“I’ll clear my schedule and everything,” Harry says, and Louis really isn’t sure if he’s joking.

Noah grins and scrambles down from Louis’ arms so he can go bother Zayn. Louis watches him go and sighs.

“I told you he gets attached.”

Harry shrugs. “Well who’s to say I won’t be around in November,” he asks. “Tour will be over by then and I’d love to come to his birthday Lou.”

Louis raises his eyebrows. “How could you know we’ll still be together?”

“Because,” Harry says, his eyebrows furrowing. “Because-you make me happy and I don’t want to deny myself that anymore.”
Louis turns against Harry and tucks his face into the crook of Harry’s neck. He sighs softly and says, “You make me happy too, H. So happy.”

Harry gently scratches Louis’ scalp and whispers, “Good, that’s all I want.”

They stay standing like that for god knows how long, and Louis only pulls away because Harry’s hand stills in his hair and he can hear the younger man’s heart speed up a bit through his jumper.

“I think I see your mum,” he says, letting his hand drift down to Louis’ back. “Is she the one glaring at me from the doorway like she’s thinking of chopping my hands off for touching her son?”

Louis smiles and turns to find his mother is indeed glaring at Harry. “That would be her. She’s coming this way, it’s your last chance to make an escape,” he says, only half kidding.

Any doubts Louis might’ve had disappear when Harry grips his waist and smiles. “Wouldn’t dream of it. Mums are my specialty, just you wait.”

Jay walks over, pawning the youngest twins off onto Dan and Lottie so she can interrogate Harry properly. Harry grins widely because he’s always cheerful, even in the face of almost certain death. Louis is a bit surprised to see the way his mum softens a bit at Harry’s smile.

“Hello love,” Jay says, leaning forward to hug Louis and kiss his cheek. “Who do we have here?”

And she knows full well who Harry is, but he still jumps at the chance to properly introduce himself. “I’m Harry Styles,” he says. “It’s really lovely to meet you.”

She frowns at him but Louis can tell it’s mostly just for show, probably because Harry hasn’t done anything wrong just yet. “Hello Harry,” she says kindly. “I’m Louis’ mum, you can call me Jay. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

The last comment is directed to Louis, mostly because he hasn’t told her very much about Harry after their fight. Harry of course is not perturbed by their frowns.

“I’ve heard a lot about you too,” he says. “All wonderful things of course. I figured it must be true seeing as how you’re responsible for Louis.”

Louis scoffs at that but Jay still cracks the smallest of smiles. “Well, where’s my grandson?”

“Off bothering someone, probably,” Louis mutters.

Harry pouts. “He’s been perfect all day Louis, just because you think finger paints aren’t for beds doesn’t mean the rest of us do.”

Louis barks out a laugh and shakes his head. “I’ll go find him. Will the two of you be alright?” He gives his mother a look and she smiles innocently.

“We’ll be just fine Louis.”

Even though Louis hardly believes that, he nods and leaves the two of them to go retrieve Noah. He finds the boy fighting with Doris about which is better cupcakes or cake, while Dan and Lottie supervise.

“You’ve left the poor boy with your mum already?” Dan asks, obviously impressed with Harry’s bravery.

Lottie’s eyebrows shoot up. “The ultimate test, innit? If he hasn’t fled by the time he get back
Harry’s a keeper.”

Dan seems to think it over and then nods. “Shall we place our bets?”

Louis rolls his eyes and picks Noah up from the floor. “You’re both just hilarious,” he lies. “Love, your grandma is asking for you.”

Noah gasps and kicks at Louis’ hips with his socked feet. “Daddy, Daddy! My Gramma has to try my cupcakes!”

Although Louis is a bit worried that Lottie might be right and Harry might just run out as soon as he turns his back, he agrees to let Noah grab a plate and pile four cupcakes onto it.

It’s to Louis surprise when they walk up to Jay and Harry and find them close together, laughing like old friends about something Harry’s showing her. It’s been a very long time since Louis’s let anyone meet anyone in his family, let alone his mum, and no one has ever gotten this close to Jay this fast. Even before Noah was born she would stick to her tactic of trying to scare them off for at least three visits before she warmed up to anyone Louis brought around.

Now with a grandson to protect as well, she’s hardly glanced at anyone Louis has ever mentioned to her. Louis wonders if it’s because of Luke, if it’s because she never liked him but eventually stopped telling him so to keep Louis happy. He isn’t sure he could ever blame her for wanting to protect them after having to put Louis back together in those weeks and months after Luke moved out.

“What are we looking at?” Louis asks.

Harry jolts up and grins when he spots the two of them. “Love, look at this picture Gemma’s sent me of Eva. She’s got a work party, Eva’s wearing the dress I bought her in Paris. Isn’t she beautiful?”

Louis smiles and agrees of course. Harry beams and then quietly excuses himself while he sends Gemma a message back.

“Grandma, you meeting Harry?” Noah asks, giggling when Jay gives him a hug and kiss.

Jay smiles at him. “I am darling. He seems very nice.”

Noah nods earnestly. “So cool, sings songs and we made cupcakes. Daddy’s got them.”

“You two made cupcakes?” Jay asks, reaching for one of the cupcakes and carefully pulling the wrapper away from all the icing Noah’s put on them.

“We did,” Harry confirms, reaching for a cupcake as well. “Noah’s a very talented baker.”

Noah nods and starts ticking off on his fingers everything he was responsible for. “I crack eggs, pour flour, and did icin’. Harry did the oven, but I can help mix.”

“You did, and you were wonderful at it,” Harry confirms

Noah smiles, obviously quite proud of himself, and takes a huge bite of his cupcake. “Daddy can’t bake but Harry’s gonna teach me more, Grandma,” he mumbles around the crumbs in his mouth.

“Hey,” Louis snaps. “I can bake.”

Jay laughs at that along with both Harry and Noah. “Love, the last time you baked was when you burnt the brownies for the twin’s birthday.
“Only the edges burned, they were still edible.” Louis says, maneuvering Noah around on his hip.

“I’m sure they were delicious, love,” Harry says, his hand returning to Louis’ back. He gently presses his thumb against Louis’ skin and Louis wants to kiss him so badly. “Do you want me to take him for a bit? You look tired, maybe you should sit down.”

Louis rolls his eyes but he still lets Harry take Noah into his arms. “I’m not that tired,”

“You haven’t had proper sleep in days,” Harry says confidently, and Louis can’t even argue that because he’s been the one up texting Harry at all hours of the night lately.

Jay frowns. “Is something wrong, Louis?”

Before Louis can even answer, Harry’s jumping in. “He’s got a huge article due at work next week. He’ll smash it of course he always does, but he just worries you know?”

Jay’s eyes soften and Louis can actually see the moment she decides that she likes Harry. Her guard comes down and she no longer looks standoffish and scary, she looks like the mum Louis has always known who just worries too much and loves him to death.

“I do know,” she agrees. “Louis, why don’t we go sit down. Harry, you have to tell me the recipe you used for these cupcakes they’re wonderful.”

Harry smiles his toothy smile and gently nudges Louis towards the couch, trailing behind Jay while he talks about how simple and easy it is. Even though Louis really is exhausted, he can’t help but feel so accomplished. His mum likes Harry, she really does, and if she likes him then he has to be doing something right.

It isn’t until later on when all of Fizzy’s friends and the rest of the guests have drifted home after teary goodbyes and far too much cake leaving behind just Louis’ family that he and his mum get a moment alone. They’re in Louis’ garden, the air still warm with what remains of summer slowly drifting away. A half eaten pizza sits on the table and he’s got practically every chair he owns pulled out so they can all sit.

Harry however is sat in the grass with both sets of twins and Noah around him. He’s telling Daisy and Phoebe funny stories about the places he’s been over the years while Doris happily sticks flowers into his curls. Noah and Ernest have a few of his dinosaurs out and they’re using Harry’s legs as mountains.

“He’s really lovely,” Jay murmurs to Louis, watching Harry praise the beauty of the weeds Doris has weaved into his hair.

Louis smiles. “Yeah, he’s alright.”

Jay reaches over and brushes a piece of hair away from Louis’ face. Louis isn’t sure how she manages to look so happy and so sad at once, it’s quite confusing. “I’m sorry,” she says. “I don’t want you to think I don’t trust your judgment Louis, its just-I won’t see you hurt like that again. I won’t let it happen again.”

“I’m an adult Mum, I can make my own choices,” Louis reminds her gently.

Jay nods and reaches for his hand. She squeezes it in her own and her eyes sparkle in the dusty light. “I know you are Louis, but you’re always going to be my baby. It’s always going to be my job to protect you, and you know that, I know you do. But I don’t think he’s someone I have to protect you from.”
Louis frowns. “What does that mean?”

“I’m trying to tell you I like him,” she says softly. “I think he could be really good for you. Both of you.”

Louis looks out to where Harry now has Noah sitting in his lap. Doris is passing him handfuls of dirt and weeds she’s pulled from the ground and he’s carefully sifting through them to find the flowers which he places into Noah’s hair to slowly form a crown. He’s still talking to Daisy and Phoebe but his attention is on Noah who is giggling but trying his hardest to keep still.

And Louis honestly can’t remember the last time he’s felt so comfortable with anyone like this. They both watch Harry finish off the crown and show Noah using his phone. Noah shrieks with glee and waves at Louis.

“Daddy! Daddy, lookit!”

Louis smiles at him and then he locks eyes with Harry who’s smiling right back. His hair is full of grass and weeds, his shirt has a small stain on the collar from where he attempted-and failed-to beat Phoebe at a pizza eating contest, and he’s smiling so beautifully that everyone else seems captured in it. Even Lottie who has been trying to keep up her careless facade all day can’t help but crack a smile at him.

“I think he is good for us too,” Louis says, suddenly so certain of it.

And Harry obviously doesn’t hear him, but his grin still widens and the whole garden erupts into laughter and chaos when he declares a tickle war on the youngest children starting with Noah.

Jay squeezes Louis’ hand harder and they both watch on while Harry Styles is easily defeated in a tickle war by three small children and a dinosaur or two.
and in the rain give you sunshine

Chapter Notes

This chapter is the result of listening to Landslide by Oh Wonder on repeat for far too long. Hopefully you enjoy it though. It's very much a filler chapter but I guess there has to be at least one...or...seven. Oh well.

Enjoy <3

Luke and Louis agree to meet on Monday. Louis works from home that day, just because the thought of driving when he’s this nervous and shaky is not something he wants to experience. Noah is working hard on his next coloring book masterpiece while Louis works on his next assignment when the doorbell rings. So much for Louis pawning Noah off on his mum so he could actually have an adult conversation.

Noah gasps and goes to answer it but Louis stops him. “I’ll get it love, wait here.”

“But Daddy-”

“Wait here, Noah,” Louis says sternly.

Noah sighs but does as he’s told. Louis leaves him and goes to answer the door. On the other side stands Luke. He’s looking around the neighborhood with a frown on his face. Probably brings back bad memories of all the men he cheated on Louis with, Louis supposes.


Luke shrugs. He looks like he’s about to say something but instead he smiles and says, “Hey, kid.”

Louis’ heart stops. He looks back and sure enough, there’s Noah standing in the hall frowning at Luke. “Daddy, who’s that?”

“No one love, just a friend,” Louis says quickly. “Didn’t I ask you to stay in the living room?”


“I hardly think that’s any of your concern,” Louis growls before turning back towards Noah. “Baby, go up to your room now okay? Daddy has to talk to his friend about something.”

Noah frowns. It’s obvious he doesn’t like this at all, but he nods anyway. “Okay,” he says carefully. “I’ll be there if you need me Daddy.”

Louis smiles. “Thank you sweetheart. Here take my phone, you can play a game while you wait yeah?”

The fact that Louis hardly ever lets him do that is probably what really convinces Noah to listen. He takes the phone from Louis’ hand, pecks him on the cheek, and walks off to his room.
Louis hates this.


“Don’t talk about him,” Louis snaps. “Nothing about him has anything to do with you. What did you want to talk about?”

Luke smiles mischievously. “What, you aren’t going to invite me in?”

As much as Louis hates it, he sighs and lets Luke in. They sit on opposite ends of the couch, Louis pressed up against one arm in an attempt to stay as far away as possible. He doesn’t think of when they first came to look at the house, about how he’d almost cried at the thought of raising their family together.

“So, Harry-”

“We aren’t here to talk about Harry,” Louis interrupts. “You get absolutely no say in my life, Lucas, understand? What did you really need to talk about.”

Luke’s smug smile makes Louis as angry as it always does, but nowhere near as angry as his next statement does. “Noah, actually, that’s who I came to talk about. I hardly think it’s fair that I have to support a child I’ve hardly met.”

“And who’s fault is that?” Louis demands. “I’ve given you far too many chances over the years, and I’m done with it now. He’s just a baby, he doesn’t deserve you coming in and out of his life whenever you feel like it.”

“Trust me Louis, I don’t want him,” Luke mutters, and god Louis fucking hates him. “I’ve been speaking to my lawyers and they don’t think it’s quite fair either. The kids doesn’t even know who I am.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Well there’s no way to get out of it-”


Louis snaps. “Fuck you,” he growls. “Don’t you dare sit there and act like I somehow fucking forced you into this. Maybe you don’t want him now, but you wanted him just as badly as I did before you started running off and cheating on me. I don’t know what I did that made you stop loving me, but I don’t care anymore. All I care about is Noah never feeling like he was unwanted because for me he never was.”

Luke laughs like that’s the most hilarious thing he’s ever heard. “Why do you think I agreed to it Louis?” he sneers. “Because you wouldn’t fucking let up. And yeah maybe for a bit there I did want him, because I was stupid enough to think a baby might fix our marriage.”

“And what, you thought fucking other guys would fix our marriage as well?” Louis shouts.

Luke shakes his head and stands. “I’m not going to sit here and listen to this. The point is Louis, I don’t want your damn kid. I don’t want my rights anymore.”

Louis feels like he’s been punched in the chest. It’s not like this is the first time Luke’s suggested it, he’s been threatening for years, but Louis knows this is finally it. “No,” he says. “No that’s not why. You just don’t want to pay anymore, you want to leave me alone again. You just want to see me crash and burn because that’s all you’ve ever wanted.”
There’s no denying it, and Louis knows that Luke realizes this. So, he just shrugs his shoulders and says, “It is what it is, love. I’m afraid I have to go now, meeting with my lawyers and all that. It was nice talking to you.”

“Fuck you,” Louis spits, jumping up from the couch. “Get out of my house. He doesn’t need you, we will never need you. Get out!”


“Get the fuck out,” Louis bellows.

As soon as he’s out the door, Louis slams it shut. He locks it and then collapses against it, sobbing. It hits all at once like a fucking tidal wave. What’s he going to do? How is he going to make it out of this?

“Daddy?” Noah’s shaky voice whispers.

It just makes Louis cry harder. “I’m sorry,” he hiccups. “I’m sorry Noah, I’m so sorry.”

Noah tugs on his shirt. “Daddy, please don’t cry.”

Louis says nothing. He hears Noah walk out of the room and quietly return seconds later. “Daddy, we can cuddle on the couch. You’ll feel better. Hank wants to cuddle, Daddy.”

Louis finally pulls away from the door. Noah is watching him with tear filled eyes, holding Hank up for Louis to take. The sight just makes Louis feel like the worst father ever, but he says nothing. Instead of taking Hank, Louis picks Noah up and holds him tight to his chest.

“It’s okay,” Noah whispers.

God, Louis thinks, how awful is it that his four year old child has to comfort him?

Louis carries Noah to the couch and sits down, still holding Noah tight and crushing Hank between them. “I’m so sorry, baby. I’m so sorry.”

Noah shakes his head. “I love you. Don’t cry Daddy.”

Instead of answering and crying even harder, Louis shakes his head and holds Noah even closer. He closes his eyes and just breathes, remembering why he’s here. Noah needs him. His baby needs him to be okay.

The sound of the lock on the door clicking startles Louis, but then he hears his mum calling their names. “Louis?” she yells. “Noah, where are you sweetheart?”

Jay walks into the living room and freezes. “Mum?” Louis whispers, surprised.

“Baby, what’s wrong?” She asks, quiet obviously alarmed. “Noah called me and said you were yelling and someone was here?”


Jay’s expression turns stormy. “Why was he here?”

Before Louis can say anything, Noah’s speaking. “He made my Daddy cry,” he murmurs. “He did it, I know. Yelled at my Daddy and he cried and I was scared.”
“Oh, baby,” Louis whispers.

Noah sniffs, wiping at his nose with his jumper sleeve. “Called my Grandma and my Zayn like you showed me on your phone. I was scared Daddy, I’m sorry.”

“You did the right thing Noah,” Jay says softly, coming to sit down beside them.

“Grandma’s right, love,” Louis whispers, gently fixing Noah’s hair. “You did the right thing, you don’t have to be sorry. You’re a good boy, okay? My very best boy.”

“He’s not a friend,” Noah says quite seriously. “Friend’s don’t make you cry. Friend’s make you laugh like Harry and my Zayn.”

Louis cracks a smile at that. “You’re absolutely right baby. I’m sorry you had to hear me yell.”

“It’s okay Daddy, I wanted to yell too.”

Louis chuckles and presses his lips to Noah’s forehead. He’s the luckiest man alive, he knows that. He’s got Noah, and that’s all he needs.

Jay gives Louis a knowing look and he knows he’s going to have to explain himself to her later on. For now, she seems alright with avoiding the subject. “Noah love, why don’t we make Daddy some tea?” she asks.

Noah nods and raises his arms up so Jay will carry him to the kitchen. As soon as they’re gone, Louis goes to Noah’s room to find his phone. It’s laying on his bed and he has ten missed calls from his mum and Zayn. Wincing, Louis reaches for it and calls Zayn.

Their conversation is short. Zayn is already on his way over, having frantically left work when he got Noah’s phone call. He refuses to turn back, especially when Louis tells him why he was crying in the first place. Louis let’s it go because even though he feels like a burden right now, all he wants is his best friend to tell him everything’s okay.

“Daddy?” Noah calls from the living room.

Louis hastily wipes at the tears forming in his eyes and heads back to where Noah is waiting by the couch. “Just talking to your uncle love,” he explains. “What have you got there?”

“Hot chocolate for me,” Noah says happily, sitting down and patting the spot next to him. “Grandma says she can carry tea. It’s hot.”

“Good plan,” Louis agrees. He sits down beside his son and pulls him closer carefully.

He watches him carefully scowl down at his mug and blow on it softly before taking a sip. Noah wrinkles his nose and murmurs something about marshmallows, but takes another sip and sighs happily to himself. Louis suddenly remembers holding his little hands when he first learned to walk, quietly coaxing the two syllables Dada out of him for months and crying with joy with he finally yelled them out over dinner one night.

Everyone told him that it’d feel like this, like his son’s growing up far too fast right in front of him, but Louis never wanted to believe that.

“I love you so much Noah, you know that?” Louis says quietly.

Noah doesn’t even hesitate. He smiles warmly up at Louis and says, “I know Daddy. I love you
too.”

Louis kisses the top of his head and leaves him to his hot chocolate.

It isn’t until Noah finally goes to take his nap that Louis can tell his mum what happened. He’s not surprised when he starts crying again just remembering all the awful things Luke had said to him, and that’s how Zayn finds them.

“I’m going to kill him,” he growls, storming into the room and pulling Louis into a hug. “I’ll kill him Louis. Are you okay?”

Louis nods against Zayn’s shoulder and holds tight to the back of his baggy shirt. “I’m okay now,” he whispers, though he’s not sure if that’s true.

Jay reaches out for Louis’ hand when the two of them finally sit down. “Love, you can fight it.”

“I’m not sure if I even want to,” Louis admits with a sad laugh. “Because as selfish as it is, the thought of him never being able to take my baby away makes me feel better.”

Zayn stops that particular train of thought right away. “He wouldn’t, you know he wouldn’t.”

“To hurt me he would,” Louis murmurs.

Neither of them want to debate that, Louis knows it. Zayn sighs. “Love, even if he ever wanted to no one would let him. You’re a great father.”

“No, he’s right isn’t he?” Louis asks, his voice cracking. “I’m a bad father. I can’t even support my kid on my own and he was right about Harry, I’m dragging men through his life and I always promised I wouldn’t and Noah heard us fighting today and he was so scared he had to call you both—”

“Louis,” Jay interrupts, stopping his rambling before he can work himself up to a full on panic attack. His mother knows him too well sometimes.

He sucks in a few deep breaths until it feels less like there’s a weight on his chest. “I’m sorry,” he whispers.

Zayn squeezes him tight. “Don’t be sorry.”

“Not one part of that is true,” His mother says sternly. “Being a single parent is hard Louis, and it isn’t something you ever planned on having to do. There’s no shame in needing help once in awhile. And you are not dragging men through Noah’s life, as far as he’s concerned you’ve never been with anyone. You’d never do that to him, Louis.”

Zayn nods and agrees. “Your mum’s right Lou, you’re doing a great job and it’s not your fault Luke’s an asshole. Noah knows to call us if he ever needs to, and that’s what he did. He loves you Louis, he was just worried about you. He’s a kid, he doesn’t understand.”

Despite it all, Louis knows it’s not true. He knows he’s a bad father, he knows Noah deserves better than what Louis can give him. But he doesn’t know what to do about it, so he just cries silently and lets Zayn hug him.

“I love you,” he says. “You are an absolutely fantastic dad. Don’t doubt that, okay?”

Louis’ shoulders shake with the sobs he’s trying so hard to hold in. Instead of letting them out, he
presses his face to Zayn’s neck. “I want to go to bed.”

“Why don’t you go take a nap sweetheart?” Jay says softly. “I’ll get the house picked up and start on dinner. That’s what you need, a good meal.”

Louis wants to laugh but he doesn’t. Jay accepts his hug and whispered apology and Zayn follows him to his room. They get into bed together, Louis pressed close to Zayn’s chest just like old times.

They’re both quiet, Zayn gently rubbing Louis’ back and Louis laying with his eyes closed and trying to stop his crying.

Finally, Zayn says, “If money’s going to be a problem-”

“No Zayn,” Louis interrupts. “I’m not doing that. I won’t take your money.”

Zayn sighs but doesn’t push the issue, like always. “Fine. But if you ever need it you know to call me, yeah? Your stupid pride isn’t worth getting your lights turned off.”

“I know.”

“Good. Have you thought about talking to your boss about a raise? You practically run the place as it is, you deserve it.”

Louis smiles. “I’ll get on that babe,” he whispers.

Zayn nods and sighs. “Go to sleep, I’ve got you.”

And he always does, Louis knows that. So he falls asleep.

Harry bites on his lip nervously while he waits for Louis to answer his phone. They don’t have plans tonight, he’d asked but Louis had said he might be busy. But that doesn’t mean Harry’s going to give up of course, and there’s this restaurant his friend’s just recommended to him and he wants to make reservations but not without at least asking first.

“Hello?” A voice that is decidedly not Louis’ finally answers.

Harry frowns. “Hi, sorry is Louis around?”

“Sorry babe, he’s sleeping,” the person whispers and Harry’s anxiety spikes far more than it should.

“Oh. Well-then I guess I-”

“Harry, it’s Zayn.”

Harry stops stuttering and breathes a sigh of relief. He’s such an idiot. “Oh, hey Zayn. What’s the matter, is Lou okay?”

Zayn sighs heavily. “Bit of a dramatic day, but he should be alright. Do you want me to wake him?”

“No, no don’t,” Harry says quickly. “Just tell him I called? And that I hope he feels better.”
The words make Zayn laugh for some reason. “Will do, Harry. Hey, do you mind if we talked for a minute?”

“Yeah sure, what about?” Harry asks.

“Noah,” Zayn says, and that’s not really what Harry expected. “Listen, you know that if you hurt him I’ll kill you. And not in like, Louis’s my best mate so be nice way, in a that’s my nephew and I will actually bury you way.”

The fierceness of his tone tells Harry that Zayn is absolutely not messing around here. So he answers in all seriousness. “No, of course I wouldn’t. I would never, he’s just a baby. Who would hurt him?”

“You’d be surprised,” Zayn sighs. “Listen Harry, I think you’re a good guy. At least you haven’t given me any reason to think otherwise. You seem sweet and I know you and Louis really get on and Noah seems to like you as well.”

“Zayn I really like Louis,” Harry admits. “And I really want to be with him. He’s—he’s just special, you know? I’ve never felt this way about anyone before. Sorry, I’m rambling.”

There’s a soft noise on the other line like Zayn’s trying not to laugh. “No, it’s okay I get it. Not about Louis though, he’s too much of a nuisance for me.”

Harry smiles. “Never for me,” he says, sounding like a lovesick puppy even to himself. “Is he okay, really? I just worry about him sometimes is all.”

Zayn pauses and Harry knows he’s trying to decide whether or not to lie on Louis’ behalf. Not that Harry minds it, he knows what it’s like when your best mate starts dating someone seemingly out of nowhere and you’re still trying to protect them. It makes him happy actually, knowing Louis has someone looking out for him.

“Honestly no, Harry, he’s not okay,” Zayn says finally. “But if he wants to talk about it to you then that’s his decision. But for the most part he’s doing okay. He’s going to be fine.”

There’s a moment where Harry almost thanks Zayn for actually being honest with him. He quickly decides that might be a strange thing to do and holds it in. “Just have him call me?” he asks instead.

“I will babe,” Zayn promises. “And I’ll talk to you later, yeah?”

“Yeah, thanks Zayn,” Harry says.

They both hang up and Harry runs his hands through his hair. He stands up from his bed and decides he needs to do something to get his mind off of things for awhile. His yoga mat sits in the corner of his hotel room looking dejected and Harry decides that would work.

There’s a garden on the roof of his hotel so Harry heads up, bottle of water in one hand and yoga mat under his arm. It’s completely empty save for him and a bird that’s quietly flitting around. Harry takes a deep breath, clears his head, and lays his mat out.

Yoga was one of the programs his rehab offered. Harry had turned his nose up at it to begin with, mostly because he was so sure he didn’t have a problem and that he didn’t deserve to be there. Eventually though, after spending far too long in bed sweating and crying and puking up nothing, Harry had to get out of that room. Yoga was outside and that’s what Harry really needed, just fresh air.

After coming to terms with the fact that yeah, he did have a problem and yeah, he did need help,
Harry kept it up. It calms him down, centers him and all the bullshit the books tell you. Really it just
gives him a much needed break from reality once in awhile.

It’s well into the afternoon and at the very end of Harry’s yoga routine when Louis finally calls him
back. The face of his phone lights up since he’s left it on silence and Harry reaches for it when he
sees Louis’ name.

“Hey love,” he answers easily.

“Hey,” Louis replies, his voice scratchy from sleep. “Sorry, I only just woke up. Zayn told me you
called.”

Harry sits up and pulls his feet in a butterfly pose. “Don’t worry about it Lou. I was only calling to
see if you’d be free tonight after all?”

“I’m not sure I’m up to it Harold,” Louis sighs.

Harry frowns but remembers what Zayn said about Louis not being okay and tries again. “We could
just come back to the hotel. Get room service, watch a movie. There’s a pool too, if you wanted.”

Louis is about to say something but a whisper in the background stops him. “Mum, really?” he asks
quietly. “I guess then-my mum says she can take Noah for the night. So I guess I could then.”

Harry smiles triumphantly and reminds himself to send Jay a lovely bouquet of flowers before he
leaves. “Well good, I miss you.”

“You only just saw me a day ago,” Louis teases.

“Doesn’t matter, I still miss you,” Harry says, letting go of his feet and stretching his legs out. “Spend
the night with me?”

The last part is barely a whisper. Louis chuckles at him. “Alright darling. When should I come
over?”

“Whenever you want, I’ll be here.”

“As soon as I can then. I’ll see you soon Harold.”

Harry looks down at his lap to hide his red cheeks even though no one’s around to see. “I’ll see you
soon,” he says easily.

The hotel Harry’s staying at is twenty minutes from Louis’ house and far too lavish for his liking.
But, he isn’t the popstar staying here so he supposes it’s none of his business. The front desk looks
reluctant to let him in, even when he gives them the ridiculous fake name Harry’s using for the room.
It’s quite obvious they know Mick Green is Harry Styles and politely ask him to wait while they call
up to ask if it’s alright to let Louis in.

He’s sure they probably think he’s some kind of groupie when they give him the room number and
show him to an elevator, but Louis could care less. Harry’s staying on the very top floor so Louis has
a bit of time to try to fix his hair in the mirror on the wall of the elevator.

There’s only a few doors on the top floor, and Louis easily finds Harry’s. He knocks and only has to wait seconds for Harry to throw the door open wearing nothing but a pair of joggers that sit low on his waist. His curls are wet and dripping down onto his chest and fuck, Louis needs a moment.

“Hey,” Harry breathes, grinning so his cheeks dimple in.

“Hello love,” Louis says easily, trying to hide the fact that he’s having a heart attack right now. No big deal, it’s fine.

Harry pulls the door open and motions for Louis to come inside. The room is just as ridiculous as the hotel itself. Louis isn’t sure what he was expecting, though.

“Where have your clothes gone?” He asks.

At that, Harry blushes red. “Sorry, I just got out of the shower.”

Louis shakes his head and steps right up to Harry’s chest. He kisses his collarbone and thumbs over the laurels on his hips. Harry wraps his arms around Louis and smiles at him.

“How are you?”

“Could be better, but I won’t complain. Come here, kiss me. I’ve hardly had a kiss in ages.”

Harry laughs but leans down to do so, kissing Louis gently. He shuts the door and tugs Louis forward, stumbling to the middle of the room. It reminds Louis so much of the the first time that it makes him smile.

“Mm,” he sighs when Harry finally pulls away. “Needed that. Now, I believe I was promised room service.”

Harry brushes his hair behind his ear and kisses Louis’ once more. He then walks to the bedside table and returns with a menu. “Anything you want, as much of it as you want. The plan is to eat until we’re so full we can’t move.”

“Good lad,” Louis says, kicking his trainers off so he can jump onto the bed. “It’s so fancy in here, how do you get comfortable?”

Harry laughs and heads for the drawers, tugging a simple black shirt out. “What’re you talking about?”

“Everything looks breakable,” Louis says. “Is this what your flat looks like?”

“I’m sort of between places right now,” Harry admits. “Maybe you can help me decorate my new one. I see a lot of couches with fingerpaint stains in my future.”

“You don’t know what you’re missing,” Louis says quite seriously.

Harry jumps onto the bed beside him, making him bounce a couple of times. While Louis quietly looks over the menu, Harry slides closer and rests his head just above Louis’. Before Louis realizes it, Harry’s stolen one of his hands and is holding it above them slightly, pressing their fingertips together.

“I want pizza, and cake and ice cream. Oh my god they have fried chicken. Harold, I need it.”
Harry laughs softly and interlaces their fingers so he can tug Louis to his chest. “Anything you want,” he promises.

“Well that’s it then,” Louis decides. “That and a back rub.”

“I can handle that,” Harry says, stealing the menu away and sitting up. “Lay down on your stomach.”

Louis laughs. “You don’t actually have to give me a back rub.”

Harry shakes his head. “Anything you want, that’s what I said. I’ll call room service, take your shirt off and lie down.”

“Is this your way of tricking me into bed, Styles?” Louis asks, but he does take his shirt off.

“Wouldn’t have to trick you,” Harry leans down to capture Louis’ lips once more. “I’ll be back, lay down.”

Louis nods and does as he’s told, laying in the middle of the giant bed and closing his eyes. It must get pretty lonely here, he supposes, sleeping all alone in a bed this big. Harry grabs the phone and heads to the bathroom to call room service. It’s a ridiculous assortment of food but Harry doesn’t sound the least bit embarrassed about it.

The phone call ends and Harry returns after a minute to sit on the bed beside Louis. “They said it’ll be a little while.”

Louis laughs. “They hate us, don’t they?”

“Probably, yeah. Sit still.” That’s the only warning Louis gets before something’s pouring over his back. He jumps on instinct and Harry sighs. “Louis.”

“Warn me next time, christ. What is that?”

“I did warn you,” Harry shoots back. “It’s just oil. It’ll warm up in a second, now sit still.”

Louis smirks. “Kinky.”

Harry snorts but says nothing else. The sheets rustle and then Harry’s right there, sitting as close as he can without actually sitting on top of Louis’ legs. He can sort of feel Harry’s soft breathing on his neck but he doesn’t really care.

The instant Harry’s hand touch his skin Louis lets out an embarrassingly loud groan.

“You’re so tense, love,” Harry murmurs.

Louis is about to reply but Harry is suddenly moving both of his hands and his back makes an ungodly cracking noise. “Is it supposed to sound like that?” he asks, a bit worried Harry’s just broken him.

“Mhm. Shut up and relax.” Harry says simply.

Normally Louis would do the complete opposite, but for once he listens and closes his eyes. His back makes a few more disconcerting noises but the relief afterward is immediate. It feels incredible and Louis’s tempted to ask who taught Harry how to do this so he can write them a letter of thanks.

After the day he’s had, it’s really no surprise that Louis starts to nod off. Harry doesn’t speak, just
hums under his breath and kneads at Louis’ back for what feels like forever. It’s so calming and so exactly what Louis needed that he doesn’t even realize he’s fallen asleep until he feels lips brushing across his ear.

“Wake up,” Harry murmurs, trailing a finger down Louis’ spine. “Food’s here, darling.”

“No,” Louis groans. “Bring it here, I can never stand again. I’m a wet noodle, look at me.”

Harry laughs and kisses the very top of Louis’ spine. The bed shifts and he pads across the room, politely thanking the person there. Louis turns his head to the side and opens his eyes to see Harry carefully pushing a cart full of food into the room.

“Look at you,” he sighs happily. “What’ve I done to deserve you?”

“You’re only saying that because I’m holding a plate of fried chicken right now,” Harry says. Louis barks out a laugh and smiles to himself. “Could be.”

“What are you smiling about?” Harry asks, stopping the cart and taking a couple empty plates off.

Louis shakes his head. “Nothing, just something Noah said. Make my plate, I’m starving but I don’t think I’ll be standing up anytime soon.”

Harry grins deviously, “My plan has worked. You’re mine now, you can never leave.”

It’s obvious that he’s joking but Louis finds himself thinking that he wouldn’t really have a problem with that.

“Harry, really thank you,” he says softly. “I really needed this. You make me happy, you know that?”

Harry ducks his head bashfully. “Just wanted to make you feel better, that’s all. Zayn said you had a bad day.”

The way he looks over at Louis practically screams *I’m worried about you*. And yeah, normally Louis would laugh it off, make a stupid joke and change the topic, but the way Harry looks at him makes him pause. Harry isn’t stupid, he knows something isn’t right, and he’s Louis’ boyfriend isn’t he? It’s been awhile since Louis has had a real actual boyfriend, but he does remember the whole trusting one another thing. If there’s anyone he should be able to talk to about this it’d be Harry.

But there’s also the part of his mind screaming no. It’s too early, it’s too much. Harry will realize he’s made a mistake, that he wants no part in Louis’ dramatic mess of a life and leave him.

Louis sighs and rolls onto his back, ignoring the face Harry makes when his still oily skin touches the sheets. “Noah’s father dropped by. Not a pleasant visit, it never is with him.”

Harry bites his lip and it looks like he’s thinking hard on something. Finally, he just says “I’m sorry.”

Louis smiles. “Don’t be love.”

“Do you want me to scare him off? Rough him up a bit?” Harry asks.

Louis barks out a laugh. “You, roughing someone up a bit?” he teases. “As hilarious as that sounds, I think I’ll pass.”

Harry pouts, handing off the plate in his hands to Louis. “Don’t laugh, I’m quite tough.”
“Sure you are babe,” Louis chuckles. “But how would that look? Harry Styles bloodies up his new boy toy’s dead beat ex husband. Sounds good for your image.”

“Hey, don’t talk about yourself that way,” Harry says sternly.

Louis smiles and lifts a piece of pizza up to his mouth. “Am I not your boy toy, then?”

“No you’re my boyfriend,” he mumbles petulantly. “S’different.”

“Ah, I see,” Louis laughs. “Come cuddle me then, boyfriend.”

The word makes Harry light up, cheeks dimpling in with the force of his smile. He does as he’s told, waiting for Louis to sit up so he can cuddle against his side. Louis quietly wraps an arm around his waist and squeezes gently.

“I vote for a One Tree Hill marathon,” Louis decides, reaching for the remote with grabby hands.

“Never seen it,” Harry says.

Louis puts his hand over his heart and shakes his head. “You poor uncultured child. The young Chad Michael Murray is who we owe my sexuality crisis to. Without him god knows where I’d be.”

Harry giggles and presses a short kiss to the underside of Louis’ jaw. “I’d be honored to watch it with you, then,” he breathes against Louis’ skin.

The show starts and Louis sings along to the theme song as loudly and passionately as he can. Harry laughs the entire time and joins in towards the end to Louis’ delight.

While the first episode starts, Louis gets out of bed and stands up on unsteady legs. He heads for Harry’s drawers and tugs a few of them open until he finds a jumper that’ll do. He tugs it on without a word and heads back to the bed, only to find Harry watching him with a smile.

“What are you doing?” He asks.

Louis scoffs. “Getting comfortable. Don’t question me, Harry.”

They squeeze close together despite how large the bed is and Louis tries to pay attention. Tries, because Harry seems to have other ideas if the lips currently making their way down Louis’ neck are anything to go by.

“You’re missing important plot points,” Louis says, but he still tilts his head just a bit for Harry’s benefit.

“I like having you with me,” Harry murmurs, slipping a hand under Louis’ jumper to pull him closer. “Feel free to steal my clothes whenever.”

Louis smiles and shrugs just enough so the shoulder slips down. “Thank you for this, all of it I mean.” He murmurs.

“Don’t thank me,” Harry whispers back. “You deserve to be happy all of the time, and I’m going to make sure you are. I am your boyfriend after all.”

Louis tilts his chin up for a kiss. “You’re lovely. How’d you get so lovely?”

Harry sighs and obliges him, kissing his lips softly. “I’m not lovely, really. I just think you deserve better and you do.”
They pull away from one another, Louis down biting his lip in thought. Harry reaches out and gently brushes a stray piece of hair behind his ear, letting his fingertips run across Louis’ skin when he pulls away. It’s little moments like this that make Louis wonder if Harry’s right. Maybe he does deserve better than what he’s always had. Maybe he deserves Harry.

Their pizza doesn’t make it halfway through the first episode and by the time they’ve started the next one Louis’ stomach is aching. Harry is laughing at his groaning

“How have you ever been in love?” Louis asks, watching on as yet another ridiculous love triangle unfolds on screen.

Harry shrugs and kisses Louis’ forehead. “I think that I thought I was a few times. But as soon as it ended I realized that it wasn’t. So no, I suppose I haven’t.”

Louis nods. “Me too,” he says, before wrinkling his nose. “No, actually I was in love I know that. I was so fucking in love, in love enough to get married and have a baby. And it fell to pieces anyway. He cheated on me and left anyway, and today he told me he never wanted my baby even though I was so sure he did. I’m not so sure I believe in it anymore.”

In the corner of his eye Louis can see Harry frowning thoughtfully. Finally he says, “I’ve had my heart broken too, nowhere near as bad as yours though, I’ll admit. But I still believe in love, Lou, and fate and soulmates.”

Suddenly they’re back in that dodgy restaurant again, and Louis is watching Harry’s eyes light up in wonder almost like a child’s. Almost like he had been waiting his whole life to hear what Louis was telling him.

*Louis, it’s fate.*

“Soulmates,” Louis scoffs, so he doesn’t blurt out something stupid.

Harry nods, eyes lighting up just like before. It really shouldn’t scare Louis as much as it does. “I think there’s one person out there for all of us. Maybe it takes a couple of tries to find them but they’re out there Louis, and I believe that. I have to believe that or I don’t know what I’d do.”

Louis frowns and bites his lower lip. He doesn’t want to discourage the boy, of course not, but he can’t stop himself from shooting the idea down. “I think it’s a nice idea. I’d like to believe it too, but not after what happened.”

“Well, maybe someday,” Harry sighs wistfully. He sounds like he wants to be the one to make Louis believe it.

“The only kind of love that makes sense to me anymore is the kind between me and Noah,” he admits quietly. “I could never stop loving him, no matter what he does. And I know he wouldn’t stop loving me either. Romantic love might not be in my future, I guess.”

“That’s an awful thought,” Harry says, reaching out for Louis’ hand. “It sounds so lonely Louis. Aren’t you lonely?”

Louis shakes his head, trying to convince himself as well as Harry. “I have Noah.”

“I know love, and he’s wonderful but,” Harry hesitates, but then presses on. “Don’t you want someone to share your life with? Someone who would want the both of you forever, just to be in love Louis. Don’t you want that?”
He sound so goddamn sincere about it, like he really believes everything he’s saying. Louis hates it.

“I don’t know that there is a forever with me,” Louis admits. “People don’t tend to want to stick around because of Noah and I don’t have the patience for that. We’re a package deal.”

Harry moves, sitting up so they’re facing on another. “I get that,” he whispers, “Noah’s wonderful. He’s so sweet Lou, and you’ve raised him so well. Anyone who can’t see how lovely and amazing both of you are doesn’t deserve you.”

There’s a lump in Louis’ throat that he has to swallow around to croak out, “What are you saying Harold?”

“That you’re so wonderful, and Noah is so wonderful and that I have never felt like this about anyone before.”

Harry’s eyes are sparkling again and Louis can hear him whispering excitedly about fate and soulmates. Louis reaches forward and lets one of his hands simply rest on Harry’s cheek, brushing his thumb across the man’s cheekbones. Harry closes his eyes just for a moment, long enough for Louis’ to think about everything he’s just said.

“Harry, sweetheart,” he murmurs.

His eyes snap open, clear and beautifully green. “I haven’t Lou,” he whispers. “I’ve never gotten this close to someone so fast. I’ve never fallen so hard so fast before and it’s scary but I love it. And I know that you’re scared Louis, I’m scared too. But you don’t have to be. I’d never hurt you.”

Louis runs a hand through Harry’s curls, gently rubbing the skin at the top of his neck. “Harry, baby, you’re so sweet,” he whispers, hating that it already sounds like a rejection. “You’re the sweetest and you’re right, I am scared but I’m trying so hard not to be. I want this to work, really I do. I just keep waiting for you to come to your senses and realize I’m not who you really want.”

In an instant Harry’s expression turns stormy. He slowly pulls away and asks, “Why would I do that?”

“Because you’re you and I’m me. You’re gorgeous and successful and rich, you could have literally anyone you want. I’m a single dad, not much to look at either, and last week we ate cereal for dinner three nights in a row because my paycheck came late. I am not the person you’re supposed to end up with.”

“Well who am I supposed to end up with, then?” Harry asks, his voice just edging on angry.

Louis shrugs and looks away. If he has to keep looking at Harry he’s going to chicken out. “Someone just as rich and beautiful as you. A model maybe, don’t you know some models? You’d look gorgeous together and everyone would fall in love with you.”

“I don’t think it’s for you to decide who I’m meant to be with based on some stupid idea of me in your head,” Harry snaps.

Louis sighs. “Don’t get tetchy.”

“Fuck off, Louis,” Harry spits, crossing his arms over his chest and scowling. “I’m not tetchy, I’m angry. I’m sick of everyone else thinking they know what’s good for me. I’m an adult, I can make my own decisions and my decision is you so just-just shut up and deal with it.”

Louis tries his hardest to hold his laughter in but he can’t. As soon as Harry hears the snort that
escapes, he’s making to get out of bed and storm off. Louis shakes his head and grabs onto his arm, holding him back.

“No, I’m sorry. It’s just, that’s the most forceful way anyone’s ever told me about their feelings for me.”

“Yeah, well I also think you’re beautiful so you can just shut up about that too,” Harry mutters petulantly. “If you really don’t want to be with me that’s one thing but I’m not going to let you ruin this because you think it’s best for me. No one gets to decide what I want except for me.”

Louis runs his hand down to Harry’s and gently squeezes. “I’m sorry love, really. I didn’t mean it that way it’s just my own stupid insecurities. I don’t have the best luck with men in case you couldn’t tell. I feel like I’ve struck some kinda of lottery here with you, I just keep waiting for it to all come crashing down on me.”

“Well it’s not going to if I have any say in it,” Harry says quite seriously. “I’m sorry too, I shouldn’t have snapped at you.”

“Don’t worry about it love, some kind of pop star trauma, I’m sure,” Louis teases, leaning in to kiss the tip of Harry’s nose just to see his smile. “I think that was our first real argument. Are we going to make it?”

Harry giggles and nods. He tilts his head down and presses his lips to Louis’. “We’re going to be fine.”

Louis hums. “Good. Now let’s go, I’m not leaving this hotel without jumping into the pool fully clothed at least once.”

To Louis’ delight, Harry nods and follows loyally behind him.

Harry insists that he take Louis to work the next morning. Louis tries to protest but he’s too tired to put up a real fight. Harry ignores his groaning about how he can handle going to work and instead picks out his largest and most comfortable jumper for Louis to wear.

“So you don’t forget me,” he explains, helping Louis pull it over his head.

Louis finally emerges from the knit, hair a mess and pouting and Harry’s heart feels fit to burst.

“It’s like wearing a blanket,” Louis grumbles, pushing the sleeves up a bit. “How could I forget you?”

Harry shrugs and takes his hands, carefully rolling the sleeves up for him. “Who knows. You might meet some charming and handsome man today who’ll try to sweep you off your feet.”

“Ah I see,” Louis nods sagely. “Since the jumper adds about twenty pounds he won’t be able to sweep me off to anywhere and I’ll still be yours.”

Harry giggles and tugs Louis in by the waist. He smells like Harry’s soap and mint toothpaste and he goes easily into Harry’s arms, still half asleep. “That’s exactly the plan,” he whispers, kissing his
cheek.

Louis smiles and rests his head on Harry’s shoulder. There’s a lovebite just over his collarbone that makes Harry’s breath catch. Anyone could see it and know Louis has someone, someone patiently waiting for him to come home, someone who keeps him up at night laughing and smiling and kissing. And maybe it’s awful of him to feel so possessive, but he wants everyone to know Louis is his. He wants to take Louis out and show him off, almost like saying, See? Look how amazing he is, and he's mine. He picked me, out of everyone he picked me.

“What on earth could you be smiling about so early in the morning,” Louis wonders.

Instead of voicing all of his ridiculous thoughts Harry shrugs and lets him go. Louis walks around the room, gathering his things and double checking his work bag. Before he can slip either of them onto his shoulders Harry gently takes them from his hands.

The two of them leave the room hand in hand, Louis cuddling close to Harry’s side when they get into the lift. He closes his eyes and sighs heavily. “I don’t want to be an adult today.”

He looks so sad and tired that Harry can’t help but smooth his hair down and kiss his forehead. “Do you want me to call work and tell them that?”

Louis smiles. “Yes, please.”

Harry smiles back and squeezes his hand. “We’ll find you a cuppa before we go, yeah? And breakfast. This really is your fault you know, I tried to get you out of that pool for hours.”

“Shut up,” Louis murmurs fondly.

If Harry manages to sneak a picture of their hands held together purely to show to Louis later on when he’s more awake, well then that’s really his business.

They get breakfast just as Harry promised at a small cafe and he’s almost certain he spots a barista taking a picture of him practically holding Louis upright while they wait. While Harry drives, Louis sips at his tea and buries himself in Harry’s jumper. A playlist of soft music plays in the background and Louis stares out at the passing cars sleepily.

“You really don’t have to pick me up, I’ll be fine getting home,” he says at one point.

Harry rolls his eyes. “I’m not going to just leave you there with no car, Lou.”

“I feel bad, is all,” Louis says, playing with his sleeves. “Don’t you have things you should be doing?”

Nothing that’s more important than you, is Harry’s initial thought.

“Honestly, no,” he says instead. “I’m off the hook until tour starts up again. And it’s not like it’s been completely useless, I’ve written quite a bit. The boys say they’re excited to hear it, so.”

Louis pouts, ripping into his breakfast sandwich. “Don’t remind me you’re leaving. What am I to do? No back rubs, no room service, no stunning man I can call over to my home at a moment’s notice to make cupcakes. It’s torture, really.”

Harry raises his eyebrows. “Would’ve thought you’d miss the sex, honestly.”

Louis just scoffs. “Well I can get that from anyone Harold, be realistic.”
Harry barks out a laugh and Louis looks far too proud of himself for it.

At some point Louis finishes his sandwich and reaches over to take Harry’s hand back in his own. “You should come over tonight,” he says, rubbing his thumb over Harry’s knuckles. “Noah’s been bugging me about seeing you again since Saturday. He has a lot of things to tell you.”

Harry smiles. “Yeah? Like what?”

“Well he’s listened to your music, seen a few videos as well, and he’s come to the decision that Niall is his favorite,” Louis says quite seriously. “So really it’ll be him bugging you about Niall the entire time while we eat whatever leftovers are in my fridge. Awful, yeah?”

Harry knows he’s being tested but that’s not what makes him shake his head. “It sounds like exactly how I want to spend my night,” he says sincerely.

Louis rolls his eyes but Harry can see the smile pulling at his lips. “Tonight then.”

They park a block away from Louis’ work, as close as Harry can get at this time, but he still insists on walking Louis to the floor. Louis allows it, mostly because Harry pulls out his best pout and Louis can’t say no.

There are plenty of people around so no one really spares them a glance until Harry stops them a front of the door and tugs Louis close for a kiss. It’s a bit dirty for a public place, but Harry can’t be arsed to care.

“What was that for?” Louis asks breathlessly.

Harry gently helps Louis shoulder his work back and then presses a soft kiss to his forehead. “Just because I’ll miss you. But I’ll see you later on for leftovers, yeah?”

“Don’t sound so excited for it,” Louis laughs, taking a step back so he can give Harry a quick peck on the lips. “I’ll be here waiting for you.”

Harry watches him go until he enters the lift and disappears before quietly walking back to his car. On the way there he picks out the picture of Louis’ hand held in his own in the lift and posts it to his Instagram, in black and white mostly just to bother Louis who thinks it’s stupid. Instead of trying to think of a caption, Harry just tacks on the anchor emoji.

Only minutes later Louis is texting him, you’re a complete idiot. It makes Harry feel far happier than the words should, but he guesses that’s just the effect Louis has on him.

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Louis’ day is relatively slow, he spends most of it forcing himself to listen to an album he’s supposed to be reviewing soon. He goes to lunch with Zayn and Perrie to discuss wedding colors for the thousandth time, and he calls Noah just to check in more than once. Even Harry picking him up seems normal now, after having spent so much of the break together.

Harry agrees to grab them some beer so Louis can pick Noah up and get him settled. The boy squeals excitedly when he finds out Harry’s coming. In anticipation he changes into his favorite t-
shirt from a The Fray gig Louis went to years ago. It’s worn and only just now starting to fit him without looking ridiculous and Noah wears it constantly. He also tugs his penguin hat on, just for good measure, and patiently waits in the foyer for Harry to arrive.

“Love, he’s run to the store it might be awhile,” Louis says, patting the top of his head when he passes by.


“I’m sure he’d love it baby,” Louis answers with a smile. “Now come put away your crayons, yeah?”

Somehow Louis manages to get the mess down to a reasonable level by the time the doorbell rings. Noah gasps from the next room and waits patiently at the door for Louis to come and open it.

“Hey Lou, I’ve got the drinks,” Harry says, brushing his hand across Louis’ waist when he walks in. “Oh my god, is that a penguin hat?”

Noah giggles and nods. “Penguins are almost my favorite, not as much as dinosaurs. Hi Harry.”

Harry smiles and hands the bags off to Louis so he can slip his boots off. “Hi Noah. How are you doing, love?”

“My Daddy buys me a new dinosaur book, do you wanna see? And he says you know Niall but I can’t be rude.”

Louis sighs. “You tried, love.”

Noah pouts, tugging at his hat. “Daddy, Niall is the coolest. Got a guitar-I want a guitar. Harry, can you do it?”

“Play guitar?” Harry asks. “A bit, not as well as Niall can. He’s been teaching me for years now. I suppose if I actually sat down and learned I’d be alright.”

“I wanna learn, Daddy can I?” Noah tugs on Louis’ shirt, following behind him as he walks.

Louis sighs and gently tousles his curls. “Maybe in another year or so, my love. Your fingers are too small, they’ll blister up and I’ll cry and so will you. I could always teach you piano if you like.”

Harry raises his eyebrows. “You play piano?”

Louis smiles. “Don’t looked so shocked Harold, I’m offended.”

“Daddy, just wanna play songs for you,” Noah pouts. “Can sing to you when you can’t sleep like you do for me.”

It’s moments like this where Louis is sure his heart is going to burst. He picks Noah up and carries him to the kitchen. “You’re far too sweet to me, do you know that?”

“Dad,” Noah whines, hiding his now blushing cheeks against Louis’ neck. “’Barrassing me in front of Harry.”

Louis smiles and Harry claps a hand over his mouth to keep himself from laughing. “I’m embarrassing you? Me? Your insanely cool, incredibly hip father? I don’t believe that for a second, Harry can you believe that?”
“Well, you did just use the word hip in the sentence which does you no favors,” Harry remarks.

Louis gasps dramatically, making Noah giggle. “How dare you Harold, how very dare you.”

Noah lifts his head up, cheeks still a bit pink, and grins at Harry. “Dare you, Harry,” he stutters out between laughter.

Since it sort of makes his heart flutter ridiculously, Louis chooses to ignore the way Harry’s smiling at the two of them.

Noah takes a seat on the kitchen counter. He kicks his feet against the cupboards under him and peers at Harry curiously while he helps Louis search their fridge.

“Harry, where is your Daddy at?”

Harry lifts his head up from where he’s inspecting the expiry date on their milk. “He’s at his home, he doesn’t live around here babe.”

“Do you have a mum?” Noah fires back, no hesitation.

Apparently Harry’s up for the questioning because he answers just as quickly. “I do, she’s the loveliest woman in the entire world and I love her very much. I’ve a step-dad as well, and a sister and a niece.”

Noah smiles at that. “I want a sister too. Daddy, can we get one?”

Louis chokes on nothing and sputters out a laugh. “Noah, that isn’t how it works love. We can’t just get a sister for you.”

The news seems to discourage Noah a bit, but he continues on. “Who is a niece?” He asks.

“That’s my sister’s daughter, I’m her uncle like Zayn is your uncle love,” Harry explains slowly so Noah will understand. “Her name is Eva, she’s only a bit younger than you actually.”

“That’s pretty cool then,” Noah decides. “Daddy, can I have the chicken please?”

Louis pulls out a container of chinese food from two days ago and deems it safe before agreeing. Harry navigates their kitchen like a pro and pulls three plates down for them. Noah watches them both carefully with his thinking face on, the one he uses when he’s contemplating such mysteries as what his stuffed dinosaurs are really doing when he isn’t home.

Finally, Noah looks to Harry and says, “Harry, do you like girls?”

“Noah,” Louis starts.

Harry smiles and shakes his head. “No, it’s alright,” he murmurs to Louis before turning back to the boy. “No Noah, I don’t.”

“That’s okay then, my Daddy doesn’t either. But he says he loves me forever no matter what and sometimes girls are cute.”

Louis groans and crosses himself. “God help me.”

Harry and Noah both giggle and Noah goes back to kicking his feet around again. “Do you have a boyfriend Harry?”
“Now that’s quite enough,” Louis decides. “People are going to think you’ve an awful father with
the way you talk. Apologize to Harry.”

Noah sighs, obviously not happy with that answer. “Sorry Harry,” he says reluctantly. “Just wanna
know, that’s all.”

“Just nosy, that’s all,” Louis teases, dropping a kiss to the boy’s head. “Apple juice, love?”

“Yes please,” Noah chirps. “Harry do you get to sing on telly?”

Harry somehow smiles which Louis finds commendable. Most people quit by this point of Noah’s
never ending questions. The first time Noah ever uttered the sentence _But why?_ was the beginning
of the end for Louis’ patience.

“Sometimes I do. In a couple of weeks I’ll be on telly singing a brand new song.”

And, that’s new. Harry never mentioned a new single, but then again why would he? It’s not like
Louis has asked.

“Can I watch, Daddy?” Noah asks.

“We’ll see love,” Louis says. “Go and wash your hands please, front and back.”

Luckily Noah takes the bait and hops off the counter with Harry’s help. He skips off down the hall,
singing a song from one of his cartoons. As soon as he’s gone, Louis turns to Harry and winces.

“I’m sorry, he’s so rude some of the time.”

Harry smiles and shakes his head. “Don’t worry about it baby, he’s just a kid. They ask questions,
that’s what kids do.”

Louis sighs but doesn’t fight it. “Well, come kiss me quickly. We only have however long it takes
him to stumble through his alphabet before he comes back.”

Harry chuckles and steps forward, kissing Louis’ deeply. “You’re beautiful,” he murmurs when they
pull away.

“You’re full of shit,” Louis giggles back. “I’m having pasta, what do you want?”

Harry just smiles. “Pasta then. Tea?”

Louis nods and heads back to the fridge. “And hot chocolate for the little monster as well, else he’ll
feel left out.”

Noah comes stomping in right then and gasps. “Daddy, I hear you. Call me a little monster.”

“You’re my little monster darling,” Louis teases. “How about we eat on the couch today, we can
even watch a movie.”

Noah sighs. “I guess so.”

Louis smiles and kneels down to pull him into a hug. “I love you pumpkin.”

“I know,” Noah says, squeezing Louis back. “I love you too my Daddy. Missed you last night.”

The words make Louis feel awful, but he tries to hide it. This really isn’t the time for one of his
signature crying sessions, after all. “I missed you too. Go on and pick a movie, okay? Harry and I
will be out as soon as everything’s done.”

Noah nods and kisses Louis’ cheek before running off. The kitchen goes silent until Harry clears his
throat over the sound of the kettle and says, “You’re a fantastic father.”

“God knows that’s not true,” Louis sighs.

Harry shakes his head. “No, you really are. I’ve never seen a father love their son as much as you
do.”

“Well, he’s my son of course I love him,” Louis says, his eyebrows furrowing. “My dad was never
like that. He loved me and all of course, but it wasn’t like what I had with my mum. I don’t want
Noah to ever think he can’t come to me with things when he’s older. I don’t want him to think he has
to repress his emotions or some bullshit like that just ‘cause he’s a boy. It’s stupid, you know?
Completely ridiculous if you ask me.”

“Like I said, Louis, you’re a fantastic father.”

Louis feels his face warm. “I’m not, really.”

“Stop it, come here,” Harry says softly, reaching out for Louis’ elbow. “You’re wonderful, every bit
of you. You’re so smart and beautiful and you’re raising Noah so well Louis. You’re perfect, okay?
Every part of you, ever single inch.”

Louis has no idea what to say to that. No one’s ever treated him this way before. It’s so different
from how Luke was after Noah was born. Maybe before he was more like this, before they were
married. Luke was always the kind of guy to joke with his friends about his life being over now that
he was married. Of course Lois always laughed along, pretending it didn’t hurt. He always thought
getting married and starting a family would be the start of everything for him, and in a way it was.

Sometimes he gets the feeling that maybe Harry would be into marriage and kids as much as he is,
but that’s a fucking terrifying thought. Louis shakes his head and gently pulls himself from Harry’s
arms.

“C’mon, he’s probably starving.”

Harry doesn’t look happy about letting the subject, but of course he does because he’s Harry and he
just has to be perfect. He just has to be everything Louis ever wanted.

“Daddy, I got Toy Story!” Noah announces when they walk into the room. “Harry, do you like it?”

“Love it,” Harry answers, smiling brightly. “Good choice Noah.”

Noah smiles quite proudly. “Thanks Harry. Daddy, come sit by me.”

“I’m coming darling. Make some room for Harry too.”

The three of them squeeze onto the small sofa, Noah more or less sitting on top of Louis by the time
he’s situated. He grabs his chicken and hot chocolate with a cheerful thank you and Louis starts the
movie.

“Guess who is my favorite?” Noah whispers.

Harry beats Louis to it. “Is it Rex?”
Noah gasps and looks at Harry with his mouth open and eyes wide. “Harry, how do you guess that?”

Harry laughs and shrugs. “Just lucky, I suppose.”

About halfway through the movie, after having listened to Harry and Noah recite the movie to each other word for word as Buzz and Woody, Louis feels Noah leaning up to whisper in his ear. Or, his version of whispering which is really just quiet yelling.

“Daddy, I like Harry,” he says.

“Yeah?” Louis whispers back, pretending not to see Harry trying to school the smile on his face beside him.

Noah nods, glancing over at Harry quickly. “Do you like him too?” He asks.

“Yes darling, I do.” Louis answers.

It means so much more to him then it does to Noah, but of course Noah doesn’t know that. But still, Noah grins at him like it’s some huge triumph and turns back to the movie. Harry gently reaches out and lays his hand on top of Louis’, brushing their fingers over one another. When Louis turns to look at him Harry is just smiling at both of them, eyes sparkling.

There’s so many things Louis wishes he could say, so many things he wants to tell Harry. Of course he can’t though, and so he just hopes and prays Harry knows how much this means to him.

“Pay attention,” Louis whispers finally.

Harry grins and does as he’s told, turning his attention back to the movie. Their fingers intertwine almost out of habit and Louis finds he doesn’t have a problem with that.

Not at all.
“You’re disgusting,” Jesy says casually.

Louis ignores her and takes a sip of his tea instead. It’s shockingly cold, enough for him to recoil in shock. Jesy of course laughs at him and then leans over his desk, desperately trying to get his attention.

“Christ Jes, don’t you have work to do?” Louis asks, kicking is chair back so she’s not right in his face anymore.”

“Probably, yeah,” she concedes, tapping her long nails on his desk. “But I’ve come to have a deep heart to heart with you instead.”

Louis snorts and makes sure to save his work, just in case. Usually Jesy’s tangents and heart to heart’s can last quite awhile, the last thing he needs is for her to destroy an entire afternoon’s worth of work with one dramatic sweep of her arm.

“Allright, let’s have it then,” he says, carefully pushing his laptop to the corner of the desk. “What is it this time? Boy troubles?”

“No, he’s perfect,” Jesy sighs dreamily. “It’s your boyfriend, actually.”

Louis scrunches his nose in distaste. “You know, I’m almost certain there’s a rule somewhere saying you aren’t allowed to discuss my personal life at work.”

Jesy just scoffs as if the idea of privacy is hilarious, and reaches to the desk behind her. With a dramatic flick of her wrist she drops a magazine down right in front of Louis. It only takes a glance at it for Louis to start laughing.

“What the fuck is that?”

“I’m thinking of having it framed for the office,” Jesy says. “Our little Louis’ first front page story. My little protege all grown up.”

Louis picks up the magazine and yeah, that’s definitely him there on the front. The main picture that sits amongst all the other gossip is from just the day before when Harry dropped him off at work. They look ridiculous and tired and Harry has his lips pressed to Louis’ forehead, while the headline above them reads, Has Harry Found The One? in big bright letters.

“That is fucking brilliant,” Louis laughs, quickly flipping to the story inside. “Look, they’ve already planned our wedding and everything.”

Jesy grins and taps her nail against one paragraph. “I like this part the best, the part where your close personal friend told them you’re moving in together.”

“Well of course, who doesn’t move straight in after a couple months of dating?” Louis laughs. “Has Jade seen yet?”

Jesy snorts. “Of course she has, and she’s pissed she didn’t get the exclusive.”
“Apologize for me, will you? I just haven’t had the time, what with these wedding preparations.” Louis sighs in a lofty voice.

The two of them flip through the story which even has a little timeline, including a grainy picture of Louis and Harry kissing outside of the ice cream shop all those weeks ago. Jesy looks over his shoulder while Louis gets all the details of his Spring wedding and Liam’s apparent hatred for him.

Finally, she says, “You’re quite cute together, the two of you.”

“Don’t take the piss,” Jesy shakes her head, resting her hand on Louis’ shoulder. “I’m not. I’m really happy for you Lou, really. You deserve it.”

Louis shrugs and shuts the magazine just as his phone starts to ring. “He’s alright, I suppose.”

“You suppose,” she teases. “Is that him now?”

A look down at his phone confirms it is in fact Harry calling. “Sorry love, he gets a bit bored all on his own,” Louis sighs. “I’ll go for lunch then?”

“Of course babe. Make sure to tell him I haven’t received my invitation yet.” Jesy gives him a quick squeeze around the shoulders and walks away, leaving Louis in peace.

“Hey babe,” Louis answers quietly.

Harry hums happily. “Hello. I’ve got an idea I want to run past you.”

“Is it a wedding?” Louis asks, grabbing his jacket. Well, Harry’s jacket actually, but Louis intends to keep it in his new collection of Harry’s things he’s stolen. Besides, Noah got spaghetti sauce on the sleeve of it yesterday and Louis isn’t really sure how to get spaghetti sauce out of denim. He decides that if he can figure it out before Harry leaves he’ll give it back, but if not oh well really.

It takes a moment for Louis’ words to register and then Harry’s sputtering out, “What?”

“Teasing love. Jesy’s brought me this magazine today saying we’re engaged and moving in together. It was sort of hilarious actually.”

“You shouldn’t read those,” Harry says seriously. “They always say awful things.”

Louis smiles and gives Jade a little wave before leaving the office. “I’m an adult love, I can handle myself. What was your idea?”

Instead of fighting Louis on it, Harry gives in and lets him change the subject. “Right, so anyway my break is ending soon,” he says, ignoring Louis’ groan of pretest. “And our next gig is this like charity thing in London before we go back to America. It’s not huge or anything, we’re only going to play a couple songs and there’s a few other bands that are gonna be there as well, but I was just thinking that maybe you and Noah would like to come?”

Louis freezes. “What?”

“Yeah, I mean I know Noah really wants to meet Niall so I told him about it and he’s buzzing. He says if you can come early enough he can show Noah a couple things on his guitar. And then I just thought that if you wanted to stay the night at the hotel with us, we can all hang out together. Do you think he’d like that?”
Harry sounds so hopeful, as if Louis could ever say no to him. It’s becoming quite obvious he can’t.

“God, yeah of course he would. Is that even a question?” Louis laughs, ignoring the man in the corner of the lift who’s giving him strange looks. “Babe, are you sure? I mean, Noah’s all well and good to spend a day with but he’s a kid. I can’t guarantee he won’t make your entire crew hate him by the end of the day.”

Harry laughs as if the idea of temper tantrums is hilarious. “Babe, we’ve had plenty of kids on tour before, Noah’s nothing. Niall’s going to be so excited Lou, him and Liam both. They really want to meet him.”

Louis smiles and waits until he’s safely out of the lift and away from people to ask, “Are you talking my son up to One Direction?”

“Might be. Is that a yes?”

Of course it’s a yes, but Louis can’t give in that easily. “I’ll have to talk to work and see what we have going on, but it’s almost certainly a yes. Really love, thank you for this. Noah is going to lose it.”

Harry sighs happily. “Good, it’ll be so great Louis I promise. He’s going to love it.”

“Don’t do anything ridiculous,” Louis warns.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

His obviously put on innocent tone makes Louis rolls his eyes. “It means, don’t do anything ridiculous popstar.”

Harry sighs, sounding very put out. “Fine, but I’m not happy about it.”

“You’ll live somehow love,” Louis says, lifting up on his toes to spot Zayn at the doors. “I’ve got to go, got a date with my other boyfriend.”

“Give him my best,” Harry replies.

Louis smiles. “Bye, love.”

The drive to London is excruciatingly long, Louis thinks, although it could just be the fact that there’s a hyperactive toddler kicking his seat most of the way there. Harry being Harry had of course offered to send someone to drive Louis and Noah, but Louis had of course refused. They’re spending two days in a posh hotel for free, the least he can do is drive himself there.

Noah is excited, to say the very least. Luckily he manages to tire himself out halfway through the ride with all of his babbling and kicking around, and passes out. He’s still fast asleep when they finally get to the hotel, and shows no signs of waking up when Louis stops the car. Louis quickly gathers all of their bags in one arm and lifts Noah up with the other, letting the boy drool against his shoulder on the way in.

He feels a bit out of place immediately, walking into the mostly quiet lobby with dirty trainers and a sleeping toddler on his shoulder. The receptionist looks wary of him, but luckily Louis doesn’t have to get any closer.
“Louis?”

A quick look around confirms it’s Harry’s bodyguard Alberto, making his way over from the lifts. Louis smiles. “Hey, yeah. You alright?” Louis calls back.

Alberto walks over quickly and grabs the bags from him. He’s frowning when he says, “Harry said you were going to call so I could help you. Christ, what’ve you packed in here, bricks?”

Louis smiles, adjusting Noah now that the weight of the bags is gone. “You don’t have children do you?”

“No, thank god,” Alberto smirks.

“Well, it’s all essential trust me,” Louis promises, keeping a tight hold on Hank. “I know Harry said to call but I really didn’t want to be a bother. I’m sure you have more important things to be doing right now.”

Alberto rolls his eyes and gently pushes Louis in the direction of the lift with a hand on his back. “Trust me, I don’t. You’re not a bother, c’mon let’s get you both settled in. The boys are already gone, I’ll take you in through the back so we avoid the screaming.”

Both men look to Noah who right then lets out a loud snore against his father’s shoulder.

“Good idea,” Louis agrees.

Alberto smiles at the boy. “Harry’s had them bring food to the room as well, said you’d both probably be hungry after the drive.”

Louis scoffs. “Imagine having that kind of money,” he mutters.

Alberto just smiles and leads Louis into the lift where he hits the number for the very highest floor. It’s really no surprise that the room they walk into is far too huge for just the two of them, Louis thinks. His tired eyes take in the two giant beds, the floor to ceiling windows, the table full of food and another smaller room next to the bathroom completely with a second TV and couches. Why anyone would need two televisions in there hotel room, Louis isn’t really sure, but he’s never been rich. Maybe it’s something rich people enjoy, having two televisions on at once.

“The whole floor is ours so you don’t have to worry about being too loud or anything, he wont be bothering anyone,” Alberto says, gesturing towards Noah who is now laying on one of the beds and scowling in his sleep.

Louis laughs and brushes a curl away from his cheek. “Still, I’ll try to avoid any tantrums for my sake. Let me just get him up and get some food in him and we can be on our way.”

“Take as long as you need, I’ll be outside whenever you’re ready.”

With that, Alberto leaves and they’re alone. Louis looks around the room once more and then decides Zayn needs to know how ridiculous this is. He takes a quick picture and sends it with the caption casual weekend.

Zayn quickly sends back fuckin enjoy it u prick and Louis giggles.

“Daddy?” Noah mumbles.

Louis turns and smiles down at his son. “Well, good morning sunshine. Did you sleep well?”
Noah nods, but he’s pouting. “Daddy, this isn’t where the music is.”

“Of course not love, don’t you want to get changed and eat something before we got to the concert?”

Reluctantly, Noah nods and sits up. He looks around, finally taking in his surroundings with wide eyes. “This is bigger than my whole house!” he gasps.

Louis chuckles and leans down to try to tame his curls. “Looks like it, doesn’t it?

“Could fit all my friends here,” Noah mutters, obviously planning future parties in his new hotel room while Louis helps him change his shirt.

As soon as he’s changed, Noah jumps up and rushes to the windows. He presses his nose against them and sighs. Louis smiles and lets him look out while he looks over the food. There’s a ridiculous amount of everything and anything they might want, but knowing his son Noah is going to go straight for the cereal.

“Love, come and eat so we can go.” Louis calls, pouring him a bowl of coco pops.

Noah turns away from the window, eyes wide, and says, “Hold on! I almost forget!”

“What did you forget?” Louis asks.

Instead of answering, Noah runs to where his pillow is sitting next to their bags. As fancy as this place is, Noah can’t sleep anywhere without his pillow. He reaches inside the pillowcase, eyebrows furrowed.

“A present for Harry,” he explains, his whole arm now inside the pillowcase. “My Daisy helps.”

Louis laughs. “Darling, what is it?”

“Look!” Noah shouts, triumphantly holding up something Louis can’t quite make out.

When he steps forward and opens his hand, Louis smiles. It’s a friendship bracelet made from rainbow colored string, and though there are definitely a couple mistakes it’s quite impressive.

“Love, that is beautiful,” Louis says, making Noah beam with pride. “Daisy helped you make it?”

Noah nods and brings the bracelet up to his face, gently poking at the strings. “She did, I asked. Saw she made some and then I made mine with her. Will Harry like it?”

“He’s going to love it, Noah. Do you want me to keep hold of it for you?”

Noah nods and hands the bracelet over. “Just wanna give him it, cause he’s my new friend.”

“It was a wonderful idea, love. Now come and eat, I’ll put this in your bag for safekeeping.”

“Thanks Daddy.” Noah says.

Louis drops a kiss to the top of his head. “Go eat darling.”

Noah nods and takes a seat at the table, shoveling spoonfuls of cereal into his mouth. Louis reaches for his phone to check in with Harry. The message he finds makes him smile.

Harry: have you made it in safe?
Louis: we’re fine mum I can drive you know. Noahs having cereal thanks by the way

Harry: :) no problem I figured you might be hungry. Got a ton planned for you both!!

Louis: im sure you have love. we’ll be there soon

Harry: Good. Missing you xx

Louis ignores the way his heart sort of skips a beat and shoves his phone back into his pocket. While he readies Noah’s bag, Noah shovels spoonfuls of cereal into his mouth. Minutes later, Noah finishes and jumps up out of his chair.

“Daddy! Can I have my hat please?” He asks.

After Noah has got his hat and trainers on and they’ve both cleaned the mess up on the table, Louis turns to look at him. “Alright love, are we ready for the concert?”

Noah nods and claps his hands together excitedly. “Gonna see all the music, and see Harry, little worried about meeting Niall.”

Louis smiles and drops a kiss to his forehead. “You’ll be fine pumpkin, he’s going to love you. It’s alright to be nervous though, perfectly normal. Let’s get going yeah?”

Noah agrees and waits for Louis to get their bag before reaching up for his hand. When they walk out the door they find Alberto leaning against the opposite wall, frowning down at his phone.

“Noah! So many muscles!” Noah gasps.

Alberto puts his phone away and smiles. “Hey little man, I’m Alberto.”

“I’m Noah Tomlinson and this is my Daddy, ’cept grown ups call him Louis.”

Louis smiles and squeezes Noah's hand. “He knows who I am, love. Alberto is a friend of Harry’s.”

The mention of the younger boy makes Noah beam. “Harry is so cool, even if his nose is giant.”

Alberto barks out a loud laugh and Louis just sighs.

“Right, well let’s get you both there to see him.”

The three of them get into the lift and Louis picks Noah up on the way out to the car. They have to switch out his car seat which takes a good five minutes of struggling, but they’re soon on their way.

Noah spends most of the ride with his face pressed to the window of the car, looking at everything that passes by in awe. When they arrive at the venue, a large concert hall with plenty of people and flashing lights outside, Noah gasps. He reaches his hand up and gently waves as they pass by towards the back entrance, even though it’s probably impossible for anyone to see him through the tinted windows.

They enter into the line of cars making their way through to the back entrance. Louis makes sure to keep Noah held tight to his side as they get out of the car and walk inside. There are people rushing around everywhere, some shouting into headpieces, others carrying various articles of clothing, one frantically shouting for Evian as if it’s a life or death situation. Noah looks around at the chaos with wide eyes and leans over to whisper in Louis’ ear.
“Daddy, kinda like my Lottie’s show.”

Louis nods remembering their trip to Lottie’s last show before her graduation last summer. “It is a bit yeah, baby. You alright?”

Noah nods and lays his head down on Louis’ shoulder while they walk.

Finally, to Louis’ immense relief, they reach a door with a sign that reads *One Direction* stuck to the front. Alberto pushes the door open and they’re met with blissful quiet.

“They boys are probably off somewhere getting made up,” Alberto says, letting them inside. “I’ll go let them know you’re both here. Make yourselves at home, there should be water and soda in that fridge over there.”

“Thank you!” Noah chirps.

Alberto smiles, looking sufficiently charmed by the boy. “No problem, little man. I’ll be right back.”

As soon as the door is shut, Noah lifts his hand to his mouth and starts chewing on his nails. Louis sighs and gently tugs his hand away, sitting them both on the couch. “Love, don’t do that. Are you still nervous?”

Noah sighs and nods. “Just want Niall to like me,” he admits quietly.

“Oh love,” Louis chuckles, holding his arms out for a hug. “It’s alright to be nervous, I get nervous sometimes too when I meet bands I really like.”

“Really?” Noah asks against his shoulder, sounding amazed at the thought of his father being nervous about anything.

Louis nods. “Of course, it’s scary. But Niall is going to love you, I promise.”

“Just want him to think I’m cool.”

It takes Louis everything he has in him not to laugh at that. “He will absolutely think you’re cool. Who wouldn’t think you’re cool?”

Noah shrugs and Louis quickly reaches in to tickle his sides. Just as Louis expected, Noah lets out a shrieking giggle and tries to squirm away, nervousness forgotten. Louis laughs right back and keeps tickling him, showing no mercy. Noah is so loud, laughing and shrieking, that neither of them hear the door open.

“Hello boys,”

Both of them jump at the sound of Harry’s voice. Louis looks up to find all three members of One Direction dressed and styled within an inch of their life and smiling at them from the door. Noah makes a sort of strangled gasping noise and quickly tries to hide against Louis’ side when his father stands up.

“My love,” he whispers.

The boys all stifle their laughter. Louis smiles and reaches back to pat Noah's head. “Love, go say hi. They won't bite, promise.”

Little fingers squeeze onto Louis’ thigh, and Noah whines softly. Harry and Liam are trying their hardest not to laugh and Niall’s face has been taken over by a monstrous grin. When their eyes
finally meet Harry mouths a silent *Hey*, and Louis smiles back.

Finally, Noah steps out from behind his father. His cheeks are burning red and he’s got his hands twisted together nervously when he says, “Hi Niall, hi Liam. I’m Noah, and I like your music the most.”

It’s almost like the floodgates have been open and Niall starts cackling with laughter. “No way, the most?” he asks loudly.

Noah nods, looking incredibly starstruck.

“Well we’ve heard a ton about you Noah, from this one over here,” Niall says, nudging a bashful Harry with his elbow. “Me and Liam are so excited to meet ya.”

“Me? Heared about me?” Noah asks in disbelief.

Liam nods and pushes the other two inside. “Of course, Harry hardly stops talking about you and your dad. I feel like I know you already.”

Noah turns to look up at Louis, eyes wide and sparkling. “Daddy, they know me,” he whispers.

“Of course they do, love.”

Harry scoffs. “What, don’t I get a hello?”

“No, you don’t,” Louis says, reaching forward for Liam’s arm. The man looks shocked but lets Louis tug him into a bear hug with no qualms. “But Liam does. Hello Liam.”

“Hi Louis,” Liam laughs.

Noah shakes his head at his father’s antics and runs up to hug Harry around the legs. “Hi Harry! I got a surprise for you.”

“For me?” Harry asks, gently pulling Noah away so he can sit on the couch instead and talk to him at eye level. “Is it a present, love?”

“Mhm, a present,” Noah says proudly. “But not for now, it’s for later.”

Harry reaches forward to gently fix Noah’s hat, and Louis could almost laugh at how clucky he is. “Well, I guess I’ll just have to wait then won’t I? You know, I think Niall has something to show you actually.”

“What?”

Niall nods. “Harry was telling me you wanted to try guitar, right?”

Noah gasps, looking to both Harry and Louis in shock before nodding to Niall. “I do! I do so much!”

Sometimes, and this is definitely one of those times, Louis wonders if Harry is even real. He wonders what exactly he did to deserve Harry, who is currently making every single one of his kid’s dreams come true like it’s no big deal. Harry who gently nudges Noah over towards Niall in the corner of the room and whispers, “Go on love.”

From a case he seems to have pulled from nowhere, Niall extracts a beaten up acoustic guitar. He takes a seat in an overstuffed armchair and motions Noah over to him.
“We’ve got time, I can show ya some basics. Here, I’ll do this part and you strum.”

Liam laughs and takes a seat on one side of Harry, leaving the other side open for Louis. “It’s like we don’t even exist,” he says.

“He was so nervous the whole way here,” Louis whispers to both of them, not wanting to embarrass Noah. “He worked himself up so much over it he had to have a nap.”

Harry wraps his arm around Louis’ waist and squeezes close to him. “Poor love,” he sighs.

“Don’t you start,” Louis teases, running his thumb across Harry’s hand.

Instead of answering, Harry blushes a deep red and presses his face to Louis’ neck for a moment. He wraps his other arm around Louis’ front and squeezes lightly before whispering, “Missed you.”

“Missed you too sap,” Louis murmurs back, gently brushing his hand over Harry’s curls. There’s far too much hairspray in them for his liking, and he’s frowning about it when he catches Liam staring. “What’re you looking at Payno?”

Liam shrugs and smiles when Harry sits up and starts fixing his hair. “Nothing. You’re just—it’s nice, that’s all. Seeing him happy.”

“Well, I do so love to make him happy,” Louis teases.

“Louis, your kid’s a natural!” Niall shouts to him, and judging by the way his eyes are lit up, he means it.

“I’m going to have to buy him a guitar now, there’s no way out,” Louis sighs, watching Noah giddily learning basic chords.

“He is doing really well,” Harry says, tapping his fingers against Louis’ waist. “Better than me at least.”

Liam snorts out a laugh. “Not hard, that.”

“Oh piss off Liam,” Harry grumbles.

“Daddy!” Noah calls, turning to smile at Louis. “Do you see I’m great?”

Louis smiles and nods, ignoring the laughter from the other two. “I see you pumpkin, you’re a genius.”

Noah looks so proud of himself Louis could almost cry.

“We should have him come on with us and play a song, what do you think?” Niall laughs.

“Absolutely not, I couldn’t handle it. I don’t know how your poor mothers did it, I’d go positively mad.”

Harry smiles at that, sharing a look with Niall. “Liam’s mum hasn’t stopped crying in ages.”

“Shut up, both of you,” Liam grumbles.

Louis smiles. “Your poor mum, send her my love.”

“Lads, you’ll have to be going soon,” Someone shouts, rapping on the door.
Suddenly brought back to reality, Louis sits up and knocks Harry’s arm from his waist. “Baby, c’mon let’s let Niall go.”

Noah sighs, obviously not happy about this, but still gives Niall a winning smile. “Thank you for showing me.”

“No problem kid,” Niall smiles back, giving the boy a fist bump. “We can practice some more tonight, what do you think?”

“Yeah!” Noah agrees, hugging Niall around the waist. The man looks shocked but before he can react, Noah is rushing across the room to Louis. He hops up on his tip toes and harshly whispers into his ear.

“Daddy, my present for Harry.”

“I’ve got it right here love.”

Noah turns to Harry and fixes him with a serious look. “Harry, gotta close your eyes now.”

Harry does as he’s told and closes his eyes. Louis reaches for their bag and carefully pulls the bracelet out of the side pocket. Noah takes it from Louis’ hands carefully and turns back to Harry again, all while Liam and Niall watch on with obvious amusement.

“Hand please!”

Harry smirks and holds out his left hand. Noah lays the bracelet down across his wrist and let’s Louis help him tie it tight. He then gently fusses with it, getting it to face just the way he likes, and finally pulls away.

“Now, open your eyes!”

Harry does as he’s told and opens his eyes, immediately looking down at his wrist. At first he says nothing, just blinks and reaches to gently touch the lopsided string bracelet. Noah waits, bouncing on the heels of his feet.

After a moment of tense silence, Harry smiles and says, “Oh, Noah it’s beautiful. Did you make this?”

“I did, I made it! My Daisy helps me, but I make it the most. It’s for being my new friend,” Noah says in one quick breath.

Despite the fact that it’s just a simple bracelet, Harry looks speechless. “Thank you so much,” he whispers. “I love it, I’ll never take it off I promise.”

Noah beams at the compliment and steps forward to give Harry a hug. “You’re welcome, Harry. Thank you for being my friend.”

Harry hugs him right back, closing his eyes. “Thank you for being mine, love.”

Another knock at the door interrupts them. “Boys, two minutes!” The same voice shouts, before disappearing off into the chaos outside.

Liam stands up and pats Harry on the back. “Let’s go lads. Louis, you know where you’re going?”

Before Louis can say anything, Harry lifts his head. “I’ll have Alberto show them their seats. I’ll see you both in a little bit, yeah? Go with your Dad, love.”
Noah gives Harry one last squeeze and then moves to Louis’ arms. “Good luck! Sing good!”

Harry stands up and presses a quick kiss to Louis’ cheek, laughing when he whispers, “Break a leg Harold.”

The three boys shout their goodbyes on their way out and Niall stops to muss up Noah’s hair before running after them. Noah giggles and turns to Louis, hat tilted almost completely off his head now and cheeks red from laughter.

“Daddy, you were right. Didn’t even need to be scared, and Niall’s the best.”

“You’re the best,” Louis tells him, meaning every word. “Come on love, let’s go watch some music.”

There’s really no words to describe how Harry feels looking out and seeing Louis and Noah dancing and singing along with the crowd. He’s heard a few times that home isn’t a place so much as it’s a person, and that’s what it feels like when he watches them. They’re smiling and dancing and Noah looks like he’s shouting the words at the top of his lungs. Every song Harry sings, no matter how broody or dramatic it’s meant to be, he’s smiling. Niall and Liam see them as well, Harry can tell by the way Niall keeps shouting *Sing it!* and cackling with delight when Noah does just that.

While they perform, Harry can’t help but glance down at his wrist once or twice. Knowing that everyone else is going to see the bracelet makes him proud in a weird sort of way. He supposes he’s just proud to wear it knowing that Noah made it just for him. Any other reason would be ridiculous, right?

Their set is only a few songs long and they’re soon leaving the stage with shouted thank you’s and a round of applause that seems to go on forever. They’re rushed backstage by yelling stage hands and body guards to change out of their sweaty clothes. Instead of heading off with Niall and Liam to check out the beginnings of the after party, Harry heads back out into the crowd.

Louis and Noah are in the area reserved for family and friends, now sitting down while they wait for the next act to set up. Noah is sat in Louis’ lap, giggling about something and babbling to him. Louis just smiles at him and gently tucks a lock of hair behind his ear.

“Did you enjoy it?”

At the sound of his voice, both of them look up. It hits Harry out of nowhere when he’s faced with both pairs of sparkling blue eyes how beautiful they are. His breath always seems to catch in his throat whenever he sees them together, both quick witted and beautiful and so smart. They could break his heart so easily and he knows it, and that’s as terrifying as it is exhilarating.

“Harry, was so good!” Noah gasps, looking amazed when he thinks about the performance. “When you went like-and then Liam goes *BANG* and then Niall-”

“Take a breath my love,” Louis teases.

Noah does he’s told and takes a deep breath before jumping back into his story, explaining everything he loved about the show. It’s mostly him imitating the boys and their instruments which Harry finds hilarious.

“Well, I’m glad that you liked it,” he says, once Niall’s done imitating a guitar. “I was a bit worried.”
Louis rolls his eyes. “You were perfect Harold.”

“Worth four stars?”

That surprises a laugh out of Louis. “Fuck off,” he chuckles.

“Daddy!” Noah gasps.

Louis cringes. “Sorry love, little ears. I forgot.”

Noah covers said little ears with his hands and fixes Louis with a very serious scowl. “A pound Daddy.”

“What is he talking about?” Harry laughs, sitting down in the empty chair beside Louis.

Louis shakes his head. “Swear jar. It’s not even my swear jar, it’s me mums.”


“I can control myself, thank you very much,” Louis snarks back.

“Haven’t seen much evidence for it,” Harry murmurs.

Before Louis can answer, Noah pulls his hands off of his ears. He’s still scowling when he says, “Daddy I am very hungry. So hungry and I will starve.”

“Babe, you had cereal not that long ago.” Louis reminds him.

Noah shrugs. “So? I’m still starving.”

Louis groans. “You will not starve, Noah. Let’s go yeah? I’ll find food.”

Without really thinking, Harry blurts out, “Love I have someone for that.”

Louis barks out a laugh and fixes him with a sarcastic smile. “Oh, you have someone how nice. I don’t though, actually, but I do have legs. And you’re welcome to follow me on your own legs if you want.”

Noah giggles at his father and holds on tight to Louis’ neck when they stand up. Harry is left sitting in his chair, in a bit of shock, until Noah yells to him. “C’mon Harry!”

Harry stumbles up and takes off after them, catching up just as Louis is charming someone’s poor assistant into pointing him in the right direction. She does so and Louis takes off, Harry trailing behind like a puppy.

“Right,” Louis announces when they enter into a hall full of people milling around and a table of food. It must be the after party, Harry supposes, because he spots Niall in one corner trying to flirt with some poor girl.

“What shall it be love?” Louis asks.

Noah looks around and then shrugs. “I dunno. Harry, what you like?”

“Tacos are good,” Harry mutters, mostly because that’s the only thing he can identify on the table from here.
“The two of you sometimes, I swear,” Louis sighs, turning towards Harry. “Hold him for a moment, would you?”

Harry takes Noah into his arms easily and they both watch Louis make a beeline for the table. He starts picking and choosing food and basically ignoring all of the major celebrities around him. It’s sort of hilarious, actually.

“Your father’s a bit crazy, you know that?” Harry says to Noah.

Noah nods, looking proud of that fact. “A little bit.”

“But he is wonderful.”

The words make Noah smile. He gently kicks Harry’s side to get his attention. “I know about you, Harry.”

Harry laughs and shakes his head. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“I know it,” Noah reiterates, giggling now. “I know your secret.”

“You know, I’m starting to think the crazy might’ve rubbed off on you a bit, love.” Harry teases.

Noah giggles and rests his cheek against Harry’s shoulder. “It’s just nothing.”

“Just nothing?” Harry parrots back, bouncing lightly on the soles of his feet like he does for Eva when she’s sleepy.

Noah nods and reaches out to gently drum his fingers against the skin of Harry’s neck. “You’re a good friend, Harry,” he says quietly. “For me and Daddy. Like when you’re our friend.”

“I like being your friend too, love,” Harry replies happily. Noah pats his back instead of answering.

Like a hurricane, Louis sweeps through the room and back to the two of them. He presents the plate of food and bowl of popcorn in his hands with a loud, “Tada!”

“Would you look at that, your legs do work,” Harry laughs.

Louis smirks and looks from Noah’s sleepy face to Harry, and back once more. “Well, don’t you two look comfortable.”

Noah blinks his tired blue eyes at Louis and smiles. “Kinda sleepy. Probably could have soda.”

That surprises a laugh out of Louis who immediately shakes his head. “Yeah? Would that solve it?”

“Probably,” Noah sighs.

Harry smiles and nods to him. “He’s smart, this kid. Knows how to get what he wants.”

And even though it’s obvious Noah has no clue what that means, he still giggles out, “Thanks Harry.”

“I don’t like this, the two of you ganging up on me,” Louis decides, scowling at both of them until Harry smiles and he breaks. “You can have one soda love, and that’s it for the day. Deal?”

“Deal,” Noah agrees.
After Louis has grabbed drinks for each of them, they head back to their seats. The next band has only just taken the stage and Noah manages to spill part of the bowl of popcorn he was entrusted with down Harry’s shirt.

Harry is sure someone’s taking pictures of him, which is mostly why he tries to angle his body in a way to hide Noah. He’s just a baby after all, he doesn’t deserve that. Louis keeps one hand on Harry’s lower back the whole walk to their seats. When they sit down and Louis takes Noah back into his lap, Harry makes sure to rest one of his arms around Louis’ shoulders.

“You look beautiful tonight,” he whispers, dipping in close to Louis’ ear so no one else will hear.

“Careful Styles,” Louis whispers back, reaching over to squeeze Harry’s upper thigh. “Don’t start things you can’t finish.”

The words make Harry blush a deep red. He leans back in his seat but makes sure to keep one arm around Louis.

While the band sings and dances on stage, Noah imitates them. He wiggles around in a little dance and sings along like he knows the words, though it’s quite obvious that he doesn’t. For the most part it’s a lot of incoherent babbling, but he does it quite loudly and like he’s sure he knows that he’s right.

“Love, do you like this song?” Louis laughs.

Noah nods, still wiggling around. “Don’t know what it says, but I like it!”

Harry laughs and stands up, bowing at the waist as dramatically as he can. Louis openly laughs at him but Harry ignores it and reaches for Noah’s hand instead.

“May I have this dance?”

Noah giggles and hops out of Louis’ lap. “I can’t reach!” he complains, reaching up for Harry’s hands.

Sweeping him up off the floor, Harry grabs hold of one of Noah’s hands and starts spinning them around. Noah is in a fit of giggles but still attempts to sing along. Harry starts to sing with him until he gets the words enough to go along with it.

*She took my arm I don’t know how it happened* The band croons, and Harry and Noah yell right along with them. Out of the corner of his eye, Harry can see Louis practically crying with laughter at this point, which only makes him happier.

The song comes to an end with a loud cacophony of sounds, and Noah cheering at the top of his lungs. Louis claps and yells for them while everyone else claps for the band. Noah and Harry both take a bow for him, Noah copying how Harry does it exactly.

“Thank you, thank you,” Harry says haughtily. “We’ve been-wait, Noah who are we?”

Without a moment’s hesitation, Noah shouts, “The Dinosaurs!”

Harry coughs over his laugh and nods. “Right, we’ve been The Dinosaurs.”

“Mental, both of you are mental,” Louis laughs, shaking his head at the two of them. “Are we done then? All musiced out my love?”
It takes an embarrassingly long amount of time for Harry to realize Louis isn’t talking to him.

Noah shakes his head, eyes still bright with excitement and adrenaline. “Never Daddy. What now? Do we have to go home?”

“Home?” Harry gasps, pulling Noah back up into his arms. “Who said anything about going home? No, you’re both mine for the weekend. Let’s go, the car should be waiting.”

Noah nods and claps his hands at the idea. “Yes! Daddy can we?”

Louis shrugs and stands up, letting Harry pull him close to both of them. “Of course love. What Harry says goes, but only for the weekend.”

“So cool,” Noah murmurs, taking one last look around the emptying venue. “Best weekend.”

Harry can’t help but agree.

The five of them are all crowded onto Niall’s bed, Noah sitting between Louis’ legs while he shouts at his father about what to do. Louis shouts back at him and the two of them shouting together are louder than the other three boys who are laughing at them.

“Aw, fuck me Lou! How’d you manage that?” Niall yells when Louis somehow kicks the ball around his player and closer to the goal.

“Language!” Louis and Noah shout in unison.

Liam yelps when Louis kicks one leg out and knocks the controller from his hand. “Christ, Harry stop them!” he yells, scrambling on the floor for his controller.

But it’s too late. Noah and Louis’ player makes it past their goalie and they score. They both let out loud victory cries and Louis hauls Noah onto his shoulders. He starts a victory lap around the massive room, all while singing *We Are The Champions* at the top of his lungs.

“You cheated!” Liam shouts when he finally gets hold of the controller.

“That’s the Tommo way, Liam!” Louis yells once they’ve looped back around, pointing a finger right in Liam’s face.

“Tommo way, Liam!” Noah laughs.

Louis takes one last lap of the room, reminding the other three boys there’s no time for losers, and finally ends up falling back onto the bed. Harry moves just in time to catch Noah around the waist and pull him from Louis’ shoulders.

“You both are trouble,” Harry laughs. “Aren’t you trouble?”

Noah shakes his head, shoulders shaking with giggles. “I’m not! Daddy is, Daddy’s trouble.”

Louis and Harry share a look. The way Harry smiles at him makes something stir deep in Louis’ chest. He tries not to think on it.

“I think it’s you, you’re the troublemaker,” Harry teases, tickling Noah’s sides.

“Ticklemonster!” Noah accuses, trying to escape Harry’s arms. “Save me, someone quick!”
Like a hero from an action movie, Niall swoops in to knock Harry out of the way. Harry makes a dramatic painful noise and falls to his back. Noah sits up, curls wild and cheeks ruddy from laughter. It occurs to Louis out of nowhere than he can’t remember the last time he saw his son this happy.

“My poor love,” Louis laughs, sitting up as well. “That mean old Harry’s been so awful to you, hasn’t he?”

Noah looks over at Harry who is still playing dead and giggles. “He’s okay. Is funny, even if my Phoebe says he kinda looks like frog.”

The boys absolutely lose it at that and Louis’ eyes go wide. “Phoebe told you that?”

“Yes, and she’s always right. Says Liam is her most favorite, though, ‘cause he’s so handsome,” Noah stops and looks at Liam, his eyebrows pulling together thoughtfully. “Do you think so Daddy?”

The laughter only gets louder, though now Liam is trying to hide his red face from them all. Louis turns to wink at him suggestively. Harry makes a sad sort of sound and reaches out to gently squeeze his hand around Louis’ exposed ankle. Louis smiles.

“He’s Liam Payne love, he’s beautiful. Aren’t you Liam?”

Liam sort of looks like an angry tomato. “Shut up Louis.”

Louis looks to Noah. “That means yes, because I’m always right aren’t I?”

Noah nods. “You’re more right than my Phoebe, but only ‘cause you’re the boss.”

“You hear that boys? I’m the boss,” Louis announces, reaching for his forgotten controller. “The boss wants another round of FIFA. Shall we?”

Crawling across everyone else, Noah gets back into Louis’ lap. “Ready! C’mon Harry, be on our team.”

“Of course bean,” Harry blurts out, sitting back up.

Noah scrunches his nose. “I’m not a bean Harry, I’m a Noah.”

“I suppose you could be both,” Harry says slowly. “A Noah and a bean. A Noah bean.”

There’s a moment of silence while Noah thinks it over. Finally, he nods and says, “Could be both.”

Harry nods back, a smile pulling at his lips. “Right then, bean, let’s go. Tommo way.”

“Tommo way,” Noah agrees.

Louis is so immersed in their conversation that Noah has to shake his arm to get his attention. Harry doesn’t even look at him. Doesn’t even acknowledge he’s just broken Louis’ heart and put it right back together again right in front of him.

It’s not until later, when Niall has his guitar carefully balanced on Noah’s knee and is patiently showing him where to put his hands, that Louis finally gets Harry alone.

“What was that?” Louis asks, quiet over the sounds of the superhero movie only Liam’s watching at this point.
Harry frowns and reaches over the bed to gently touch Louis’ hand. “What was what love?”

“You and Noah, that.”

Harry’s frown grows deeper. “Babe, what? We were just messing around, that’s all. He’s fun.”

“Do you mean it?” Louis asks, because he can’t help himself. “When you’re-you’re just so good with him, and the things you say and-just. Do you mean it?”

And what he’s really thinking is Do you really want this?, but he can’t bring himself to say the words.

There’s a sad look on Harry’s face when he reaches out to gently touch Louis’ cheek. He searches Louis’ eyes for something and sighs. “Baby, of course. Of course I do. He’s lovely, you know that I think you’re both so wonderful don’t you?”

Louis suddenly feels incredibly stupid for ever doubting it. “I know,” he murmurs.

Harry nods, reaching for Louis’ hand. “Good, that’s-that’s good then,” he sighs. “I’m going to miss you so badly.”

“Harry-”

“No, I know you don’t want to talk about it,” Harry interrupts stubbornly. “But I’m going to miss you so fucking much and it’s all I can think about.”

Louis shakes his head and sighs. “I’ll miss you too. I miss you already, H. It’s stupid isn’t it, what we’ve done to ourselves. I should’ve never gone for that drink with you.”

Harry shakes his head desperately. “Don’t, please. Don’t say that. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me Louis.”

Their hands come together over the bed, fingers intertwined, and Louis wants to protest it but he doesn’t. For once he just listens.

“You make me so much better, you know? I’m so much happier with you then I’ve been in so long and everyone can tell. It’s actually kinda sad, even my mom saw how happy I was and immediately asked what’d happened.”

Louis smirks. “Can’t be all that.”

“You are though,” Harry whispers. “God Louis, you don’t even know.”

“Know what?”

“Daddy!”

Noah’s shout from across the room shocks Louis back to reality. He rips his hand from Harry’s, though logically he knows there’s no way Noah can see them from this angle, and ignores the hurt look on his boyfriend’s face. Instead, he focuses on Noah’s happy smile.

“What is it, love?”

Noah grins and strums the guitar in his hands, shouting, “Niall says I’m so good, I’m the best!” The instrument makes a sad clanging noise and Noah frowns. Niall patiently helps him fix his fingers a bit and Noah tries again, this time emitting a pleasant sounding chord when he strums.
“Of course you are, you’re my son aren’t you?” Louis teases, glancing down at Harry’s watch. “But it’s way past your bed time, kid. Say goodnight to everyone.”

Noah pouts. “But Dad.”

“Love it’s late, don’t you want to be awake for tomorrow? I’ve heard Harry’s got big plans.”

Biting his lip, Noah looks down at the guitar and then back over to Harry who’s smiling at him. Finally, he sighs in defeat. “Fine, I can go to bed. Goodnight Niall, thanks for teachin’ me.”

Niall smiles and ruffles his curls. “No problem lad, we can learn more tomorrow too if you want.”

Noah nods and jumps down from the chair, moving over to Liam who’s got a whole couch to himself. “Goodnight Liam, most handsome.”

While the other three boys laugh, Liam turns red right up to the tips of his ears. “Night Noah,” he says, ignoring everyone else. “I’ll see you in the morning, won’t I?”

Noah nods and moves over to the bed where Louis is standing up and gathering the things they have scattered over the room. Harry stands up as well and watches Louis flit around along with Noah.

“I’ll walk you to your room,” he decides.

Louis is almost tempted to refuse, but he doesn’t. They need to talk about it, he knows that, and he hates it. He hates talking about emotions or basically anything that could make him more vulnerable than he already is, especially with Harry. But he supposes this is how a real relationship works, isn’t it? You’re supposed to want to be vulnerable with them, he thinks. You’re supposed to trust that they won’t hurt you when you open yourself up and show them every awful insecure thing about yourself.

Well, Louis tried that the last time and it didn’t work. He got hurt more than he ever thought possible. But sometimes he wonders if Harry is even capable of hurting another person.

“C’mon love,” Louis says, holding his hand out for Noah’s. “I’m tired too.”

Noah takes Louis’ hand and rubs his sleepy eyes with the other. “Bye bye,” he calls behind him.


Their room is two doors down from Niall’s and Harry quietly leads them inside. Noah walks over to the bed and gives Hank a quick cuddle. “Hank and I wanna sleep with you, Daddy,” he mumbles into the dinosaur’s back.

“Of course you can,” Louis answers. “Get your pajamas on love, and brush your teeth please.”

Noah nods and goes to do so, taking his pajamas and toothbrush into the bathroom with him. In an instant, Harry is pressing himself close to Louis again. Louis closes his eyes and holds his breath. Harry brushes his lips over Louis’ forehead and sighs.

“We’ll be okay,” he says. “I know we’ll be okay. I’ll be home soon.”

Louis reaches out to touch his hip, tugging him closer. “I’ll miss you,” he admits.

“I’ll miss you too,” Harry replies, kissing his lips just briefly. “Maybe you and Noah could come to a show.”
Louis smiles. “As sweet as that is, I can’t just up and leave babe. Noah’s got nursery starting again soon, work is only getting busier, and don’t even get me started on passports and airplanes and that sort of thing.”

Harry nods, grimacing. “I know, I know I’m sorry. I’m being stupid, but I can’t really be reasonable right now not knowing when I’m going to get to see you again. It’s killing me.”

“I know love,” Louis kisses Harry’s cheek and gently pulls away when he hears the faucet turn off in the bathroom. “We can talk, just let me get him into bed. He’ll pass out as soon as his head hits the pillow.”

Before Harry can agree, the bathroom door swings open. Noah exits dressed in his favorite dinosaur pajamas and the football slippers Jay got him last Christmas. He smiles at the two of them and climbs up into the bed, pulling Hank close to his chest.

“I’m so sleepy Daddy,” he yawns. “Can’t wait until tomorrow to hang out with Harry.”

Louis smiles and tucks the blankets in around Noah in the middle of the bed. Noah smiles up at him and pulls the sheets to his chin, making sure Hank is properly tucked in as well.

“I love you pumpkin,” Louis whispers, placing a kiss to his forehead. “Harry and I will be right in the next room if you need us, okay?”

Noah smiles over at Harry and nods. “Can I have telly on, just this once?”

Normally Louis would laugh at the idea, but Noah is already so tired he won’t make it through one cartoon. And besides, it’s supposed to be a special weekend anyway. No rules, or something like that.

“Just this once,” Louis agrees. “Do you want to say goodnight to Harry?”

“Night night Harry,” Noah sing songs. “Thank you for the very best day.”

Harry sighs happily, looking so proud of himself Louis could almost cry. “You don’t have to thank me, bean. Tomorrow will be even better, a thousand times better. Thank you for my bracelet.”

Noah smiles and turns onto his side, snuggling down into the sheets while Louis picks out a cartoon for him to watch. After they’ve both finally settled on something, Louis turns the lights off and leaves Noah with one last kiss to his cheek.

“Sweet dreams darling.”

The little room off Louis’ own isn’t completely cut off, but it’s far enough away that they won’t disturb Noah. Louis takes a seat on one of the couches and Harry sits down beside him, pulling his legs up in front of him and making himself smaller.

“Tomorrow,” Louis starts to say, but Harry stops him.

“No way, it’s a surprise Louis,” he scolds. “You’re going to love it though, I promise.”

Louis hates how endeared he is by this stupid boy. “I’m sure it’s something ridiculous.”

Instead of replying, Harry tilts to the side and rests his head on Louis’ shoulder. They both watch in silence as Noah tosses and turns before finally settling. Louis reaches for Harry’s hand and squeezes, watching Noah’s chest rising and falling rhythmically under the sheets.
“I’ve always wanted kids,” he says, because if they’re going to talk they’re going to fucking talk. “Ever since I was young, far too young to be worried about that sort of thing. Sometimes I wonder if that’s why I was so ready to get married straight out of uni, have a baby straight out of uni, even if he wasn’t the guy I always dreamed of.”

Louis stops to take a breath. Luke was never what he dreamed of, he’s sure of that now. But back then he was so swept up in it all, too swept up to admit to himself that he dreamed of better.

“He noticed me Harry, and that was all I wanted,” he chokes out, hating himself for how true the words are. “I just wanted someone to fucking want me for once.”

Arms wrap their way around Louis’ waist and he soon finds himself pressed to Harry’s chest. “I want you,” Harry whispers, pressing a kiss to his temple. “From the moment I first saw you, I wanted you, and I still do.”

“You didn’t like me,” Louis remembers.

Harry chuckles and shakes his head. “It wasn’t that, I just thought you’d hate us, me especially. I was so intimidated by you.”

“By me?” Louis laughs.

Harry nods. “You just-you’re so confident and sure of yourself, witty and funny, you could cut me down so easily if you wanted to. That’s intimidating, Lou.”

Louis shakes his head, moving so they’re facing each other once more. “Baby, I’d never. Not to you.”

Harry lowers his eyes and shrugs. A blush is slowly creeping it's way across his cheeks, and Louis loves it. “Well I know that now, but I didn’t then. I’d just read some of what you’d written and thought shit, he’s going to hate me. And then you showed up and fuck, Louis, you were gorgeous, and so funny, and then you were talking to Noah and your whole face just lit up and-you’re beautiful, you know?”

Now it’s Louis turn to go red. He shakes his head but Harry stops him with a quick press of his lips. “And then you said yes when I asked you for a drink, and you took me away and I needed it Louis. I needed that one night of just being a normal lad and going out and meeting a guy I liked. I never got to do it, you know? I’d only just come to terms with who I was when I was 16 and suddenly I was stuck in the closet again. All I ever wanted was a normal relationship.”

Louis laughs softly. “This is so far from normal babe, if you haven’t noticed.”

Harry pokes his nose in retaliation. “I know that. But still, it’s more normal than I’ve ever had. You’re not some guy I met by chance at a party who thank god turned out to be gay because I kissed him drunk. And you aren’t trying to use me, and you aren’t cheating on me with a pretty girl. I can go on dates with you in public and not have to worry we’ll be seen, and I can tell people about you, and I can hold your hand-fuck Louis. It feels so good just to hold you hand.”

The words make Louis want to cry, and scream, and maybe punch everyone who ever hurt his boy. Just the thought of anyone trying to hurt or change Harry makes Louis angry.

“Baby, you’re breaking my heart,” he whispers. “Fuck, that pisses me off so much.”

“Sorry,”
Louis shakes his head, tugging at one of Harry’s stray curls so he’ll smile again. “Don’t be sorry, love, it isn’t your fault. I’m just mad that they took that away from you. Christ, you were just a baby.”

“I wasn’t a baby,” Harry pouts back, moving towards Louis’ hand. “Besides, I get it now. And I get it with you, I’d rather it be with you than any other idiot I would’ve found.”

As much as Louis wants to agree with this, he can’t. Sure, no one really deserves Harry Styles, but still. “You deserved a chance Harry,” Louis explains. “You deserved to be a teenager and go on dates and cry to your mum about your poor broken heart more than once. I’m sorry.”

“I’m okay,” Harry promises. “It sucks, I missed out and that sucks. But I’m okay. I have you now.”

“You do,” Louis promises right back. “You have me Harry, as long as you want me.”

*Forever, his mind begs. Please want me forever.*

The couch is a bit uncomfortable, but the two of them make it work. Louis lays down and Harry lays beside him, head and hands resting on Louis’ chest. They watch Noah sleep quietly, Louis gently tugging the knots out of Harry’s hair with his fingertips. It could be minutes or hours later, Louis would never be able to tell, when Harry finally speaks again.

“Me too.”

Louis frowns, brushing a thumb over Harry’s cheek. “What?”

Harry presses his fingertips to Louis’ side and nods. “I’ve always wanted a family too, kids and someone to love. As far back as I can remember.

There’s no response Louis can think of right now that wouldn’t end with him in tears, so he says nothing. Instead, he just presses himself close to Harry, closes his eyes, and prays that he could be enough.

Gentle whispers wake Louis up the next morning. Well, one gentle whisper and Noah’s whisper, which is more of a hushed shout.

“We’ve got to wake him up! He’s taking too long!” Noah’s complaining.

A voice that is unmistakably Harry’s replies softly, “He’s tired Noah, let your poor dad sleep a bit. Did you want breakfast? We can order for Louis as well.”

Noah giggles. “You call him Louis.”

Harry laughs softly. “Well that’s his name, bean, he deserves to hear it once in awhile. C’mon, let’s look and see what there is.”

“I want all the bacon Harry,” Noah says quite seriously. “It’s my favorite.”

“Then that’s what you’ll get. What about your dad, huh?”

Noah hums and Louis can hear him shuffling around. “Daddy likes pancakes and berries, and everything else too.”

“Mm, that’s very informative love, thank you,” Harry chuckles. “Stay here, I’ll go and order so we
don’t wake him.”

As if remembering his father is sleeping directly next to him, Noah whispers “Okay.”

Louis waits until he hears Harry quietly pad out of the room to roll over onto his side. Noah gasps.

“Daddy! Finally!”

Louis blinks his eyes open and smiles. “Good morning to you too, love.”

“Harry’s gettin’ breakfast,” Noah explains. “You were still sleepin’ Daddy, you sleep forever and ever!”

“I was tired babes, you wore me out yesterday. You hair is a right mess this morning, isn’t it?”

Noah nods and tugs at a piece of his hair with a frown. “Very curly. Can I have mine like Harry’s?”

“In a bun?” Louis asks. Noah nods back. “You’ll have to grow it out a bit more I think. We can try in a few weeks.”

Noah sighs dramatically and flops down onto his back. “Life is so hard,” he moans.

Louis bursts into laughter. “That it is love.”

As if on cue, Harry bursts back into the room all smiles and flowing hair. “Good morning! You’re awake!”

“You’re far too awake,” Louis replies. He’s even dressed already, which Louis finds a little offensive. Who gets dressed before noon on a weekend?

Harry shrugs, his whole body looking jittery with excitement. “I’m excited, that’s all. Ready to start our day.”

Louis sits up against the headboard, not missing the way Harry’s eyes drag over his chest. He smirks. “You still haven’t told me what is we’re doing, Harold.”

It takes a moment for Harry to tear his eyes away. “Of course not,” he stutters out. “What kind of a surprise would it be if I told you?”

“The kind I know about, coincidentally the only kind of surprise I like,” Louis says.

Noah shakes his head. “Daddy, surprises are best. Can we go now Harry?”

“At least we eat breakfast, okay? We wouldn’t want you starving during your surprise.”

“Probably you’re right,” Noah agrees. He then hops out of the bed and steps into his football slippers, heading for the bathroom. “I’ll be back!”

Louis smiles. “We’ll be here.”

The door shuts and in an instant Harry is there, pressing his lips to Louis’, thumbing at his waist and groaning. “Fuck Lou,” he whispers, dropping his lips to Louis’ neck. “You’re so lovely in the mornings. Want to wake up next to you every morning.”

“Liar,” Louis tries to sound unaffected, but it’s hard when there’s an incredibly hot man pressing kisses to his chest. “Will you tell me what the surprise is now?”
Harry lets out a surprised laugh and pulls away. There’s a lovebite forming now, right between the letters on Louis’ chest, and he touches it proudly. “You’re using me,” he says. “You only want me for secret telling.”

Louis sighs sadly and hangs his head. “It’s true, you’ve caught me. I’m only with you for the secrets you know.”

Harry shakes his head. “I knew it.”

Across the room the bathroom door creaks open again. Noah walks out, now with a little bit of his hair pulled into a messy knot on the top of his head. Louis starts to laugh but Harry stops him with a terrible scowl.

“Noah love, did you want help?” Harry asks, flashing Noah a brilliant smile. It’s a bit scary how fast he can go from one extreme to another when he wants to, Louis thinks.

Frowning, Noah reaches up to tug at his hair. “Only got a little,” he explains sadly.

Harry beckons him over, taking a seat at the end of the bed. “No worries bean, when I was growing my hair out I didn’t have very much either. Come here, let me see.”

It takes a good two or three minutes just for Harry to get the hair tie Noah’s found out of his hair. Louis watches as he gently combs through the boys curls with his fingertips before picking out just the top-most pieces. In an instant, he’s formed a positively tiny bun and has tied it up expertly.

“There you are,” Harry says, patting Noah’s shoulder. “Go on, go see if you like it.”

With an absolutely massive grin on his face, Noah runs to the bathroom. A knock on the door has Harry dashing away as well, slowly pulling a huge cart of food in and thanking the boy who’s brought it all up for them.

“Harry, thank you I love it!” Noah shouts from the bathroom. “Look so, so cool!”

Harry beams at the praise. “You’re so welcome. I hope you’re both hungry, I might’ve over estimated how much we can all eat.”

“Are you even real?” Louis asks. There’s no way this boy is real, he reasons. He’s probably hit his head and has found himself in some sort of fantasy world. That’s the only explanation that makes sense.

Harry grins at him but says nothing back.

After they’ve eaten all they possibly can and Louis coaxes Noah into wearing something other than pajamas, Harry leads them out to his car. Someone, who at this point could just be a fairy godmother Louis thinks, has already moved Noah’s car seat and so all they have to do is get in and drive.

Louis never really spent much time in London, so he honestly has no clue where they’re going until the car finally stops in front of the Natural History Museum. Louis can only stare.

“Harry,” he starts.

Harry grins. “Come on, let’s go.”

Noah, who’s had his face stuck to the window for most of the ride, pulls away to frown at them. He lifts Hank up to look outside as well, as if the dinosaur can read. “Where are we? Is the surprise
“Come on boys!” Harry shouts happily.

The museum looks curiously slow for a weekend, and Louis almost asks if Harry’s had something to do with that, but he doesn’t want to ruin this for Noah. He can scold Harry for being ridiculous later.

As soon as they walk inside they’re faced with a giant dinosaur. Noah’s eyes go as wide as saucers and his mouth hangs open, completely speechless. Harry is wringing his hand nervously and smiling down at him, waiting for the boy to react.

“Daddy,” Noah says, finally.

Louis beams. “Yeah baby?”

From there it’s like a dam has been broken. Noah points up to the dinosaur and shouts, “That’s-oh my gosh! Daddy!”

Harry is practically shaking with excitement at Louis’ side, just as much of a child as Louis’ four year old. “Do you like your surprise?” He asks, as if the answer could be anything other than a resounding yes.

Noah turns to Harry and practically throws himself out for Louis’ arms to hug him. Harry looks shocked, but quickly grabs Noah so he doesn’t fall. “Thank you Harry,” Noah says, and Louis thinks he might actually be crying. “I love it.”

Harry smiles and squeezes the boy back, telling Noah he doesn’t have to thank him. Louis doesn’t think Harry really understands what this means to both him and Noah. It’s such a stark difference to how every other guy has ever reacted to his son, and Louis could almost cry at how happy Noah is. All he wants is for Noah to be happy, it’s more important to him than anything else in the world. Knowing that Harry actually listens when Noah babbles nonsense and seems to genuinely care means more to Louis than the younger boy could ever know.

When Noah gets back down on his own feet, he immediately makes a running start towards the dinosaur, Hank bouncing along against his side.

“Harry,” Louis whispers.

Harry shakes his head. ‘I meant it,” he says, reaching over the squeeze Louis’ hand just once. “I told you I meant it.”

And fuck, Louis thinks, he really does.

The two of them follow Noah around while he tugs Louis through all of the dinosaur exhibits. At every stop he spews out more random facts he’s learned from all the books Louis’s read to him. He makes sure that Harry reads ever plaque aloud to him so he knows exactly what they’re looking at and where it’s from.

At some point Louis loses hold of his hand and lets the two of them walk off, each as enthralled by the fossils and bones as the other. Louis makes sure to sneak a picture or two, or twenty, purely because he needs documentation of the best day of his baby’s life. If anyone were to point out the way his hands shake when he catches a photo of Harry gently taking Noah’s hand and directing him towards the next exhibit, Louis would absolutely deny it.

“Daddy!” Noah shouts, snapping Louis out of his thoughts. He and Harry are waiting at the end of
the hall, hands still held together and looking impatient. “Come on slow poke, gonna see a real dinosaur egg!”

Louis puts his phone away and nods. He walks over to the two of them and takes his son’s hand again, Harry still firmly holding onto the other. And when they both smile up at him, Louis is sure that this is what he's been waiting for for so long.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like every chapter we go through the "this is awful" "no it isn't" argument, so I won't say it but you should know I'm definitely thinking it ;)

Hopefully you enjoyed this, sorry it's taken so long. School and work are equally insane right now and I feel like I'm caught in the middle. Also for some reason I've decided I need to write at least 10,000 words for each chapter-not sure why but I can't get past it- so it takes a bit of time to get everything out. Also I'd like to say sorry for not replying to comments for weeks at a time. I'm just awful at replying (excuses, excuses) but I promise you I read every single one sometimes 3 times over when I find it hard to write. You guys keep me going.

Love you all. Thank you for reading xx
So this chapter is a bit shorter than usual, but I just needed to get this part over and done with so the story can move on. I feel like it's been stuck in one place for 9 chapters at this point. Bit ashamed of that. I'll get over it.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy. As always your comments and kudos keep me going. Love you all.

Oh p.s. I just wanted to share this song with you all as it is basically this entire story and I love it :) Eventually I'll have to make a playlist of all the songs I've listened to on repeat while writing this they definitely deserve some credit.

The minute Natalie walks up, she reaches for Noah and swings him in one large circle. Louis watches the two of them with a smile. Natalie steps forward to kiss Louis’ cheek and he gently leads her into the house. Noah babbles on and on about his day while mindlessly playing with Natalie’s curly hair.

“How are you?” Natalie whispers to him.

Louis forces a smile. “I’m good love. Perfect.”

Natalie nods and lets him lean against her shoulder when they sit down on the couch. While Noah fills Natalie in on everything she’s missed in the past few weeks, Louis makes them both a cup of tea. When he returns to the room he hears Noah telling Natalie all about how he played guitar with the Niall.

“Was so cool, my Natalie,” Noah tells her. “And then Harry takes me and my Daddy to see dinosaurs.”


Noah nods. “So cool, Harry’s the coolest. Got cool hair and nice music.”

“Well he sounds lovely,” Natalie says, smirking at Louis.

“He’s pretty cool. I know Harry’s got a secret.”

That surprises Louis enough to laugh. “What secret is that, love?” he asks.

Noah scoffs. “Can’t tell you, Daddy.”

“What do you mean you can’t tell me?” Louis asks, scandalized at the thought. He’s always been Noah’s number one secret keeper. The idea that Noah might keep something from him is a bit terrifying actually, and suddenly Louis feels too much like his mother.

Natalie interrupts his train of thought by politely asking, “Would you tell me, love?”
After a moment’s hesitation, Noah nods and gets up onto his knees to whisper into Natalie’s ear. There’s a pause, and then Natalie laughs.

“Really?” she asks.

“I know it,” Noah affirms.

Natalie glances over at Louis’ shocked face and then back to Noah. “You know, I think you might be right babes.”

Louis crosses his arms and pouts. “Secrets don’t make friends, Natalie.”

“Oh hush Lewis, it’s none of your concern,” Natalie laughs.

Noah nods. “Yeah Daddy, no worries.”

Both Natalie and Louis laugh. “No worries?” Louis asks.

“Mhm. Niall says no worries.”

Louis rolls his eyes and turns back to the tv. Let them have their secrets, then.

A few hours later Noah is fast asleep and Natalie and Louis are laying across the couch together with beers and a shit movie.

“Lou I have to tell you something,” Natalie says suddenly.

Louis frowns, patting her head. “What, are you pregnant?”

“Oh fuck off, prat,” Natalie giggles. “You know that’s not my thing. Especially after last time, christ.”

Louis laughs and kisses her forehead. Natalie sits up and Louis follows, moving so they’re facing one another. She sighs and rubs her face.

“I don’t want you to hate me,” she says quietly.

Frowning, Louis pulls her into a tight hug. “Babe I could never hate you,” he promises. “You’re one of my best mates. You gave me the greatest gift anyone could ever give. Nothing you say could change that.”

Natalie takes a few deep breaths, and then nods. When she raises her head there are tears in her eyes. “I got a job offer.”

Louis beams. “Babe, oh my god. That’s bloody fantastic!”


There’s immediate silence as soon as the words leave her mouth. Louis doesn’t know what to say. He knows she’s been having trouble lately, casting is a hard industry to break into, but he never thought she’d leave. London always seemed far enough away for them, far enough so she could have her own life, close enough to see Noah once in awhile when they want. They’d always agreed she’d be part of Noah’s life, that he’d grow up knowing who Natalie is, Louis never wanted anything other than that.

“I don’t want you to think I’m abandoning you,” she whispers through tears, obviously put off by his
silence. “I’m not Lou, I love you both so much. But I can’t-this is my career. It’s important to me and this is such a huge opportunity and-”

“And you’re taking it,” Louis says firmly, squeezing her hand. “Nat, you have to. It’s what you’ve been working towards all these years and you fucking deserve it. God I’m so proud of you.”

The two of them hug tightly, Natalie still crying against Louis’ shoulder. He hushes her, rubbing her back like he’d do for Noah. And fuck, Noah. What is he going to tell Noah?

“I’m sorry it’s so sudden,” Natalie whispers. “They just called this morning, you’re the first person I’ve told.”

Louis smiles and pulls back slowly. “When are you leaving?”

She shakes her head. “Not for another few weeks or so. I need time for visa’s and packing everything and finding a flat and shit. God, Lou. Am I doing the right thing?”

“Absolutely,” Louis replies without any hesitation. “You’re not tied to us, Natalie. I know you’d never abandon us and just disappear someday, I know Noah is always going to have you. You don’t need to be here all of the time for that to happen.”

Natalie nods. “And you,” she says. “You’re always going to have me too, Louis. Whenever you need me.”

“I know that,” Louis whispers. “God I’m going to miss you.”

Just like that Natalie is crying again. Louis hasn’t seen her this emotional since she was pregnant with Noah. Mentioning this gets him a quick slap, but Natalie doesn’t leave his arms. Louis just sits there and lets himself be cried on, maybe shedding a tear or two himself.

“You want me to what?” Harry asks.

His publicist nods at his disbelief. “It’s a good image Harry, we can work with it,” she explains. “You’re back on your feet again with a serious boyfriend, one who people want to know about. It’s a true comeback story.”

“He has a son,” Harry blurts out. “A four year old son.”

She looks a bit shocked, but quickly recovers. “Right we can do something about that-”

“No, I don’t want anything done about it,” Harry says seriously. “Other then you making sure he’s not part of this at all. No pictures, no pap shots, nothing.”

“Harry you can’t honestly expect-”

“Yes I can. You protect everyone else’s privacy, and you can protect mine. He’s just a baby, and I know Louis isn’t going to agree to shit either unless you promise me you’ll do everything you can to keep him out of this.”
Harry’s sure this isn’t what she expected. The woman looks like she’s just sucked a lemon. “Fine,” she says, finally. “I’ll see what we can do.”

“I have to make a call,” Harry says, and with that he leaves the room.

It’s one in the afternoon in Doncaster. Louis answers after a few rings with a cheery, “Hello, Harold.”

Harry’s mood immediately lifts. He smiles, ducking into an empty hallway of the studio they’re in. “Hi,” he breathes, leaning back against the wall. “What are you up to?”

Louis sighs. “Just finally got Noah down for a nap. I’m pretty sure someone slipped caffeine into his juice this morning. Thinking about doing some work, or I could just watch Netflix instead.”

Though he’d certainly never admit it, sometimes Harry closes his eyes and pretends Louis is holding him and laughing in his ear when they talk. It’s probably not a good omen considering they’ve only been apart two weeks now, but Harry tries not to think about that too much.

“I’ve got a question for you,” he says.

“Anything,” Louis replies.

Harry sighs. “They want me to mention you in this interview we’re doing in a few minutes. I’m not sure how yet, I think they’ll probably just ask something stupid and lead me into acknowledging your existence basically.”

Louis hums along in understanding. “What’s the question, baby.”

The nickname makes Harry’s stomach flutter with butterflies. He hates himself sometimes. “Is it okay? I know you sort of said like an open secret or whatever, but my publicist thinks it’d be good? They said it’d look like I’m getting my life back together.”

“Well that’s got nothing do with me, love,” Louis says quietly. “You’ve gotten yourself this far, you should take the credit.”

Harry doesn’t know what to say to that, so he just doesn’t say anything.

When there’s no response, Louis sighs. “You make the decision,” he says. “I don’t mind Harry, everyone in my life who should know does. It’s up to you.”

“Lou I-” Harry starts and stops, trying to think of how to say it. “It’s not that I don’t want people to know you’re mine, obviously. It’s just I’m worried. I couldn’t stand seeing anyone talk badly about you.”

Louis laughs softly. “Sweetheart, they’re going to say bad things about me. Just ignore the bad, yeah? Focus on good things.”

They both go quiet, and then Harry nods. “Okay. Okay I’ll do it.”

“Alright lovely,” Louis yawns, like it’s no big deal that Harry is about to admit their relationship to the world. “Now back to the real issue-what should I be watching?”

Harry talks Louis through picking a show to binge watch before he’s found and called away to the interview.

Honestly he can’t remember the last time he was this nervous for anything. The stage is simple, just
five chairs, a backdrop of windows showing off Times Square, and an extremely tiny live audience. Their interviewer seems sweet and asks relatively standard questions. They joke with one another, tease a possible new single, and gang up on Liam about his never ending engagement until it’s finally brought up.

“Speaking of partners,” the interviewer segues easily. “There’s a new boy in your life Harry, isn’t there? I’m sure we’ve all seen the papers.”

In response the crowd breaks out into clapping and cheering. Harry smiles bashfully, he doesn’t even have to fake it. “Yes, there’s someone.”

The interviewer flashes him an equally genuine smile. “How’s that going? Well, I hope.”

“Wonderful,” Harry says honestly. “He’s-he’s wonderful. Really just-yeah.”

Niall cackles, mocking Harry in a deep voice. “Not a clue what he sees in this idiot,” he teases, elbowing Harry gently.

“Have you all met him?” The interviewer asks. When the boys nod, she grins at them. “What do you think? Do you approve?”


Harry smiles. “Maybe you’re just shit at FIFA, Liam”

The crowd laughs when Liam turns to scowl at Harry. “It wasn’t just me, he beat both of you as well. You probably lost because you were too busy staring into his eyes.”

“Shutup Liam,” Harry mumbles while everyone else laughs. Louis is going to love this, he already knows.

The interviewer finally takes the reigns again, giving Harry a winning smile and saying, “Well we’re all so happy for you, really.”

Niall gives Harry a hard pat on the back and the boy spends the rest of the interview smiling dopily at nothing.

“Harry!” Noah yells.

Louis frowns and looks around, as if Harry may suddenly appear in the grocery store. Of course he hasn’t, and all Louis finds is a few confused looking cashiers staring back at him.


Noah points and sure enough, there’s One Direction on the front cover of a magazine. “Look,” he says. “Harry and Niall and handsome Liam”

Straying from him for a moment, Louis grabs the magazine off the rack and smiles. “Look at that
love, he’s got your bracelet on.”

Noah gasps and snatches the magazine up. Sure enough, Harry’s got his bracelet proudly on his left arm, draped casually over Niall’s shoulder. Noah’s eyes light up. “He does! Where they at?”

Louis hums, thinking about it. He’s sure Harry’s told him, he likes to keep Louis up to date on where he is with ridiculous pictures and phone calls. Somewhere in the South, he thinks. “In the states baby, pretty far away. They’re singing shows almost every night, you know.”

“So cool,” Noah sighs dreamily. “Can call Harry, probably.”

The words strike a strange feeling of fear in Louis. He ruffles Noah’s curls and says, “We’ll see, love.” Mostly because he’s drawn a blank on how to deal with that.

*Don’t let him get attached*, his mind screams.

They’re halfway through the cereal aisle when Zayn texts to say he’s at the house already. Louis tries to speed it up a bit, throwing the generic cereal into their basket even though it tastes like shit.

“Daddy,” Noah says softly.

Louis puts his phone away and brushes a curl from Noah’s eyes. “Yeah babes?”

“Think,” Noah starts, and then frowns as if he’s thinking some more before continuing. “Think you might be sad.”

Louis shakes his head immediately. “Never. How could I be sad with you around, huh? My little lad.”

Noah shrugs, huffing softly. “Were happy, I know that.”

“I am happy,” Louis promises. “I’m so happy, I promise. You don’t have to worry about me.”

Noah sighs like he’s put out by all of it. “Just love you.”

“I love you too,” Louis promises. “No worries, remember?”

Noah giggles and nods, tapping Niall’s face on the magazine. “No worries,” he sighs.

After they’ve checked out and Louis has just about cried when he swipes his credit card through, they head home. Zayn and Perrie are there waiting when they walk inside, having taken full advantage of their couch and alcohol already.

“Hello!” Noah shouts, dropping the two bags in his hands at the door. “I am here!”

“Hey kid,” Zayn laughs, pulling the boy in for a huge hug as soon as he’s close enough. “Missed you.”

Noah nods, squeezing his little arms around Zayn’s neck. “Been a lotta days without you,” he says sadly.

Perrie laughs at the two of them. “It’s only been four days,” she teases when Noah pulls her in for a hug. “How are you little love?”

“Super good. Daddy got nail polish and I was gonna ask you pretty please if we can paint mine.” Noah rambles off.
Perrie nods, looking at Louis over Noah’s shoulder. “Of course we can. Why don’t you run and grab it and we’ll start a film while your dad and Uncle Z cook us some dinner.”

And Louis could kiss her. He hasn’t had a minute alone in days, and all he really needs is a talk with his best mate. He mouths a silent Thank you, and lets Zayn drag him and all of his groceries to the kitchen.

They stay quiet for a bit, silently putting away everything and starting up the oven.

“Lou,” Zayn sighs. He knows something’s off, obviously.

Louis falls against him, letting Zayn hug him. All he wants is a hug.

“You doing okay?”

Louis lets out a long sigh and nods. “I’m fine. Just tired that’s all. Mum says I’m working myself too hard, you know? And I don’t really ever feel it until the end of the day when it all just goes to shit.”

Instead of commenting on that, Zayn nods and kisses his cheek. “Come on, you need a smoke.”

Louis laughs softly. “Thought we were quitting.”

“We are,” Zayn says sternly. “After this, this is the last time.”

They walk out into the garden, switching the light on and stealing chairs for themselves. The sun is setting somewhere behind the neighbor’s house and their red cigarette tips are lit up in the darkness.

Louis rests his head on Zayn’s shoulder and says, “Harry hates that I smoke.”

Zayn hums softly. “Yeah?”

Louis nods. It’s not like Harry has actually outright said anything, but he can just tell. He doesn’t know what’s worse, the fact that he cares what Harry thinks, or the fact that the disapproving looks Harry gave him almost made him want to quit on the spot.

“I feel like an idiot.”

Zayn wraps an arm around Louis’ shoulder and says, “Harry hates that I smoke.”

“Harry.”

“Ah,” Zayn says, like that makes any sort of sense.

Louis shakes his head and takes another long drag of his cigarette. “I just-I knew he was going to have to leave eventually. I mean, that’s his whole fucking job yeah? So I kept telling myself to not get used to having him here, but I did. And I got myself so ready to break up when he left but he just—he hasn’t broken up with me yet.”

As he expected, Zayn looks genuinely confused. “And that’s a bad thing?”

Groaning loudly, Louis sits up on his own again. He stubs the cigarette out, crushing it under his foot. He knows he sounds ridiculous, but he honestly never expected it to go this far between himself and Harry. And god, now Harry’s off telling millions of people about their relationship. That’s not something one does when they’re ready to break up, Louis thinks.

“It’s awful,” he says simply. “Sometimes I think it would have been easier if he’d just left, if he’d just
stopped talking to me. Or if- fuck this is going to sound awful-maybe if he and Noah didn’t get along.”

“So what you want is an excuse to be alone,” Zayn says slowly. “Even though that’s not what you really want.”

The fact that he’s so right sort of makes Louis want to scream. He doesn’t want Harry to leave him, of course he doesn’t. “I want everything to stop changing,” he explains. “It’s fucking terrifying. When did life get so fucking complicated?”

“Somewhere between birth and now,” Zayn replies.

They both go quiet again. Through the slightly open door Louis can hear Noah’s laughter mixing in with Perrie’s. He thinks about the way his son’s face lit up when he saw Harry wearing his bracelet, thinks about all of the reasons this shouldn’t work, thinks about Harry singing to him softly over the phone when he called to say goodnight last night.

“Change can be good,” Zayn says, startling Louis out of his thoughts. “I know you’re scared, with Natalie leaving and Luke being his asshole self, I know that you’re afraid of getting in too deep. But god, Louis think about all the good things that can come from this. He makes you so happy, I know he does, and he makes Noah happy too. That’s like, a one in a million chance.”

Suddenly all Louis can think about is Harry, quietly whispering to him about fate.

“I know” he says. “I’m trying to not be so scared, because really I don’t want him to break up with me.”

“Don’t let this distance thing ruin something great. I’d fucking hate to see you get your heart broken over something so stupid.”

The timer on the oven goes off. Louis exhales the breath he didn’t realize he was holding and stands. “I’m trying,” he says, quietly. “I’m really fucking trying. I think I might-that I could love him. Someday.”

“Someday,” Zayn says, sounding unsure of it. Louis leaves him out in the garden.

Later, after they’ve all eaten and cleaned up, Perrie and Louis sit down to watch another film while Zayn and Noah go off to do whatever it is they do. It’s almost an hour later when Louis is making his way over to the bathroom that he hears them talking.

“…just worry,” Noah’s saying.

Zayn hums in agreement. Through the crack in the door, Louis can see the two of them sitting on Noah’s bed, his toy dinosaurs abandoned on the floor. Zayn reaches up and gently ruffles Noah’s hair.

“I know you do,” he says softly. “But love, you don’t have to okay? Your dad has it handled, and I promise I’ll worry enough for the both of us.”

“Uncle Z,” Noah starts. “I know Harry makes my Daddy smile. Is he sad Harry had to go?”

Zayn sighs loudly. “I think he could be love. Adults are weird sometimes, especially your dad. He’s pretty bad at talking about his feelings.”

“I know,” Noah sighs heavily.
“You never told me what you think of Harry,” Zayn points out. “Tell me the truth kid, I don’t want to have to fight him but I will.”

“You’re silly,” Noah giggles. “Harry’s super nice, and likes to hear my stories, and takes me to see dinosaurs! Makes my Daddy happy and makes me happy too, and sings nice songs and always listens. And he’s silly just like you!”

Zayn laughs. “Silly like me?”

“Yes! But you’re still silliest. I love you.”

Louis hears shuffling and watches Zayn hug Noah. “I love you too kid,” he says. “I’m always going to be here to protect you and your Dad, okay? No matter what happens, if you ever need me I’ll be here.”

“I know it,” Noah says, and Louis can tell he does. “You’re my family.”

Louis pulls away from the door and takes a deep shaking breath. In his pocket his phone goes off quietly.

*I miss you,* Harry’s text says.

Louis tries his best not to cry.

The green room looks the same as it did the night Louis met Harry. The backstage area is a busy whirlwind of people and music, and Louis would rather be anywhere but here right now. But he needs the money, so when the opportunity came to interview an up and coming pop band he jumped at it.

“Right,” Louis says, giving the band a winning smile. Hopefully they can’t tell how much he wants to just go home and be with his kid. “How are we then? Well I hope.”

“We’re great, yeah,” the lead singer says, smiling right back at him.

Louis tries to get comfortable in his chair and says, “Lovely. Well let’s jump right in.”

The interview is easy and painless. They’re a fairly popular band from Los Angeles who have only just begun their first international tour. They’re eager to tell him anything he wants to hear, obviously not very well trained, and their team looks close to a heart attack for most of the interview.

It’s over fairly quickly, Louis thanks them for their time, and begins packing up his things. Noah’s at Jay’s house for the night having a sleepover with the twins, and all he wants is to head to Zayn’s flat and pass out.

“You know Harry Styles, don’t you?” a voice says.

Louis looks up. It’s the bassist, a tall lanky kid with dyed green hair and a midwestern accent. For the life of him Louis cannot remember his name. Cole or Connor or some other C name. Or was that the guitarist?

The man smiles, taking a step closer to Louis, who instinctively takes a step back. “We used to party together,” he says. “Back when he was in LA.”

Louis frowns. “Is that right?” He says, trying not to come off as an asshole.

“Yeah. More than that, even.”

Any patience Louis might of had is gone as soon as the kid raises a suggestive eyebrow at him. “Well, how lucky for you,” he sneers. “Are we done here?”

Obviously because he’s an idiot with a death wish, the bassist steps forward and reaches out to touch Louis’ hip. “I was just thinking since we have so much in common, and I’m only here for the night—”

“Oh, go fuck yourself,” Louis snaps, and the room goes quiet. He pulls away violently, knocking the guy in the side with his bag. “You’re disgusting, don’t fucking touch me.”

Shocked, the bassist takes a step back. His eyes are wide and his hands up, trying to show Louis he’s backing off. “Listen—”

“No you fucking listen,” Louis knows he’s making a scene now, and he doesn’t care anymore. “Fuck off, okay? You and your shite little band can fuck right off back to LA for all I care. Maybe somebody there will care enough about who you are to suck your dick.”

“You need to go,” someone says.

Louis laughs shortly. “No fucking problem,” he spits. With that he storms out of the room, making sure to knock his shoulder into the bassist’s on his way out. He’s so angry he doesn’t even really realize what he’s just done until he’s standing outside the venue and the cold air hits him.

Shit.

Zayn answers his phone with a quiet, “Hey babe.”

“Let’s get drunk,” Louis says, breathing heavily now. He’s fucked up so bad.

“Right,” Zayn says. “I’ll meet you at Stan’s.”

They get absolutely hammered. Louis pukes in the alleyway beside Stan’s bar, like always. They close the place down, staying long after Stan’s kicked everybody else out. Zayn cries about nothing in particular, because he always does, and Louis follows his lead. He has an actual reason to cry though, he insists to Stan.

“Sure you do mate,” Stan replies, patting Louis’ side and helping him upstairs to his flat.

They pass out there, Zayn laying half on the couch with his boots still on and Louis sleeping beside Stan in his bed like they’re kids again.

He wakes up with an absolutely monstrous headache and the overwhelming urge to puke all over Stan’s new sheets. On the bedside table sits his phone, kindly plugged in to charge and showing an overwhelming amount of notifications. Most of them are from Harry.

*Baby text me when you wake up okay? I’m worried*, the latest one says.

Louis groans and checks his calls. Sure enough, he called Harry four times last night. Of course
Harry had a show last night, meaning Louis probably left him four very awful voicemails. Probably ones in which he was sobbing. Shit.

And when he finally feels brave enough to check, he finds there’s already an email from his boss about the band he interviewed. Double shit.

“Well good morning sunshine!” Stan shouts as he enters the room.

Louis groans, holding his hands over his ears. “Fuck off, stop yelling,” he mumbles.

“Aren’t you just a bundle of joy,” Stan laughs. “Get off your arse. Zayn’s already left. He holds his alcohol much better than you, you know.”

Louis rolls his eyes and lays back down. “Shut up Stan,” he mumbles. “I have to make a call, can you go?”

“Fine princess,” Stan teases.

He leaves, shutting the door behind himself, and Louis grabs his phone. It’s early in the morning for Harry but he still tries.


Louis winces. He sound so concerned. “I’m sorry H,” he sighs. “Go back to sleep, I’ll call you later.”

“What about that guy?” Harry interrupts.

Louis sighs. “I just got so drunk and crashed at Stan’s and I-”

Harry sighs and Louis can hear him rolling over in bed somewhere across the ocean. “Cried about it more like,” he says, confirming Louis’ suspicions. “I was worried Lou, couldn’t understand what you were saying. I tried calling after the show and you didn’t answer.”

“I’m sorry Harry, really. I was interviewing this band last night and I guess you and the bassist used to-I mean-”

“Oh god,” Harry groans. “Lou I’m so sorry, oh my god. What did he say? Was it awkward?”

Louis snorts. “Wasn’t until he tried to make a move on me and I snapped and screamed at him until I got kicked out. And now my boss has emailed me and we have to talk about the incident, apparently. I’m sure that’s going to go well.”

When he finishes speaking, Harry goes silent. Louis spends this time thinking of how he’s going to live without a job. Maybe he can move back in with his mum, he’s sure it won’t take him too long to find extra work. Unless it does.

“Fuck, Louis fuck. I’m so sorry, what a fucking prick. I’ll kill him. Who was it?”

Louis can’t help but laugh. Harry rarely gets angry it’s almost funny hearing him threatening anyone. “Love no, it’s okay. I’m just-I’m pissed off, honestly. It was bullshit that he thought I’d sleep with him just because of you and now-I’m just going to be in so much shit for this. And I really don’t
need this right now, I’ve been trying to pull extra jobs anyway and I really needed this. They’re going to fire me aren’t they? Jesus—"

“Louis, Louis stop,” Harry says, trying to calm him down. “I’m going to take care of it babe.”

The fact that he sounds so sure convinces Louis that Harry is actually crazy. “No, you can’t—”

“It’s my fault,” Harry says sternly, not willing to hear Louis explain how it definitely isn’t. “I’m going to take care of it. What was the band?”

Louis shakes his head. “I don’t remember, something stupid. His name started with a C, I think, like Connor or Carl—”

“Cole,” Harry finishes, his voice dropping into a low growl. “I know who it is. Don’t worry, okay? I’ll take care of it.”

“I’m worrying,” Louis whispers.

Harry sighs. “Baby just go home and get some rest, try to sleep it off. I’ll let you know when I’ve got it fixed.

“Harry, please,” Louis says, trying one last time.

“No Louis. You’re not going to suffer because of my stupid mistakes. I have to go, okay? Try to sleep love.”

With that he hangs up, leaving Louis hoping he really can work a miracle.

It takes Harry awhile to find Cole’s number. He deleted it months ago, ready to let go of that part of his past. Apparently Cole wasn’t ready to let go of him just yet.

“Harry Styles, well isn’t this a surprise,” Cole drawls when he answers.

Harry glares at nothing. The voice reminds him of too many hazy nights spent out of his mind with idiots like him.

“Listen to me,” he growls. “You are going to call your manager and tell them to call Louis’ work and say it was all a mistake. You are going to apologize for harassing and upsetting my boyfriend and you’re going to beg for their fucking forgiveness, do you understand?”

Truthfully, Harry’s never been very good at being intimidating. However he’s never really been this upset before.

“Why would I do that?” Cole laughs.

“I have so much shit on you, you’d be a fucking idiot not to. Don’t think I can’t find something that could absolutely ruin you. I’ve heard there’s a big payout with pictures like the ones I have of you.”

Cole breathes in sharply. Harry’s got him. “Don’t you think you’re overreacting?”
“No I’m not,” Harry spits out. “Don’t mess with Louis. You fuck with the people I care about and you’re finished. How do you think your band would react, hm? You harass my boyfriend and suddenly there’s a front page story on every tabloid about your coke habit. Do you think they’ll let you stay or kick you out like the last three did?”

“Alright, fuck, I’ll apologize,” Cole says quickly.

“You’re damn right you will. Don’t come near my boy again, got that? And make sure all of your little friends know that too,” Harry says, thinking back to the group they hung out with in LA together. “I’ve got enough shit on you all to write a book.”

Without waiting for an answer, Harry hangs up and promptly blocks Cole’s number.

*I’m sorry*, he texts Louis, his fingers shaking from the adrenaline rush. *I fixed it.*

He has to stop himself before he adds three stupid words to the end of the message.

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Louis is watching cartoons with Noah when he finally gets the call from Jesy. He’s glad it’s her and not Sarah. He’d much rather be fired by a friend who he wouldn’t be embarrassed to cry in front of.

“Babe, before you say anything-” he starts, but Jesy is already talking.

“I’ll kill him Louis,” she’s yelling. “Why didn’t you say something? That’s disgusting and completely unacceptable. They’re blacklisted, all of them, I swear. Let’s just see them try to get any promo from us.”

Louis’ jaw actually drops. “What?”

“His manager called and cleared everything up. He apologized for hitting on you and trying to touch you and whatever, but it’s still not acceptable. We aren’t running the piece, Sarah’s said. You’ll still be comped but we’re not giving that asshole any of our time. Fuck Lou, I’m so sorry.”

Harry is impossible. Louis is sure he’s not even real.

“It’s-it’s okay Jes, it’s not your fault,” he stutters out, too shocked to think of anything else.

Jesy sighs angrily. “Ridiculous, I’m so mad. Listen Lou, I’m heading into another meeting can we talk later?”

“Course babe. Thank you.” He says quickly.

When he hangs up smiling like a lunatic, Noah turns to watch him. “Who’s that Daddy?” He asks.

Louis shakes his head. “Just Jesy love, she had some good news for me.”

“That’s nice,” Noah decides.

“Very nice,” Louis agrees. “Want to order in?”
Noah nods. “Probably yes.”

Louis gives him a quick kiss to the forehead. Noah smiles and turns his attention back to the cartoons while Louis goes into the kitchen to call Harry.

“What did you do?” He asks before Harry even has the chance to say hello.

Harry hums, obviously pleased with himself. “I just told him to apologize, that’s all. But I also told him he’d be very sorry if he didn’t.”

“Very sorry?” Louis laughs. “Is that supposed to be scary, Harold?”

There’s noise on the other side of the phone, Louis can hear shouting and music pounding. He’s probably at the studio again, he’d mentioned it earlier on in the week. The background noise soon dulls and Louis hears a door snick shut.

“I’m not kidding Lou. I have a lot of shit on him, I could ruin his life.” He says, almost a whisper now.

Louis frowns, trying to understand what that could mean. “Why?” he asks.

Harry pauses, and then lets out a quiet sigh. “Because you’re my boy. No one messes with my boy.”

As stupid and sappy as it is, Louis still smiles. “Your boy, huh?”


Harry’s stumbling words make Louis still. It was nothing, probably just a break in the connection. That’s all.

But what if it wasn’t?

Instead of questioning him, Louis jokes, “You know it’s sort of hot, you going all protective boyfriend on me. Threatening anyone who dares to impugn my honor.”

Luckily, Harry takes the bait and laughs. “Didn’t realize that’s what I was doing. I thought I was protecting my boyfriend, but I could be wrong.”

“No, you’re very obviously my knight in shining armor. Pay attention, Harold.”

They aren’t going to talk about it, Louis decides, not over the phone at least. He moves towards his cabinets and starts looking for the best Chinese menu of the bunch.

“I miss you,” Harry says. “I’m so sorry, have I mentioned?”

“Once or twice. Harry it’s okay, love.”

Of course Harry disagrees. “It isn’t okay,” he says sternly. “I don’t want this to be why you leave me.”

Louis freezes up in shock. It feels a bit like his heart has stopped. All this time he’s been telling himself and anyone who would listen that it would be easier if they broke up, but even the mention of it makes him want to cry.

“Baby where on earth is this coming from?” he asks, his voice soft and consoling.
Harry sniffs a bit. “There’s just so much shit trying to pull us apart Lou, and my stupid past is just one of them. I swear I won’t let it happen. I promise I’m going to fight so hard for you-for us.”

Louis leans back against his fridge and closes his eyes. He wishes Harry were here. “Do you think we could be enough?” he asks, because he can’t not anymore.

“Of course baby. Of course we are.” Harry murmurs.

Louis sighs and shakes his head. “I have to go. Noah and I are ordering in. My poor love, I feel like I hardly see him.”

“You’re doing your best Louis,” Harry reminds him as he always does. “Tell him hi for me, yeah?”

Louis hesitates, suddenly reminded of Noah’s question. “Do you-he asked to call you a couple of days ago. If you’re comfortable with that.’

“If you’re comfortable. It’s your decision Louis, but of course I’d love to talk to him.”

And yeah, at this point Louis is throwing most of his rules completely out the window.

“Okay just-I’ll try not to let him talk too long.”

“You know I don’t mind,” Harry murmurs.

Louis nods and decides to leave it. “Noah? Come here a minute.”

Seconds later Noah comes careening into the room, Hank held dutifully right at his side. “Hi Daddy.”

“Harry’s on the phone love. Did you want to say hi?”

Noah’s eyes light up. He reaches up for the phone and jumps up on his tiptoes to take it from Louis. “Hi Harry!” he shouts, and Louis feels awful for Harry’s poor ears. “My Daddy says you’re singing all the time far away and I saw you in a picture with my bracelet!”

Louis hears Harry’s soft laughter through the phone. Noah takes a seat at their table and listens. Eventually Harry says something and Noah nods, kicking his feet around. “Sounds so cool. My Daddy saw music last night, I know.”

While Noah tells Harry about his new dinosaur backpack, the music he’s been listening to lately, and seeing Zayn, Louis looks through the menu and fixes himself a cuppa By the time he’s picked out what they want to order, Noah is jumping down from the chair.

“Okay Harry,” he says excitedly. “Mhm, I will promise. Bye bye Harry, tell Niall I say hi!”

With that, Noah hands the phone back, grinning madly. Louis smiles back, reaching out to muss up his curls. “I’ll talk to you later, Harold.” He says.

“Of course,” Harry says. “Goodbye love.”

Louis hangs up and is met with Noah climbing up into his arms. “Harry tells me he’s singing for tons of people! Says everyone likes his bracelet too, and I know it’s cause I made it and I’m best at making them and I’m so cool.”

Louis laughs and kisses his forehead. “Sounds like a great conversation, kid. What’d you promise Harry?”
Noah shrugs. “Just promised I’ll help him make a bracelet for me when he comes back to see me. We gotta match and I can wear it all the time too.”

“Sounds lovely, sweetheart,” Louis smiles. “You’re the very best, you know that?”

“I know Daddy,” Noah says sarcastically, before bursting into giggles at his own joke.

They spend the rest of the night watching cartoons and eating Chinese food. Louis tucks Noah into bed, reading him a story and leaving him with a gentle kiss to his cheek. Harry calls again just to say goodnight, just like he always does, and they spend hours whispering nothing of substance to one another.

That night Louis dreams about a little house with children running around and Harry at his side. He tells himself it’s just a coincidence.
something so magic about you

Chapter Notes

I’m alive! (Barely)

This chapter has been giving me so many problems for the longest time. It's nowhere near as long as the other chapters, it's mostly filler, it's soppy as all hell, but I had to get it out to move on.

Thank you everyone for the encouragement to keep going with this project, and for continuing to be interested even when it feels like I never update. You’re the greatest in the world and every time I feel like giving up on this I reread your comments and push on. I hope you enjoy this short-ish update. <3

“The interns are here,” Leigh-Anne giggles evilly one afternoon.

Louis pops his head up and sure enough, there’s a group of wide eyed terrified looking uni kids being shown around. He shakes his head and laughs. “You’re always far too happy about this, you know that? You don’t have to terrorize them, it’s not a requirement. They’re just kids.”

She groans. “You’re such a parent sometimes.”

“I’m a parent all of the time, Leigh,” Louis says, deadpan. “That’s how being a parent works.”

Leigh-Anne rolls her eyes, still watching the kids being shown around like a hawk. “Why don’t you ever keep one? You love kids.”

Louis breaks into a smile at that. “You aren’t supposed to keep them, they’re supposed to help the office and learn and shit. Just because you run it like the Hunger Games and pick one lucky servant for three months doesn’t mean we all should.”

“Honestly, you make me sound so awful,” she teases. The line of students winds out of the room and Leigh-Anne quickly runs off after them, following them into the hall.

Louis tries to focus on his work, ignoring the chatter around him about the interns and upcoming deadlines. He doesn’t actually come into contact with one of the fabled interns until later that day when he goes to make copies and finds a girl who looks close to tears over the fax machine.

“Hey,” Louis says softly, approaching her like he would a frightened animal. “Is everything alright?”

The girl nods and quickly wipes at her face. “I’m fine,” she says, obviously a lie. “Sorry, I’m just stupid that’s all.”

Louis frowns. “Well I doubt that. What’s wrong?”

“Leigh-Anne told me to fax these papers for her, and she said they were really important and I’m not supposed to look at them, but I can’t get it to send. I don’t know how it works at all, I mean who even uses a fax machine? But she’s going to be so mad and I’m going to get fired on my first day, and then no one is going to want me after that and-”
“Love, hey, calm down,” Louis laughs, gently putting his hand on her shoulder. She trails off and looks at up at him, eyes sparkling with unshed tears. “It’s going to be fine, yeah? I promise. Let’s see these papers.”

The girl bites her lip, obviously unsure of Louis. “But Leigh-Anne said-”

Louis shakes his head and she quickly hands the papers over. Sure enough, he turns them over to find they’re mostly blank, one of them being just an invitation to Perrie for lunch. This poor girl is crying for no reason. He’s never going to let Leigh-Anne hear the end of this.

“Right, so I’m going to talk to Leigh about this later, but you don’t need to fax anything. She was just testing you.”

The girl’s teary eyes go incredibly wide. “Did I fail?”

Louis almost wants to laugh but somehow stops himself. He remembers his first day interning, how terrifying it was. He wishes someone would’ve just told him that everyone was being dickish and uptight on purpose.

“You didn’t fail, I promise,” Louis says, using his most soothing tone of voice. “But for future reference I’ll show you how to fax. It’s really quite easy, it’s just archaic and no one is ever going to ask you to do it but at least you’ll know.”

Nodding, the girl stands by and watches Louis walk through the process until it makes sense. He then quickly shows her how to make copies, since that’s what he trekked all the way over here for, and by the time he’s finished her tears are gone.

“Thank you so much,” she says earnestly. “Really, I know I was being ridiculous.”

Louis shakes his head. “You weren’t being ridiculous, first days are stressful and scary as hell. If you need anymore help don’t be afraid to ask me, yeah? Or Jesy and Jade, I swear they aren’t as scary as they seem.”

“I’m Anna,” she says suddenly, giving Louis a firm handshake she’s obviously practiced. Louis sort of admires that. “Thank you so much-”

“Louis Tomlinson,” he replies easily.

And just like that, she freezes up. Anna drops his hand and gapes at him. “Oh my god,” she mutters. “That’s why you look so familiar.”

Louis frowns. “Sorry?”

“Harry Styles, you’re his boyfriend,” Anna babbles. “Shit-sorry that’s not cool is it? I promise I’m not like a crazy fan or anything, I didn’t know really, and you were so nice to me I never would’ve expected-”

“Kid, hey,” Louis chuckles awkwardly. “Take a breath, yeah? It’s not that big a deal, but I like talking about my social life at work probably as much as you do.”

Anna nods about a dozen times, obviously getting the point. “No, of course. I won’t even mention it I promise, it’ll never happen again. I won’t even think about it again!”

It seems a bit extreme, but Louis just nods at her. She reminds him a lot of himself, actually. “I’m sure I’ll see you around.”
“Oh right, work,” Anna laughs, like she’s forgotten where they’re at. “Bye Louis, thank you!”

With that she skips away, obviously much happier than she was when she came in. Louis just shakes his head and goes back to his desk. He’s just sitting down when his phone goes off.

_Louis u gotta do somethin!!!! he’s fuckin miserable. even Niall’s sick of it!!!!_

Louis smiles down at the text. He doesn’t remember exactly when he and Liam exchanged numbers, but he certainly doesn’t regret it. The guy is so daft sometimes it’s funny, and Liam seems to think Louis is hilarious as well. He’s a good lad, Louis thinks with a smile.

**What would you like me to do Payno?**

_idk!! something!!!! I can’t take it anymore its too sad :(_

Louis rolls his eyes and calls Harry.

“Hey,” Harry drawls.

“Hello love,” Louis says, shifting his phone to his shoulder so he can type. “Liam’s said you’re being miserable.”

There’s a short pause. “How did he tell you that?”

“We text of course,” Louis teases. “I’ve got him in my trap as well. My goal in life is to sleep with each member of One Direction and write a tell all.”

As if on cue Louis spots a wide eyed intern staring at him only feet away. “I’m kidding,” he says quickly. “Please just-ugh.” The intern turns tail and runs off to do whatever they were supposed to be doing.

Harry laughs. “What is going on?”

“Interns,” Louis sighs. “That reminds me, I had the best conversation with one just now. She knew who I was just because of you.”

Unfortunately, Harry doesn’t seem to find that funny. “Lou that’s not okay.”

“She’s just a kid, Harold, calm down,” Louis scoffs. “I doubt she’s going to say anything, she didn’t seem that obsessed. Also I basically talked her off a ledge over the fax machine so I doubt she wants people to know about that.”

“Okay,” Harry sighs reluctantly. “But if it gets weird promise me you’ll say something, yeah? I don’t want you being uncomfortable at work because of me.”

Louis smirks. “Too late for that, Jade exists.”

Hearing her name, Jade lifts her head up from where she’s been taking an afternoon nap at her desk and smiles. Louis replies by sticking his tongue out and crossing his eyes. She bursts into laughter.

“I have to go babe, think Zayn’s about to kill me if we don’t get lunch,” Louis says, shutting his laptop.

Harry sighs. “Okay. Have a good lunch Lou, I miss you.”

Retching noises behind him make Louis sigh. Jade now stands right next to him, grinning wide. “You’re both so gross,” she says harshly. “When’s he coming back?”

“Not soon enough,” Louis grumbles, packing up his things. “A month or so. I’ve got an official countdown going somewhere. I’m sure Noah’s keeping track as well, he’s excited to see Harry again.”

Jade smiles a real soft smile and pats his shoulder. “You’ll be fine,” she says, reassuring him though he hasn’t asked her to. “Are you ready to go? Zayn’s gone to pick up Perrie, they’re meeting us out.”

Louis nods and stands up, tucking his phone into his jacket pocket just in case Harry texts. When he’s doing so, he gets that feeling that raises the hair on the back of his neck, the feeling he’s being watched. Louis turns just in time to see a boy staring at him from one corner of the office.

“Who’s that?” Louis asks.

Jade raises her eyebrows and looks where Louis is staring. “Oh, that’s one of the newbies. I can’t remember his name though, why?”

Louis frowns. The boy has let his eyes drift away but they keep flinching back over, almost as if he’s waiting for Louis to look away. “He’s staring at me, isn’t he?”

With one last glance over, Jade simply shrugs it off. “It’s probably nothing. Poor thing’s probably too terrified to know what he’s doing, honestly. They seem extra skittish this year.”

“Yeah, probably nothing.” Louis agrees, finally pulling his eyes away from the boy. He lets Jade hook their arms together by the elbows and they walk out.

Harry is really missing his boys.

And yeah, he should probably stop referring to Louis and Noah as his boys. His brain just said it one morning and now he can’t let it go. It’s only making everything that much harder, but he can’t stop.

So, Harry’s missing his boys like mad. It has culminated into almost an entire bag dedicated to souvenirs for them. Louis is going to be a bit upset about it, but that doesn’t deter Harry in the least. Really it’s all mostly Zayn’s fault, he didn’t have to tell Harry what size shirts they both wear. If anything Noah will probably be excited to add to his collection of band shirts and Louis can’t be mad at that, can he?

Yeah it’s a little bit of a problem. And there’s another problem which lies in a text he’s just received from an old friend. An old friend who, despite the fact they haven’t spoken in months, has invited Harry to a party where there will inevitably be more old friends doing things he knows he shouldn’t. And it’s so fucking tempting.

Are you busy?

Louis doesn’t reply right away, but when he does there’s a picture attached. It’s of himself and Noah, each sticking their tongues out at the camera. We’re bored! The text says.
Harry facetimes him and Louis immediately answers.

There’s a moment where the camera tips and blurs, and then there they are. From the background Harry can tell they’re on the sofa, Noah in Louis’ lap and Louis holding the phone out far ahead of them.

“Hi!” Noah shouts when the picture stabilizes.

“Hello Harold,” Louis shouts as well.

Harry settles against the headboard of his bed and smiles. “Hi loves,” he says. “What are you up to?”

Noah heaves out a heavy sigh and gets out of Louis’ lap. “Daddy is borin’ Harry!”

“Excuse me!” Louis gasps, clutching at his heart. “That cuts deep Noah.”

Harry smiles at the two of them. “Be nice to your poor dad, bean, he can’t help that he’s boring.”

While Louis barks out a loud Hey! Noah just laughs and kisses Louis’ cheek.

“Sorry Daddy, just a yuck movie.”

Louis looks at Noah with wide, stunned eyes. “You cannot be my son,” he says, quite seriously. “Harry, are you hearing this? This child called Grease a yuck movie.”

The look of sheer disgust on Louis’ face makes Harry laugh. He shrugs, looking over at Noah who seems in awe of his father, like always.

“What are you going to do?” Harry asks.

Sighing sadly, Louis shakes his head. “I don’t know. I guess I’ll just have to throw him out on the streets.”

“Daddy!” Noah giggles.

Louis ignores him. “Harry, do you know anyone who might be interested in taking a little yuck boy?”

Noah laughs even harder at that and starts pulling at Louis’ arm to get to the phone. “No, Harry not true!”

“I might be able to find someone,” Harry says, trying his hardest not to laugh.

“So mean! You’re meanies!” Noah accuses.

Louis laughs and turns to kiss his cheek. “I love you baby, even though your taste in movies is obviously lacking.”

“I don’t know what that means,” Noah says.

Louis smiles and pulls Noah into his lap, balancing the phone away so he can hug his son. Harry watches with a strange sort of jealousy. He wishes he was there with them, which he guesses is stupid. He’s in Los Angeles, he’s famous, there’s loads of things he could be doing right now but all he wants is to sit on Louis’ couch and watch Grease and eat takeaway.

“I love you,” Louis sing songs.
Noah sticks his tongue out, his cheeks blushing red. “So not cool, Dad.”

“Noah I can promise you Harry doesn’t care whether you’re cool or not,” Louis says.

“Obviously I don’t,” Harry teases. “I mean, I’m friends with your dad and look at him.”

The words make Noah absolutely lose it. He falls out of Louis’ lap and onto his back on the couch, loud laughter lighting up Harry’s sad hotel room. Louis shakes his head at both of them and gives Harry a look.

“You’re awful, both of you. There’s no love anymore, no respect.”

“I love you,” Noah says proudly, still fighting off giggles.

Louis smiles and it’s the one Harry loves the most, the one he only gives Noah. “I know you do, silly boy. Go get your pajamas on quick, we have time for one more movie.”

The idea makes Noah light up. He jumps up off the couch and takes off running, shouting “I’ll be back!” as he leaves the picture.

After watching him go, Louis rests against the couch and smiles. “Hi babe. What’s wrong?”

Harry hates that Louis always knows when something’s wrong. Harry sighs and runs a hand through his hair. “I just-everyone’s out, yeah? They all went to this party together and I’m alone, and then I just got this text inviting me to a party where I know there’s going to be drugs and-I don’t know. I’m not going, obviously, but it’s been so long and I don’t know. It’s just stupid.”

“Oh H,” Louis sighs, looking at him sadly. “You want to hang out with me and Noah?”

Harry smiles. “I wish.”

“Then your wish is granted,” Louis decides. “We aren’t doing much love, probably just going to watch a movie and cuddle. If you want I’ll grab my computer, we can Skype so my arm doesn’t fall asleep.”

“Are you sure?” Harry asks. He hates to be a burden, hates that Louis might soon grow sick of him constantly needing reassurance and attention. But of course, Louis never complains. In fact, the happy smile he’s currently sporting says otherwise.

“Of course I’m sure,” he laughs. “Give me five minutes, yeah?”

Harry nods. He moves to hang up and stops. He looks at Louis, sitting in his little living room with his threadbare couch and a box of pizza visible on the table in the background. He’s a world away, for more than a few reasons, and Harry would give everything to be there with him.

“Thank you,” he says.

Louis smiles and blows the camera a kiss before promptly hanging up.
Louis is sat at his desk minding his own business when Jade lets out a scream. It’s not like it’s such an unusual thing to hear when she’s around, but up until that point the office had reached a strange sort of lull. She managed to destroy that instantly.

“Louis!”

Louis pops his head up to see her standing on top of her chair. A terrified looking intern is trying desperately to coax her down. Poor kid. This is not what she signed up for, Louis is sure of that.

“Did you know?” Jade yells, staring Louis down. “You knew!”

A quick look around the office confirms that everyone else seems just as confused as Louis does. That’s oddly reassuring. “Babe, what? Get off that chair are you crazy?”

Jesy emerges from her office looking tired. “Jade, off the chair,” she agrees. “I really don’t want any broken bones today.”

Still standing on her chair, Jade glares down at Louis. “One Direction just dropped a new single out of nowhere. Out of nowhere Louis! And I wasn’t at all prepared because you hate me!”

Louis raises his eyebrows. “How would I have known?” he asks. “Boy bands aren’t really my thing.”

Seeing his smirking face just makes Jade angrier. She lets out another short scream and drops back into the chair, making the poor intern yelp in shock. Seconds later a guitar is strumming loudly through her speakers. The sound of Harry’s voice has Louis reacting without really thinking about it.

He makes his way over to Jade’s desk to find her frantically scrolling through Twitter while the song plays on in the background. It’s not like it’s a bad song, of course not, but it’s kind of surreal hearing his conversations being sung back to him for the world to hear.

“What the hell,” he murmurs.

Jade shakes her head. “I hate you. Look at this.”

Louis does and his breath catches. It’s a picture of him, though he’s sure no one else would really be able to tell. The two of them are just lumps under a heavy white comforter, Louis’ arm barely visible where it’s wrapped around Harry’s waist. Harry has one hand laying over his arm, clearly recognizable by his tattoos and rings.

I’ll make this feel like home, the caption reads, followed by a link to buy the song.

That fucking idiot.

Louis walks out of the office and down the hall to the bathroom. He locks himself inside and grabs his phone.

Harry answers with a gentle, “Hey baby.”

“Harold,” Louis snaps. “You made my words a song? I said that to you Harry, me. I said that.”

Harry laughs softly. “I know you did. Did you like it at least?”

Louis suddenly understands. “You wrote me a song.”

“Of course I did. I’ve written you hundreds already, Lou.”
Shaking his head, Louis leans back against the wall and tries to think. “You never said anything,” he accuses. “When did you even have the time?

“I wrote it on break, and then Liam helped me tweak it a bit,” Harry explains calmly. “We recorded it on tour and released it today. It’s not going to be on the album, it’s an ep.”

“An ep,” Louis repeats, absolutely shocked by how normal Harry is trying to make this seem. “You’re ridiculous Harry Styles, absolutely ridiculous do you know that?”

Harry laughs and Louis can just see that smug little grin on his face. “I know. I sort of warned you though, remember I told Noah I’d be singing on telly soon?”

The conversation comes back to him out of nowhere. That was weeks ago, Harry’s been planning this for weeks.

“Why are you so intent on sharing major industry secrets with my four year old?” He demands.

“He’s a good secret keeper,” Harry teases. “You never answered me, though. Did you like it?”

“I should sue you, really, for stealing my words like that.”

Harry chuckles. “Mm, you should. There’s always royalties.”

Louis shakes his head. “I can’t believe you sometimes, I honestly can’t.”

“Lou, please tell me.”

Louis sighs and closes his eyes. “Well, I certainly won’t be reviewing it but-yes. Harry, yes of course I love it. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Harry says happily.

Louis rolls his eyes. “I’m still mad though. Some warning would’ve been nice, Jade just about bit my head off.”

“I’ll apologize for you,” Harry promises. “I miss you Lou.”

Louis smiles and shakes his head to himself. “I miss you too baby.”

“We’re supposed to be singing that song next week,” Harry sighed to himself. “I’m a bit worried I might even cry.”

“Oh hush,” Louis sighs. “I have to go back.”

Harry laughed softly, but he sounds a little choked up. “Big work to do, what with these boy bands dropping singles out of nowhere. Imagine how much worse it’d be if they released a music video or something.”

Louis narrows his eyes. “What are you saying?”

“Nothing at all love,” Harry laughs. “Best let you get back to work.”

Louis rolls his eyes and pushes himself towards the door. “I’ll call you tonight. Thank you H, really.”

“Bye Lou,” Harry murmurs.
Louis hangs up and finally walks back out of the bathroom. He finds Jade still blasting the song but now Zayn has appeared, leaning against the wall.

He looks over at Louis, knowing eyes studying him. “So.” He says simply.

“It’s so weird,” Louis blurs out, because he has to say it. “It’s alright for me to think that, right? Because I love it, honestly I do, but the fact that millions of people around the world are listening to a song that’s about me right now is so fucking weird.”

Zayn nods, ever the cool calm and collected type. If there was a time to be freaking out, this would be it. “It is weird,” he agrees. “I like the song though.”

Louis groans and covers his face with his hands. “Fuck, Z.”

Obviously seeing how much Louis needs it, Zayn reaches out and pulls Louis in for a hug. He squeezes around his best friend’s shoulders and sighed. “He really likes you, that kid. I hope you know what you’re doing.”

“I have no idea what I’m doing,” Louis groans against his chest.

Zayn just shakes his head and rubs Louis’ back. “Don’t break his heart, okay? He doesn’t deserve it.”

Louis scoffs. “You’re my best friend, you’re supposed to be on my side.”

“Babe, I’m your best friend which means I don’t like to you,” Zayn corrects him. “And we both know how gone that boy is for you and how good he is for you and Noah both. You know anyone my nephew likes that much is good in my book, but I’ve seen you with him. You’re happy, Louis.”

“Noah loves Harry,” Louis agrees. “Although now he wants to grow his hair out, not sure if I’m ready for that commitment.”

Zayn laughs and pulls back. Louis runs a hand over his face and shakes his hair out a little. This has been the weirdest day probably of his entire life. Zayn just makes it weirder by saying, “Babe you love Harry too. You’re just as gone for him as he is for you, you love that boy.”

Instantly Louis can feel his cheeks going red. He shakes his head, vehemently refusing. “I don’t.”

“Liar,” Zayn says with a simple shrug. “But whatever, it’s still early. You’ve got time to have a big revelation and all that.”

“Fuck off,” Louis grumbles, pulling away. He isn’t in love with Harry. That would just be stupid, wouldn’t it?

But then there’s also a large part of him that seems resigned to the fact that yes, he’s in love with Harry. It’s terrifying.

Zayn just smiles at him and pulls him back into the office. They’re greeted by the sounds of Jade singing loudly along with Harry and Liam’s voices. Louis sighs. It’s going to be a very long week.
“You ready love?” Louis asks Noah, carefully fixing his shirt for him.

Noah nods, tapping his fingers on his backpack straps and smiling. “I’m excited, Daddy.”

Louis smiles, bopping the boy gently on the nose. “I bet. Your last year of nursery love, that’s exciting. This time next year you’ll be off to the big school, huh?”

At the talk of the big school, as Noah referred to it, the boy wrinkles his nose and frowns. “That’s far away though. Kinda scary.”

“Well, we don’t have to think about it then,” Louis teases. “Now smile, let me take a picture for Grandma.”

Noah stands at the door and smiles bright for the camera before they leave. Louis walks Noah to school hand in hand, letting him skip along and sing a made up song about school. As much as Louis knows that his son is excited, he still feels horribly sad. His baby is growing up far too fast, all he wants is for time to slow down just a bit.

“Harry tells me that I gotta break a leg at school,” Noah says to Louis as they round the corner towards his school. “I dunno why though, I don’t think that’s good.”

Louis laughs. “It’s a saying babe. It’s the same as saying good luck.”


“You’re not wrong,” Louis agrees.

The school is bustling with children, most younger than Noah, some clutching their mother’s legs and crying, a few calling out to friend’s they haven’t seen since summer began. Noah’s eyes light up, obviously excited to be back in his element.

Louis walks him inside to his classroom, crouching down in front of him by the door. “Alright babe,” he says with a smile. “You’re going to do so well today, aren’t you?”

Noah nods. “’Course, Daddy.”

“Of course,” Louis agrees, leaning up to kiss his cheek. “I love you, okay? Go make me proud.”

Noah giggles and high fives Louis before running into the room. The teacher spares Louis a smile and a short wave, and then he’s off. He can’t stick around too long, or else he might cry in front of all these kids and that’d be mortifying.

As he starts to walk back, Louis decides to post the picture of Noah to his instagram for his family to see. He captions it back to school! with a string of emojis, a habit that he’s picked up from Harry.

Jesy comments almost immediately with, love you boys!!!! and more of his friend’s soon follow, including his sisters. Louis smiles and starts making his way to the store.

He’s just waiting to cross the road when Harry comments. It reads simply, Good luck bean. Missing my boys .xx Louis feels a bit like his heart has just dropped into his stomach.

Making a quick decision, Louis quickly calls him.

“Good morning love,” Harry whispers into the phone, sounding groggy.

“Morning,” Louis chirps back, before lowering his voice a bit. “Why aren’t you asleep?”
Harry sighs. “I was, but I woke up and saw your picture.”

Louis laughs, shaking his head at his boyfriend’s actions. “Babe go back to sleep, it’ll still be there in the morning.”

“No,” Harry says sternly. “What are you doing?”

“Walking to the store,” Louis says, quickly crossing the street. “We’re out of everything and I have to head to work soon, need some lunch.”

Harry hums. “Miss you. Noah looks so cute in his little outfit.”

Louis grins and nods. “Yeah. Damn cute kid I have.”

“He is,” Harry agrees. “Tell him I say hey, will you?”

“Course,” Louis promises, entering the little corner grocery store. He stops in his tracks and barks out a soft laugh when he notices the rack by the checkout. “Shit, there’s my mug on a magazine. You know, we’re actually sort of cute together.”

Harry groans, long and obviously annoyed. “We’re fucking beautiful. Don’t read those things, you promised me.”

“I know I promised you, I’ve promised a million times now,” Louis teases.

At that, Harry just groans louder. “Well, promise me again.”

Louis rolls his eyes and moves away from the magazines. “I promise baby, as beautiful as we are, no rags.”

“Good,” Harry sighs, and then Louis can hear some sort of noise in the background of the call. “I have to go love, I’ll see you soon right?”

“Absolutely,” Louis promises. “Go back to sleep, babe. I’ll talk to you later.”

Harry says his goodbyes right back and leaves Louis to contemplate how many frozen meals he can eat a week before his body just gives out.

After determining that it can’t be that harmful to his health, Louis picks out a few other things and heads back to his house to grab his car. The drive to work seems abnormally long, but Louis passes the time by singing to himself, tapping a beat on the steering wheel of his car. He may or may not have listened to One Direction a bit as well, but that was for him to know.

Everyone at work seems to be a bit on edge as well, with many stares following him as he makes his way into the building and towards the lift. He doesn’t really understand but chooses to ignore it, instead focusing on the cup of tea in his hands and the work he needs to finish today.

When the lift finally reaches his floor, Louis hurries towards the office. Jade squeaks when he enters, scrambling for her phone. He frowns at her and shakes his head.

“Why is everyone acting so weird?” He demands.

Jade shrugs, still holding her phone at the ready. No doubt she’s filming another one of her stupid snapchat things for the company’s account. She thinks she’s hilarious.

“I’m not sure,” Jade sing songs, obviously lying. “Hey Lou, someone left something on your desk
for you.”

Louis frowns, his eyebrows knitting together in thought. Something is definitely up.

When he reaches his desk he finds a vase sitting there, absolutely full of beautiful flowers. It’s huge and he instinctively leans down, catching the sweet smell of all the roses and lilies. A note sits tucked in between the flowers with his name on it. He snatches it up, pulling the small card out and opening it, expecting some kind of poem or long letter.

Instead all he sees is, *Hi*

He’s about to turn and ask Jade what the hell is going on when he hears the same word whispered directly behind him.

“Hi Lou.”

Louis whirls around, sure that he’s hearing things.

But no, there in the middle of his office stands Harry Styles. He looks so much tanner than when he left, his hair seems longer, and he seems to have somehow gotten more beautiful. Louis wasn’t even aware that was possible.

Without really thinking about the consequences, Louis jumps on him. It’s been so long, it’s been too fucking long, and he doesn’t know what to do with himself. Harry catches him, laughing and holding Louis close to him in a bone crushing hug. This is all Louis has been wanting for weeks, all he’s been craving ever since Harry left. He just wants to be held, wants to breathe in the scent of Harry’s cologne, to kiss his cheeks, his eyelids, his pretty lips.

“Oh my god,” Louis whispers. “Oh my god, Harry-what? You’re supposed to be-how?”

Harry laughs and gives the two of them a quick spin before letting Louis’ feet touch the floor again. He’s real, he’s real and he’s here, holding onto Louis and smiling down at him. If this is a dream, Louis is going to be pissed.

“I lied,” Harry says with a devious little grin. “I wanted to surprise you.”

Louis attempts to punch him in the chest, but Harry catches his arm before he can make contact and tugs him in for a kiss.

“I hate you,” Louis whispers, but he still pulls Harry closer by the back of his neck. He never wants this moment to end, despite the fact that he can feel the eyes of the entire office on them. It doesn’t matter anymore.

“Don’t ever leave again. I hate you.”


*I love you,* Louis thinks.

He doesn’t say it, though he wants to so badly. It’s too soon, he knows that, and it would only scare the other man away. But the way Harry kisses him, the way he holds Louis to him like he’s scared to let go-it feels like love. And maybe that’s good enough for now.
They spend the entire drive to Harry’s hotel bickering, which Harry isn’t all that surprised about. It’d been weeks since they found out they’d be heading home earlier than expected and Harry had everyone in on it, even Louis’ mother who agreed that he deserved some time away to just relax. But of course, Louis doesn’t seem to agree with this at all.

“I can’t even believe you sometimes,” Louis says for about the hundredth time since Harry surprised him in his office. “I can’t just up and leave Harry-”

“Lou, yes you can,” Harry explains for, again, the hundredth time. “I’ve already talked to Jesy and she agrees that you need to have a couple days off. Your mum’s picking Noah up from school and packing his bag for the night, and I’ve got a bag for you from Zayn in the back. Everything is taken care of.”

Louis just stares at him, one hand still holding Harry’s over the gear shift. He hasn’t let go since they left his office, even though he’s still pretending to be far more upset than he is. Harry might believe his anger if he didn’t let out an honest to god whine when they had to briefly stop holding hands to get into the car.

“You’re ridiculous,” Louis says.

Harry just smiles at him and brings their joined hands to his lips.

The hotel Harry’s picked is in Doncaster, but not the one he stayed in last time. He picked this one specifically because of its proximity to both Louis’ house and his mum’s as well. Harry knows his boyfriend well enough to know he’d never want to be too far from Noah without days of planning ahead of time.

When Harry tells him where they’re going, Louis doesn’t do anything but nod but he looks grateful for it. Harry likes to think he’s good at taking care of his boyfriend.

“So, you’ve stolen me away,” Louis says to him quite plainly halfway through their drive. “What do you plan on doing with me now?”

Harry grins, shaking his head at his dramatic boyfriend. “I haven’t stolen you, Louis. You’re my boyfriend, most people would probably find this romantic.

Though he’s obviously trying to quell it, Louis smiles. He brings Harry’s hand to his lips, kissing the tattoo where Harry’s thumb encases his one. He sighs and says, “I’ve missed you so much Harold. This is probably the most romantic thing anyone’s ever done for me. Jade looked like she was going to cry, I think.”

Harry grins, remembering Jade’s cheering as they kissed right in the middle of the office. She was his best accomplice in all of this, promising to keep any nosy interns at bay and recording it for him to tease Louis with later on.

“Well, I’m going to top this just you wait,” Harry promises. “A million times over, even. You deserve to be spoiled Lou.”
Louis shakes his head. “I don’t really. I’m just a normal lad, H.”

“You still deserve to feel spoiled babe,” Harry replies petulantly.

Louis rolls his eyes, squeezing Harry’s hand tightly. “You’re ridiculous,” he murmurs.

Harry’s starting to wonder if he says it only because he’s trying not to say something else.

They decide to go out to a club because Louis demands it. He hasn’t been out to a club in ages, he never has the time or the energy really. Plus, seeing Harry all dressed up in his sheer shirts and jeggings brings Louis great joy. Knowing it’s all purely for him makes only him even happier.

“You look fucking amazing,” Louis says to him over the music.

Harry giggles, hardly audible behind the pounding bass of the club around them. Louis is only tipsy, but Harry is drunk after only a few drinks. He’s giggly, his cheeks are pink, and he’s a genuinely awful dancer. It actually reminds Louis a lot of the night they met, and he tells Harry so.

“She should be mine,” he giggles, wiggling forward in what could maybe be considered a dance move if he wasn’t so drunk. He smiles and pulls Louis in by the waist, dropping his face to his boyfriend’s neck. “I knew then, knew you were supposed to be mine.”

Louis laughs and pats Harry’s waist, trying to ignore the part of him that wants to agree. Fate is starting to make more and more sense to him these days.

“Babe, I’m going to get another drink. You need water before you pass out on me, go stand with Alberto for a bit.”

“No,” Harry mumbles, still laying on Louis neck. He sways them around a bit until Louis pulls away. Noticing the lack of Louis underneath his hands, Harry looks up at his boyfriend. His eyes betray his shock at the idea of no longer holding Louis, and he quickly pouts.

Louis smiles and drags a thumb across his bottom lip. “I’ll be right back, love.”

“I’ll miss you,” Harry says genuinely.

With a short laugh, Louis starts pushing his way through the crowd. He gets to the bar after what feels like ages and quickly shouts an order to the bartender, making sure to ask for a bottle of water as well. Out of nowhere, he feels a hand slip onto his lower back.

“I’ll get that,”

Louis frowns and looks up to see a man he doesn’t know. “That’s alright,” Louis says, twisting to get the unfamiliar hands away. “Mind taking your hand off my arse, mate?”

“Don’t be a prude,” the man laughs, his hand still inching down Louis’ back. He must think this is a joke, Louis thinks.

In an instant Louis has the man’s wrist in his hand and wrenches him away. “Fuck off,” he says, as clearly as possible. It seems like this guy might be an idiot.
The man opens his mouth to say something, but stops. Louis feels a familiar hand around his waist, Harry’s rings cold against the bare skin where his t-shirt is riding up. When he looks over his shoulder he finds Harry’s face dark with a scowl. Obviously having a few drinks in him has made him feel rather brave.

“You alright love?” Harry asks quite loudly.

Louis nods, backing up closer to him. “Fine babe. He was just leaving.”

The man rolls his eyes and moves closer. “He was asking for it-”

“Fuck off mate, I won’t tell you again,” Louis snaps.

“Maybe if you weren’t such a fucking tease,”

Harry frowns, his arm going rigid where he’s holding onto Louis. His voice sounds cold and almost terrifying when he speaks. “I think he asked you to leave.”

Giving Harry a quick once over, the man scoffs. “Why don’t you shut it? This is between me and him.”

Finally, Harry lets Louis go and moves in front of him. He’s a bit taller than the man at the bar, but nowhere near as strong it seems. He’s certainly not lacking in bravery though, and Louis attributes that to those little neon drinks he’s been having all night. Across the club Alberto catches Louis’ eyes and starts moving closer.

“He told you to fuck off,” Harry growls out, towering over the stocky man. “Leave him alone before I make you.”

“Harold,” Louis says, honestly a bit shocked. He’s never seen Harry act like this before, even when he’s drunk.

The man opens his mouth but only has time to say the words, “Why are you defending this slag” before Harry’s reeling back and punching him in the face.

The already tense crowd around them seems to surge with the punch. Before the man can even react Harry throws another one, hitting him square in the nose. He probably would’ve gone for him again too if Louis hadn’t come to his senses and grabbed Harry’s arm.

“Stop it,” he shouts, tugging his boyfriend back. “You fucking idiot, why would you do that?”

Harry turns away and looks at Louis, eyes wide as if realizing what he’s done. The man is still swearing at him loudly though he’s now backed away, nose bleeding profusely.

“He can’t talk shit about you,” Harry says stupidly.

Louis tugs him back into the crowd of people. Security for the club is yelling at them but can barely make it through the crowd that’s gathered at the bar. Louis keeps pulling on Harry, letting him drunkenly stumble behind. He’s been to this club enough times over the years to know the fire door hasn’t had a working alarm since he was in sixth form and branches off into a deserted alleyway.

Harry follows him out into the cold night air and whimpers when Louis immediately crowds him up against a wall.

“You absolute idiot,” he growls, reaching for Harry’s hand. It’s bleeding and Louis can already see
bruises forming. “Look at your hand, look what you did, you’ve gone and hurt yourself Harry! Why would you do something like that?”

Despite all his yelling, Harry still just pouts at Louis. “I was protecting you,” he mumbles.

Louis holds his hand like it could break at any moment, gently turning it over and checking his fingers. Once satisfied that nothing is broken, Louis backs up. “God you just-” Louis stops and let’s Harry’s hand go. He takes another couple of steps back and tugs his hands through his hair, huffing out a loud breath. He can’t get his thoughts together, his veins are still pumping with adrenaline and he’s still so worried.

“Christ Harold,” is all he can think to say.

Louis focuses on his breathing for a bit, trying to calm down. He’s never been so worried in his life, so scared that Harry would be hurt. And he is hurt, and Louis did nothing to protect him. He’s hurt because of Louis.

As if proving this point, Harry lets out a whine. Louis whirls around to find his gloriously stupid boyfriend flexing his bleeding hand.

“Oh, baby no,” Louis scolds, rushing back to him. “Don’t do that, you’ll only hurt yourself even more. God, look at your hand Harry, it’s practically crushed.”

Harry frowns, his eyes filled with unshed tears. “Are you mad at me?”

“Yes, I’m mad at you,” Louis says honestly. “You shouldn’t have done that Harry, and now you’re hurt. Even if he did deserve it-”

“He did,” Harry says quickly. “He deserved worse.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Maybe he deserved it, but you still shouldn’t have hit him. You could’ve gotten into so much trouble, you could’ve been more hurt than you already are.”

Harry shrugs one shoulder. “No one talks to you like that, or touches you like that. Not if I have anything to say about it. He was being awful to you and he deserved it.”

“Okay yeah, but that doesn’t mean you hit people,” Louis says, his lip quirking up a bit in amusement. “You’re quite violent baby, aren’t you?”

Harry pouts again and shakes his head. “You know I’m not.”

“Mm, I’m not sure,” Louis teases. “It’s sort of nice knowing I have a big strong man out there to protect me.”

“Louis,” Harry whines, obviously not amused. “Don’t make fun of me, I’m drunk.”

Louis leans up just a bit and kisses Harry’s cheeks softly. “My poor darling, you’ve had a rough night.”

The door to the club opens and Louis moves to shield Harry on instinct, but stops when he sees Alberto. He looks at the two of them, obviously exasperated. “What the fuck is going on? Are you both okay?”

“Lou’s gotta scratch,” Harry drawls out. He pouts and leans forward, reaching for Louis’ cheek. Sure enough there’s a very small scratch there that Louis probably got while trying to pull Harry out
of the club.

Louis rolls his eyes. “He punched some guy, just about crushed his hand in the process. We should probably get him home.”

Alberto walks the rest of the way over to look at Harry’s hand. He sighs, shaking his head at the boy. “God kid, what were you thinking?”

“He was saying stuff about Louis,” Harry says, suddenly mad again. “He was touching him and Louis told him to back off and he wouldn’t.”

“I had it handled,” Louis says, glancing over at Alberto who’s giving him a knowing look. “It wasn’t a big deal.”

Alberto frowns and looks back towards the club. “Is he still in there? Drunkard might not be able to take care of him properly, but I could.”

“And I could help!” Harry pipes up, moving to ostensibly run back in and finish the job.

Louis stops him, pulling him close by his waist. He smiles warmly and reaches up to push Harry’s sweaty fringe off his forehead. “Darling, you are wasted.”

Harry grins happily and leans into Louis’ touch just like always. “You’re lovely,” he slurs.

They get so lost in each other that Louis almost forgets Alberto’s there. He turns to find the bodyguard still watching them. Louis shrugs at his unasked question. “Honestly, I had it handled. Harry’s overreacting.”

Obviously not happy with that statement, Harry starts to whine. “Lou-”

“No,” Louis decides. “C’mon babes, let’s get you to the car.”

With help from Alberto, he and Louis practically carry Harry out to the car. Harry leans on Louis for most of the way, his nose pressed to Louis’ hair. His normal urge to be as close as possible to Louis as he possibly can is amplified by about a thousand when he’s drunk.

Once inside his monster of a car, Louis asks Alberto to bring them to his house instead of the hotel. From the amount of phones he saw pointed in their general direction, Louis figures it probably won’t take that long before someone realizes where Harry is. Besides, as much as he loves fancy hotel rooms, he loves having Harry in his home and in his bed even more.

The two of them take up most of the backseat with Harry laying mostly in Louis’ lap.

“Louis?” Harry mumbles when they start driving.

“Yeah darling?” Louis whispers back, gently moving Harry’s hand to hold it in his lap. He already has bruises blooming around his knuckles.

Harry sighs sadly. “I have to tell you something, but I think I might be too drunk.”

Louis laughs and turns his head to kiss Harry’s cheek. “Tell me in the morning then, lovely.”

“But I might not be brave enough then,” Harry groans.

Smiling to himself, Louis squeezes Harry’s unhurt hand. “Then it’s not worth telling me now,” he says certainly. “You’ll be ready when you’re ready, don’t rush it.”
“You know though, what I want to say?”

Louis looks over at him. Harry smiles, all dopey and drunk, but his eyes still sparkle as they always do. This is the boy who has proved time and time again how far he’s willing to go for Louis, how much he cares about both him and his son. Of course Louis knows what Harry wants to say because Louis wants to say it right back.

So he nods and kisses Harry’s forehead. “I know, baby.”

Harry grins, obviously pleased with himself. “That’s good. Stay still for a second.”

Louis laughs but does as he’s told letting Harry move until he’s more comfortable and rest his head on Louis’ shoulder, snuggling in closer. He closes his eyes and sighs loudly.

“Kay. Thanks.”

Louis squeezes him closer and smiles. “Goodnight, baby.”

It’s not until Harry’s snoring on him that Louis sees that Alberto is watching them in the rear view mirror. Louis raises his eyebrows in question and the older man shakes his head.

“You’re really good for him,” he says, looking back to the road. “I’ve know that kid for years, love him like he’s my own practically. I’m glad he has you Louis, he needs someone like you in his life. I can see how much you love him.”

Blushing pink, Louis looks down at Harry and shrugs. “He got into a fight for me, I doubt that makes me a very good influence.”

“Trust me, he’s had worse,” Alberto laughs, though Louis is sure neither of them find it funny. “He loves you, that’s all. I haven’t seen him trust anyone this much in a very long time. He never shuts about you and that boy of yours, you know. We were all about ready to kill him by the end of tour, all he did was moan about how much he missed the two of you.”

_The two of you._ Just the way he says it makes Louis smile. It’s nice to know Harry missed Noah just as much as Noah seemed to miss him.

“Well, I’m glad you approve,” Louis says. “I’d hate to have to sneak him out past you, we’re far too old for that.”

Alberto laughs again and smiles at him the in mirror. Louis smiles back and keeps Harry close the whole ride home.

The two of them carry Harry inside Louis’ house, gently laying him down in Louis’ bed. Alberto says his quiet goodbye and Louis is soon left to help his half-asleep boyfriend change.

“Lou?” Harry murmurs, eyes fluttering open a bit as Louis helps him out of his shirt.

Louis shakes his head and kisses Harry’s forehead. “We’re home darling, go back to sleep.

Harry nods, no further explanation needed. “Night.”

“Goodnight my love,” Louis sighs, leaving one last soft kiss to the corner of his mouth. “You’ll have a mess in the morning.”
Harry wakes up to find Louis isn’t holding him as usual. That paired with the pain in his hand immediately puts him in a grumpy mood.

Groaning, Harry rolls over and sees Louis sitting up against the headboard with his laptop on the bed in front of him and is instantly in a better mood. Louis’ fringe is soft and free of product, just how Harry likes it, falling over the glasses he has perched on his nose. He’s wearing nothing but Harry's large cream jumper, the sleeves of which are falling over his hands as he types. Louis is absolutely beautiful, Harry thinks. He finds himself wondering how he got so lucky.

And as usual he just wants to be closer, so Harry reaches over and lays his hand on Louis’ thigh.

Louis looks over from his laptop and smiles. "Good morning troublemaker."

Harry smiles sleepily. "Mornin'."

"How's your hand?" Louis asks, pushing his laptop back and reaching for Harry's injured hand. It's badly bruised, but judging from the melting ice pack on the bedside table and the mess beside it Louis has obviously been cleaning it and icing it for him.

"Better," Harry sighs, moving closer until his head rests in Louis' lap. "I'm sorry."

"Mm," Louis smiles, brushing through his curls. "Your phones been going off all morning, love. I put it on silent awhile ago, I hope you don't mind. It kept waking me up."

Harry frowns and shakes his head. "Of course I don't mind. Have I mentioned that I'm sorry?"

Louis laughs and leans down, kissing his forehead softly. "Don't be. You should probably call Liam back though baby, he's worried sick about you."

"Okay," Harry yawns.

Louis smiles, eyes tracing over Harry’s face before he speaks again. "You're quite pretty, you know that popstar?"

Harry smiles back and nods. "Yeah, I know," he teases.

"Spoiled," Louis declares, pushing himself out of bed. "I'll make tea, you call Liam."

Harry nods and watches Louis go, jumper falling down around his thighs. As soon as he’s out of sight, Harry rolls across the bed to grab his phone. Sure enough he has more than a few missed calls, text messages, and emails from just about everyone. Liam does seem to be the one who has called the most though, so he follows Louis’ orders.

"Harry?" Liam says when he answers, obviously relieved.

"Yeah, hey Li," Harry sighs.

"God Harry," Liam groans. "You have everyone fucking worried. The papers say you relapsed and that video."

Harry frowns. "What video?"

"The video of you beating up some guy in a club Harry, that video.″ Liam snaps.
Harry shakes his head. "Liam I’m not on anything, I promise. I’m with Louis."

"Louis let you beat someone up?" Liam asks, sounding alarmed.

Harry smiles. "Of course he didn't. I was drunk, we went out together and there was this guy like, harassing Louis. I couldn't just sit there and let him do that-let him touch Louis like that."

"I know H, but you just," Liam sighs. "You scared me that's all. I was ready to come find you. I won't let it happen again, I could've stopped you last time."

Harry winces. "You couldn't have Li," he says as kindly as possible. "I didn't want to be stopped. I didn't want to listen to anyone who told me I had a problem, especially not you or Niall."

"I know that really, deep down I get that I couldn't have helped. But I still won't ever let you lose yourself like that again, H. We lost our best friend."

Harry shakes his head. "I wouldn't. I have too much to lose now. I guess that sounds dumb—"

"No, no it doesn't sound dumb," Liam says. "I understand completely, I really do."

Harry smiles. "I know. I think I love him Liam. Both of them, really. They’re everything."

"Yeah, I know the feeling," Liam chuckles. "Speaking of, I have to go. We have brunch with Sophia’s mum and the wedding planner today."

"Well good luck then, I hope you make it out alive," Harry teases him. "Love you, Li."

"Love you too, Haz. Tell Louis and Noah I said hello, yeah?"

Harry agrees and they both hang up. A quick look around confirms that Louis is still in the kitchen, so Harry decides to quickly find the video Liam’s talking about.

If you didn’t know what was going on it definitely looks bad, Harry decides. It’s a grainy video but you can see Harry thanks to the flash, and you can see the moment he snaps and punches the guy before the camera jostles a bit, turns away in the chaos, and the video eventually ends. He’s about to start it over again when suddenly his phone is no longer in his hand.

"Nope," Louis says, ignoring Harry’s protests. He shuts the phone off completely and sets it down on the bedside table. “None of that, babe. You don’t need to be looking at shit like that.”

Harry sits up, taking the cup of tea Louis’ made him from his hands. Louis sits down beside him, frowning to himself.

"Li said people think I’ve relapsed,"

"Well you haven’t," Louis says sternly, sounding so sure of it. “You’re strong, you should be proud of yourself. You shouldn’t be proud of punching that guy though, I’m still mad about that.”

Harry rolls his eyes, remember Louis’ anger from the night before. Most of it was a drunken haze, but he can remember Louis’ disapproving looks and scolding. “I don’t care,” he says, trying not to laugh.

Louis scoffs and reaches for Harry’s hurt hand. He pulls it into his lap and looks it over critically. “Probably needs more ice, yeah? I’d offer you some painkillers if you were more remorseful.”

Harry smiles and leans over to kiss him. Louis pretends to ignore him for a bit but eventually gives
“Thank you for taking care of me,” Harry murmurs.

“Of course,” Louis laughs, pulling away. “I’ll get you some ice, then we have to go pick Noah up from school, my poor mum’s probably sick of him by now.”

At the mention of the boy, Harry hesitates. “Did you want me to go back to the hotel?” He asks, even though that’s the last thing he wants to do.

To his delight, Louis frowns at him and shakes his head. “Of course not, we’ll go pick him up together and take him out to eat. He’s going to be so excited to see you Harry.”

Harry grins. “Really? You think so?”

Louis nods, taking another sip of his tea and standing up. “He’s been asking about you a lot lately, he’s got a list of things ready to talk your ear off about.”

“I’m excited to hear them all,” Harry says honestly. He really is too, he’s missed Noah almost as much as he’s missed Louis. It feels strange not having him around, actually.

Louis looks a little unsure of this but nods anyway. He leans down to kiss Harry’s forehead and sighs. “You can have the shower first love, I’m going to call my mum and let her know we’re picking him up.”

Harry nods and watches Louis go, padding out of the room in still nothing but Harry’s jumper.

When he enters the kitchen after getting dressed, he finds the same thing. Louis has his phone propped up between his ear and shoulder while he eats from a bowl of strawberries he’s cut up. Sitting beside it is an ice pack obviously meant for him. Harry stays quiet when he hears Louis murmuring.

“No, that’s not even close to what happened,” he sighs into the phone. “I’ve told you not to read that shit a million times, Z.”

Harry takes the silence that comes next as an opportunity to step forward and wrap his arms around Louis’ waist. He ducks down so his chin is tucked into Louis’ neck and sighs. Louis reaches back to rub his hip and gestures towards the fruit as an offering.

“We’re picking Noah up in a bit from school and then going to lunch. I need to pick Noah up some new trainers anyway.” Louis says, answering a question Harry’s obviously missed.

He frowns when he hears Zayn ask, “Are you good for it?”

Louis tenses up in Harry’s arms, his mouth settling into a thin line. “Yeah, I’m good. I would tell you if I wasn’t, you know that.”

On the other end of the line Harry can hear Zayn sighing. “I don’t know if I believe that, but okay. I love you Lou, you know that?”

Louis smiles and Harry smiles right back just because of how beautiful he looks. “I know, I love you too Z. I have to go there’s a Harry draped over my shoulder right now.”

“How inconvenient,” Zayn laughs. “Have Noah call me later, yeah? I feel like we haven’t spoken in ages.”

“It’s only been a full day since you last spoke,” Louis says.
“Yeah, well it’s been a day too long,” Zayn say. “Bye love, tell Harry I said good for him.”

Louis rolls his eyes and hangs up, rolling his head back to lean on Harry’s shoulder. “You almost ready?” He mumbles sleepily.

Harry nods, placing his hand over Louis’ bellybutton and pulling him in closer. “Waiting on you, love.”

“Showered last night,” Louis says with a snarky smile. “Some of us can hold our alcohol, Styles.”

Harry gasps. “That is so rude, how dare you.”

“I dare,” Louis laughs, tugging himself away. “I’m going to get dressed, try not to destroy my obviously spotless house.”

And yeah, Louis’ house is a bit of a mess, but Harry likes that. He likes looking around and seeing Noah’s drawings, his toys, Louis’ empty mugs he’s forgotten, shoes perfect for tripping over by the door. He doesn’t have a home anymore, hasn’t felt like he’s had one in years, but this feels like home today.

Except if Louis would let him he would gladly start cleaning.

Harry eats the rest of the strawberries Louis’ left for him and cleans the few dishes in the sink while he’s gone. He does take some time icing his hand as well, mostly because he knows Louis will be upset with him if he doesn’t. The last thing he wants is for Louis to be any more upset with him than he already is.

Louis soon returns in black skinny jeans and a lavender jumper pushed up past his elbows. His hair is tucked into a beanie and he winces when he catches Harry looking at it.

“Slept on it wet,” he explains. “Proper bed head, there’s no fixing it.”

“You look cute,” Harry says quickly. “We should stay in all day and cuddle.”

Smiling, Louis grabs his keys and slips into his black vans. “Maybe after we take Noah out, yeah? We can all have a cuddle and watch a movie.”

And that sounds like everything Harry ever wanted while he was gone. “Yes,” he agrees quickly. “Lou, can we?”

“Well, I was mostly joking,” Louis says while Harry puts his boots on. “But if that’s really what you want then of course love.”

Harry grins and nods. “Good. Let’s go get him, yeah?”

They head out to Louis’ car after Harry’s been talked and convinced into bringing his ice pack along. Harry’s buzzing the passenger seat the entire way. Noah’s nursery is hardly a couple of blocks away and it’s crowded with parents picking up their kids after the day has ended.

While Louis walks inside to get Noah, Harry gets out and leans against the car. He notices a few looks being thrown his way, but for the most part he’s left alone. He supposes the parents are either too old or too tired to care who he is. It doesn’t take long for Louis to return with Noah in his arms, smiling so brightly that Harry’s heart aches.

Harry sees the moment Noah realizes he’s there. He does a double take and gasps. “Daddy! Harry’s
at my school!” He hears Noah shout.

Louis smiles and lets the boy down. Noah runs the rest of the way over to Harry, nearly knocking him over with the force of his hug.

“Hey bean,” Harry laughs, helping the boy jump up for a better hug.

“Hi Harry,” Noah says quite loudly. “My Daddy says there’s a surprise for me and it’s you!”

Harry laughs. “It is me, what a crap surprise.”

Noah giggles and shakes his head. He gives Harry a squeeze around the neck and lays his head down on Harry’s shoulder. “You’re a good surprise,” he says softly.

The words make Harry’s heart surge with happiness. He ruffles Noah’s curls and sighs happily. Louis watches both of them but Harry can decide what the look on his face could mean.

“Alright boys, let’s go.” Louis says, taking Noah from Harry’s arms though they’re both reluctant to let go.

After Noah has been secured into his car seat and the three of them are all in the car, Louis pulls away from the curb.

“Where are we heading to?” Louis asks.

Noah gasps. “Noodles!” He shouts, kicking his feet against the bottom of his car seat.

Louis smiles at him and reaches over to hold Harry’s hand as covertly as he can. “How does Italian sound, love?” he asks.

If he’s being honest with himself, Harry is still a little concerned about the look Louis was giving him. Of course this obviously isn’t the best place to talk about it, so Harry just smiles back at him and nods. “Absolutely.”

They’ll talk about it later. At least that’s what Harry hopes.

Little fingers find their way into Harry’s hair from behind his seat. “Harry’s hair is even longer Daddy,” Noah calls to Louis. This is obviously an ongoing argument between them.

“Love, you hate when I have to do your hair as it is,” Louis points out.

Noah groans. “You pull it!” He accuses, still gently running a hand through Harry’s curls.

Louis shoots Harry an exasperated look, obviously asking for help. Harry smiles.

“It took me awhile to grow it out this long, Noah,” he says. “And by then I was old enough to do my own hair. My mum never would’ve let me have it this long when I was your age.”

Noah nods as if this makes more sense than anything else Louis has said to him. Then he says, “I haven’t got a mum. My friend Sarah has two.”

“That hardly seems fair,” Harry jokes.

Finally letting go of Harry’s hair, Noah shrugs. “It’s okay, because my Daddy’s gonna find a prince and then I’ll have two dads. And then Sarah can’t brag anymore!”
Harry snorts out a surprised laugh and Louis shakes his head. “Noah, that’s awfully rude.”

“She’s awfully rude,” Noah mutters.

Harry laughs but slaps a hand over his mouth when Louis shoots him a dirty look. He shakes his head, looking back at Noah who obviously thinks he’s just as funny. “I’m sorry love, he’s hilarious.”

Noah giggles and nods. “I’m funny, Daddy.”

“Neither of you are funny, I can promise you that,” Louis jokes.

“My Harry is funny,” Noah says. “Always got good jokes.”

Any reply Harry could’ve thought of dies in his throat. My Harry, Noah called him. He is Noah’s Harry. Louis obviously notices his reaction and smiles.

“He’s been saying it for a couple days now,” Louis whispers to him.

“I’m his Harry.” Is all Harry can think to say.

Louis laughs softly and nods. “That you are, my love.”

Harry bites down on his lower lip and stares out the window, happily listening to Noah babble for the rest of the drive.

After the three of them have dinner together and Harry is gladly dragged around shopping for a bit with Noah and Louis, they head home. Noah tears off across the house as soon as they get inside, shedding clothes as he goes.

“He hates wearing proper clothes,” Louis explains. “You’re lucky he’s at least putting joggers on for company.”

Harry smiles and presses a kiss to Louis’ lips while he can. “Can’t imagine where he gets that from.”

“It’s a mystery,” Louis agrees. “I’ll go make the popcorn, yeah? Go pick out a movie for us.”

After much deliberation, Harry picks Finding Nemo. Noah comes running back in, pajamas on and stuffed dinosaur in hand, and grins mischievously when he sees Harry’s selection.

“Daddy is so sad about this movie,” he giggles. “Cries every time.”

Harry smiles and pats the couch beside him. “I do too,” he admits. “But you probably don’t, right? You’re pretty strong.”

Noah giggles and hops up onto the couch. “I’m pretty strong. Would be sad if I got lost though.”

“I doubt your dad would ever let you get lost. He loves you too much.”

Noah nods and cuddles close to Harry’s side. He pulls one of Harry’s arms over his shoulder and tucks Hank between the two of them. “Yeah, pretty true,” he says, shooting Harry a look. “Daddy loves you too.”
It comes out of nowhere. Harry’s just glad he wasn’t drinking his tea when Noah said it, or else he surely would’ve choked. Instead, he lets out a very loud and ungraceful cough and sputters out, “What?”

Noah rolls his eyes, like Harry’s the one who’s being ridiculous here. “Daddy loves you, I know cause he looks at you like a crush. My Daisy tells me he’s gotta crush on you. And I tell my Natalie this secret and she says it’s true!”

Harry smiles softly. Noah has no idea how right he is. “I’m not so sure about that, bean,” he says, at a loss for how to respond to this properly.

“He does so!” Noah groans loudly. “You gotta kiss him Harry, you gotta fall in love like when a princess kisses a frog. Except my Daddy’s the prince and you’re only kinda a frog like my Phoebe says. I got a plan.”

It’s quite obviously he’s had this plan going on for awhile. Harry thinks it’s sweet, how much he wants his dad to fall in love. He also has absolutely no clue how to handle this, so he just squeezes Noah’s shoulder softly. “I think that’s mostly up to your dad, bean. I’ll see what I can do about it but no promises.”

“Grownups are dumb,” Noah mumbles.

Harry smiles. “I know, love.”

The two make themselves comfortable on the couch while they wait for Louis. By the time he appears, Noah has shifted to lean all of his weight on Harry and Harry is mostly laying across the couch. Louis brandishes a giant bowl of popcorn in one hand with Noah’s sippy cup sitting precariously atop it, and a couple of beers in his other hand.

When he spots the two of them already cuddled together, Louis smiles. “What are we watching babes?” He asks while he sets everything down.

“Finding Nemo!” Noah announces.

Louis groans and sits down heavily under Harry’s other arm. He throws his legs over Harry’s lap, getting comfortable with both of them. “Fine,” he sighs. “Start it, let’s get this over with.”

“Are you going to cry?” Harry asks as he starts the movie for them.

Noah giggles when his dad shakes his head. “Absolutely not,” Louis says.

Only ten minutes later both Louis and Harry are in tears while Noah munches on handfuls of popcorn loudly. He seems far less affected by the movie than the adults do, mostly giggling but never crying. Almost halfway through the movie though, Harry glances down only to find the boy fast asleep in his arms.

“Lou,” Harry murmurs.

Louis hums and looks away from the film. Noah’s laying across Harry with his head on Harry’s stomach. His curls are fanned out under him like a halo and he has Hank close to his face where his thumb is stuck in his mouth.

“Do you want me to move him?” Louis asks.

“No,” Harry says, probably far too quickly. “No, he’s fine. Come here.”
Louis cuddles closer to him and Harry suddenly realizes that he’s never felt so content. He’s never been so happy than he is now, just laying together with both of his boys watching a cartoon. It’s only made better when Louis tilts his head up for a kiss.

“He thinks you have a crush on me,” Harry whispers.

Louis smiles and glances down at his sleeping son. “He might be right.”

“I hope so,” Harry chuckles. “Because I definitely have a crush on you.”

They both go quiet for a moment, each of them watching Noah sleep. Finally, Louis whispers, “I want to tell him.”

Harry goes completely still. He realizes how big of a step this is, how much Louis must trust him to even suggest it. “I would love for you to tell him Lou, but it’s up to you.”

“I want to,” Louis says firmly. “I want him to know, I want to make sure he’s okay with it because-”

And he stops. They both stop, actually, locking eyes.

“I love you,” Harry says softly. “I think-I mean I hope that’s what you’re trying to say but I don’t care anymore. I can’t lie to myself anymore Louis, I’m so fucking in love with you.”


Harry does as he’s told, bringing Louis closer and kissing him. They get as close as they can without waking Noah beside them, and Harry finds that he really doesn’t mind. All he wants is to be with his boys.

“Thank you,” Louis whispers, their lips only inches apart now.

Harry smiles, brushing his hand through Louis’ hair. “For what, baby?”

“For this, for everything. This is all I ever wanted.”

“I love you,” Harry says, just because he can’t stop saying it now.

Louis laughs. “I love you, Harold.”

They lay together like that for the rest of the film, intertwined with Harry holding onto Louis tightly. He plans to leave when it ends, but Louis stops him.

“It’s late,” is his excuse. “You can stay here, the couch is always free.”

Harry smirks. “I wouldn’t even be driving, babe.”

“Well, it’s still not safe, besides your poor driver is probably sleeping by now. I’ll make up the couch for you,” Louis says firmly.

“Okay love,” Harry gives in.

Louis smiles and gets up from the couch. Together, they carefully lift Noah until he’s lying in Louis’ arms. The sleeping boy shifts and sighs loudly against Louis’ shoulder, nose scrunching up in distaste.
“Daddy?” he mumbles.

“Shh pumpkin,” Louis murmurs. “I’m right here.”

Noah blinks his eyes open just long enough to smile at him. “Love you.”

Harry’s heart stutters at how cute it all is. Louis smiles right back and whispers, “I love you too.”

While Louis’ gone, Harry searches for his phone to send off a text to Gemma.

_I love him_, Is all it says. He’s so happy to finally be able to admit it.

Gemma’s reply is almost immediate. _I know_, she’s written. _Now shut up and go to sleep._

Harry wakes up the next morning because someone is poking his nose.

“Get up sleepy head,” a small voice whispers along with the incessant poking. “Gotta wake up!”

Groaning, Harry gives in and blinks his eyes open. Noah is standing before him, finger still out and ready to poke Harry in the nose again if he falls back asleep. He’s still wearing his dinosaur pajamas and if the light outside is anything to go by it’s just barely dawn.

“Hey,” Harry croaks out. “Hey darling, what are you doing up?”

Noah shrugs and plops down on the floor beside the couch, crossing his legs over one another. He rocks side to side a bit, already full of energy, before answering. “The sun is up. What’re you doin’ on my couch, Harry?”

Harry smiles as best he can with half of his face pressed into a pillow. “It was too late for me to drive back last night, bean.”

Noah nods and leans forward to rest his chin on the sofa. He stares at Harry for a moment, blue eyes so bright beautiful that Harry could almost mistake him for his father. Finally, he sighs. “I’m hungry.”

“Yeah?” Harry asks.

“Yeah, super-duper,” Noah confirms, sounding quite serious. “I’ll probably die soon.”

Harry chuckles. “You are your father’s son, aren’t you?”

Noah frowns, his whole face scrunching up with it. “Well, duh.”

Harry shakes his head at the boy and sits up slowly. After checking his watch he confirms it’s only a bit after seven and knows Louis won’t be up for awhile now. He hardly has time to wipe the sleep from his eyes before Noah’s grabbing his hand and tugging him off the couch. Together they head for the kitchen, where Noah immediately begins opening cupboard doors.

“What do you want to eat, love?” Harry asks. He opens the fridge and frowns at the contents, finding
it mostly empty.

Noah seems to be finding the same thing. “I want everything!” he says. “Can you hear my tummy?” To emphasis this point, Noah pats his growling stomach and frowns at it.

Harry sighs. “We need to go grocery shopping.”

“Let’s go!” Noah agrees, even though Harry was mostly speaking generally. “C’mon, we gotta tell Daddy we’re goin’.”

With that, the boy takes off running across the house. Harry tries to catch him but he’s already running down the hall and barging into Louis’ room.

Louis is laying on his stomach shirtless, hair a mess, with one arm up over his head and a pillow crushed to his chest.

“Noah gently pats Louis’ shoulder. “We got no food, Daddy. Harry says we have to shop.”

Louis pokes his head up just a bit and frowns at Harry. He looks so cuddly and inviting, even if he is grumpy. “Keys are on the table,” he murmurs. “Just makes sure he’s dressed, yeah?”

Harry raises his eyebrows, honestly surprised. “What?”

“Honestly I don’t care as long as I can sleep.” Louis says, dropping his head back to the mattress.

Noah beams up at Harry and takes off running again towards his room. How that kid has so much energy this early in the morning Harry doesn’t understand.

Harry runs his hand over Louis’ shoulder and down his spine, settling at the base of his back. He leans over and gently kisses Louis’ sleep warm cheek.

“I trust you,” Louis murmurs, and that’s all Harry needed to hear.

After searching through Louis’ drawers for a bit he finds a pair of his sweat pants he’s left behind and an Adidas jumper he figures will fit him well enough. He sends a quick message to Alberto letting him know he’s going to have to come pick up his clothes from the hotel later.

When Harry walks into the hallway he finds Noah hopping out of his room whilst pulling a jumper over his head. He’s dressed in a pair of his little joggers and a t-shirt from a band Harry’s never heard of before. He’s the spitting image of his father.

“Ready to go?” Harry asks.

Noah nods and leads the way to the foyer where he finds his small vans. “Do I look nice?” He asks quite seriously, or as seriously as one can be when they’re holding a stuffed dinosaur.

Harry smiles and helps him tame a bit of his hair. “You look lovely, bean.”

Noah grins and reaches for his hand. Harry grabs his keys and his shoes before leading Noah out to the car.
The store Harry picks is the closest to Louis’ house and seems mostly deserted since it’s only just opened. Harry helps Noah into a cart and they start off, Noah ticking off on his fingers everything they need for breakfast while Harry just tries to stay awake.

“Gotta have tea!” Noah says, reaching for a box and making about five others tumble down as well. He giggles while Harry sleepily picks them all up.

“What else babes?” Harry asks after picking up the last box of tea. “Maybe some pancakes, your dad likes pancakes yeah?”

Noah nods seriously. “With fruits in.”

“With fruits in,” Harry agrees.

They’re picking out bananas for their pancakes when Harry starts to hear whispers around them. No one says anything or comes up to them, which he’s grateful for, but he can tell a few of the workers have noticed who he is just by how they’re staring.

Noah seems to notice too and giggles at him. “People are lookin’ at you. They’re gonna see you in your jammies.”

Harry smiles and ruffles Noah’s hair. “At least they’re nice jammies, yeah? Bacon next love.”

Noah nods and lifts Hank up to kiss Harry’s cheek. “I’m happy you’re here,” he says.

Harry gives Hank a kiss right back just to make Noah laugh. “I’m happy to be here too, bean.”

Their cart quickly fills up with all the things they need for breakfast and maybe a few things Noah’s talked Harry into buying as well. The teenaged cashier squeaks when she sees him but keeps her cool. He makes sure to sign a piece of receipt paper for her before he leaves.

Noah makes a big show of searching through every bag before Harry puts it in the car until he finds an apple to eat on the way home.

“My tummy’s cryin’” He explains when Harry asks what he’s doing. He’s too enamored to tell the boy no.

The entire way home, Noah babbles about what Louis might want for dinner, going from helpful options to just anything he’d like instead, like dinosaur chicken nuggets. Harry pretends to take this all into consideration though, just to make Noah smile.

Harry and Noah carry all of the bags in together, though Noah seems to be doing everything he can be loud. “We’re gonna make my Daddy so much food,” he sing songs. “And then food for me, food for my Harry.”

Harry helps him up onto the counter and they start making pancakes together. Noah helps as best he can, which mostly means he stirs the batter and gets it into his hair and on his clothes. Harry doesn’t mind of course, but he’s definitely going to have an excuse to clean up after this.

They have a steady pile of pancakes building by the time Louis finally comes stumbling in.

“Daddy!” Noah shouts, making Louis’ wince. “We’ve made you a cuppa. I told Harry how and he made it, I didn’t touch the kettle.”

Louis smiles. “Thank you love,” he croaks, kissing Noah’s forehead and gently squeezes Harry’s hip
in lieu of kissing him.

“We’ve made you pancakes as well,” Harry says gently.

“Thank you too, love,” Louis murmurs, brushing a hand over his arm as he moves to take Noah into his arms.

Noah giggles and kisses Louis’ forehead.

“Have you brushed your teeth sweetheart?” Louis asks.

Noah nods. “Yeah, and then my Harry took me to the store. I got to pick bananas.”

“Mm, sounds like an adventure,” Louis says, resting his chin on Noah’s head and hugging him tight.

“I love you, babes.”

“I love you too Daddy.”

Harry keeps on flipping the pancakes, ignoring the part of him that is practically singing with happiness. This could all be his, he realizes suddenly. This could be his life, Louis, Noah, and himself together as a family. He wants it so badly it almost hurts.

“You alright, love?” Louis asks him, looking a bit concerned.

Harry grins. “Perfect,” he says.

Louis smiles right back at him and moves past him, humming something that sounds suspiciously like *Home* as he moves.

Before Louis tells Noah about himself and Harry, he admittedly bribes the boy just a bit. It’s the weekend now so they spend the whole day together, just the three of them. They go out for ice cream and take it home to eat in the back garden. Harry buys them sidewalk chalk and he and Noah draw masterpieces for the rain to wash away. Louis watches the two of them together and tries to decipher that feeling he’s been getting in his stomach lately whenever he sees them together.

They have Noah’s favorite for dinner, spaghetti and meatballs, and soon they’re all sitting together and the dining room table. Louis looks over to Harry just as they’re finishing their food and nods. Harry nods back and excuses himself to make a quick phone call.

Louis waits until he’s gone to say something.

“Noah, darling,” he starts.

Noah hums, shoving part of a cut up meatball into his mouth. He’s practically covered in sauce now, but he looks pleased about it.

Louis smiles. “I have something I want to talk to you about, babe. A big kid talk.”

This catches Noah’s attention. If there’s one thing he loves, it’s a big kid talk. “Okay Daddy, I’m listening,” he says, putting his fork down and looking at his dad quite seriously.
Louis looks down at this plate for a moment, trying to gather his thoughts before he speaks. He’s been planning this talk for a few days now, trying to create some sort of script in his head. Of course now that he’s faced with actually having to have the talk, all of his scripts are completely forgotten.

“What do you think of Harry, babe?” Louis asks.

Noah’s eyes light up. “I like Harry!” he says enthusiastically. “So funny and nice. Like to have my Harry around.”

Louis smiles. “I’m happy you think that love because…” He trails off and suddenly second guesses everything. What if Noah is upset with him? What if he thinks that his father is somehow trying to replace Luke, even though he hardly knows his other father? What if this leads to him and Harry only becoming more attached and it doesn’t work out? What if-

“Daddy?”

Louis looks up from his fidgeting hands to find Noah staring at him with furrowed brows. He has to do it, he decides, he has to. If Noah has any problems with this Louis has to know now.

“Baby, Harry and I are together,” Louis says.


Louis nods, pushing on. “Like boyfriends, love. We’re dating one another.”

Noah doesn’t say anything to this. He seems to be very deep in thought about it, so Louis keeps on talking.

“Noah, no matter what you are always going to be what’s most important to me. You know that don’t know? No one could ever replace you. I love you more than anything and if you aren’t ready for this, than that’s completely okay?”

And he means it. As much as it would hurt, he would give this all up just to make sure Noah is happy.

Noah picks up another meatball and chews it. “Ready for what, Daddy?”

Louis frowns, confused by his reaction—or lack of one, really. “Ready for me to be dating someone, love. I know it’s a big change.”

To his delight, Noah giggles. “Daddy, you’re bein’ silly.”

Louis shakes his head, trying to understand what’s going on. “What?” He asks, finally.

Noah shrugs, going back to his food. “That’s okay too. I’m happy, Daddy. Harry makes me happy too, I like when he’s here with us. He can be your boyfriend, and then I don’t gotta look for frogs anymore. It’s good.”

Noah only laughs harder at this. He stands up and walks around the table to pull Noah in for a hug. “Thank you baby,” he murmurs. “I love you so much. We’re still a team, yeah? Daddy and Noah
forever.”

“Forever,” Noah confirms. “But, kinda think it’s good we found my Harry.”

Louis smiles and kisses his forehead. “I think it’s good too, babes. Finish eating, okay? I’m going to get Harry.”

“Okay,” Noah says, still smiling brightly. All of his plans have finally worked, Louis realizes. No more searching for frogs at the playground.

Louis leaves the room in search of Harry, finding him beside his bed. The boy is actually on the phone, nervously pacing around Louis’ room. When Louis enters, Harry pauses.

“He’s back Mum,” Harry says into the phone. “I have to go. I love you too.”

Harry hangs up and looks at Louis, obviously anxious. “Well?” he says, finally.

Louis grins. “Well he was a bit upset that he no longer has an excuse to catch frogs to gross me out but-”

Harry cuts Louis off with a kiss. He laughs against his boyfriend’s lips and pulls him in for a tight hug. “He’s okay with it? Really?”

Louis nods, kissing him back between his words. “He said he’s happy because you make me happy. He also said it’s a good thing we found you. I can’t help but agree.”

“God Louis,” Harry laughs, holding onto him tightly. “I love you so much.”

Louis melts against him, kissing him deeply. He loses himself in it, hands holding tightly to Harry’s curls. They’re both so preoccupied with one another, neither of them hear little feet approaching.

“Ew!” A shout comes from the door.

Both men separate from one another and turn to see Noah standing in the doorway. He has his arms crossed, obviously trying to appear serious though he keeps breaking into smiles.

“I know you are in love,” he says plainly. “But that doesn’t mean kissin’ all the time!”

“Oh, that’s exactly what it means,” Louis laughs, lunging towards him. “Come here!”

Noah shrieks and takes off across the house with Louis running after him. Louis soon catches his son in a fit of giggles and tackles him to the couch, leaving kisses all over his small face. Harry catches up to both of them and watches them from the doorway for awhile before finally saving Noah from Louis’ clutches, demanding they both finish their dinners.

Hours later finds the three of them on the couch together, as usual. Louis is mostly asleep, eyes closed and stretched out while Harry and Noah sit beside him. They must truly believe he’s asleep as well, because he soon hears Noah’s gentle whisper.

“My Harry?”

“My Noah,” Harry shoots back, making the toddler giggle.


Louis hears Harry shift around a bit and the telly is soon quieter than before. “I’m listening, bean.”
There’s a short pause, and then Noah asks, “Do you love my Daddy?”

Harry goes quiet and still. Noah is quiet as well, but Louis can feel his son’s ever active hands tapping a pattern on his ankle. It’s obvious he’s a bit nervous about asking such a question, and Louis is ready to pretend to wake up when Harry finally answers.

“I love your dad,” Harry begins. “More than I think anyone has ever loved another person. I love your dad so much that I would give up anything and everything for him if he asked me to. I love him more than all of the stars in the sky and all of the little Nemo’s in the sea put together. He’s everything to me.”

Noah lets out a soft gasp. “That’s pretty,” he says, his voice dreamy.

“You think so?” Harry asks honestly.

Noah sighs. “I’m glad Daddy has a love. He, um, d-d-what’s the word Harry?”

“Deserves?”

“Yeah, my Daddy deserves to have a love,” Noah says firmly. Louis loves him so much sometimes that is hurts.

Harry sighs and Louis soon feels his hands resting beside Noah’s on his ankle. “I think so too, bean,” he says. “I’m going to do everything I can to make sure you and your Daddy are always happy, you know that? I promise. You’re just as important to me as he is.”

Louis feels like his heart stops when he hears this. Of course Harry’s told him this before in a million different ways, but this feels different to him somehow. It’s different, he realizes, because neither of them know that Louis is listening. Harry isn’t doing this for his benefit, he has no motive other than making sure Noah knows that he cares.

In the quiet of their living room, Louis feels them both shifting around. He opens his eyes just enough to see the two of them embracing, Noah squeezing tightly to Harry’s side.

“I like having you here, Harry,” Noah says, his voice muffled by the hug.

Harry locks eyes with Louis, his cheeks quickly blushing red as he realizes his boyfriend has heard at least part of their conversation. Louis only smiles at him gently and nods, hoping Harry understands.

“I like being here, bean,” Harry replies, still looking at Louis. He smiles back at him, so beautiful and genuine, and Louis knows that he means it.

Chapter End Notes

This is probably the quickest update this poor fic has ever had. I hope you enjoyed almost 10k of pure fluff :) I have a quick question for everyone, or whoever reads the author's notes at least. I've been thinking about posting the playlist for this fic (or at least some of it, or else spoilers...) somewhere, but I'm not sure anyone would even be interested in listening? It isn't a very cohesive playlist, but I like to listen and add to it as I'm writing and it has inspired a ton of this fic. If you are interested, please let me know because I am forever
looking to make playlists to avoid doing real work! My boss loves me!

I hope everyone liked this update!! As always thank you for all of the comments, kudos, and support. See you soon. xx
it's you that i've been waiting to find

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

To say Louis is nervous about finally meeting Harry’s mum would be an understatement. He’s terrified, actually, more nervous than he can remember being in a long time. The drive there is spent thinking of every possible thing that could go wrong.

“Love,” Harry says at one point, reaching over to place a hand on Louis’ leg. He was so lost in his thoughts he didn’t notice how badly he was shaking it.

“Sorry,” Louis mutters.

Harry raises an eyebrow and squeezes Louis’ knee gently. “Babe, calm down yeah? It’s just my mum.”

Louis shakes his head, the thoughts starting right up again. “And you step-dad, your sister, and your niece as well,” he’s quick to correct his boyfriend. “Just your entire family I’m about to make a shit first impression on that will last forever, but yes Harold it’s certainly not a big deal.”

Instead of being supportive like any good boyfriend might do, Harry makes the stupid face he always does when he’s trying not to laugh. Louis really hates him some of the time.

“Darling, they’re not all that bad. I swear, Mum’s half in love with you already.”

“They’re going to hate me,” Louis says, ignoring Harry completely. “They’ll think I’m trying to steal you away and trap you and take all of your money just like the papers say.”

That of course has the dumb little half smile completely wiped from Harry’s face. He settles instead on an angry scowl. “Babe, why are you reading that trash? Tell me who wrote it, I’ll get PR on it so fast their heads will spin.”

“Everyone says it,” Louis grumbles.

“Well, that doesn’t make it true,” Harry says. “They don’t know you and they certainly don’t know us.”

Louis huffs and crosses his arms over his chest. “Seems true though, doesn’t it?”

And yes, okay, he knows he shouldn’t read that shit. Not only has Harry told him a thousand times, but so has just about everyone else in his life. It’s tempting though to just google his name for a moment and find thousands of people calling him a gold digging tramp-not to say he’s done that more than once of course. Once was certainly enough.

“No,” Harry says sternly, his hand still holding tightly to Louis’ knee. “Don’t talk about yourself that way. I don’t like hearing you put yourself down Lou, not when you’re the single best thing that has ever happened to me. I love you, that’s all that matters. Anyone with anything bad to say about that can go fuck themselves.”

Sometimes Louis worries Harry will get himself into trouble with how hard he loves.

Instead of saying this, Louis lets out a soft sigh and reaches for Harry’s hand. He intertwines their
fingers and absentmindedly plays with the rings on Harry fingers as he stares out the window. They both go silent as Harry drives, his expression still troubled.

“Lou,” he says finally as they near his parent’s home. “You’re wonderful, okay? My family is going to love you because I love you. All they want is for me to be happy and they know how happy you make me. I’ve never felt like this for someone before-I’ve never even brought anyone home before. They know how much you mean to me.”

Louis wants to tell him that information only makes him more nervous, but he can’t. As much as he tries to hide it, Louis knows that Harry is just as nervous. So, instead of arguing for once, Louis just nods and brings his lips to the back of Harry’s hand.

“I love you too,” he says. “I’m excited to meet them, babe.”

That finally brings a smile to Harry’s face and Louis smiles back. After all, he loves to make his boy happy.

They soon arrive to what Louis thinks is probably the prettiest house he’s ever seen. It’s large but not overbearingly so, stuck on a quiet street in the middle of nowhere with a large garden sprawling out in front of it. A black and white cat sits lazily on a window sill while a chicken bobs around the ground in front of it. It looks a bit like a dream, Louis thinks, the kind of place he always wanted when he dreamed of having a family.

“Ready?” Harry asks as he parks his car next to the two others already there.

Louis takes a deep breath and nods.

They get out of the car together, Louis reluctantly letting Harry carry both of their bags inside. The cat watches them as they approach, blinking slowly, and Louis swears it’s judging him. When they reach the door, Harry reaches for Louis’ hand and squeezes gently.

“It’ll be great,” he says.

Louis suspects he’s not the only one Harry’s trying to reassure.

Instead of knocking, Harry just opens the door and leads them right in. That makes Louis feel a bit better, only because his own mother would have a fit if he ever knocked before coming in. Of course it’s obvious right away how different their families are, only because when they come in they are met with quiet instead of an ambush of children. Actually, Louis thinks, the silence is a pleasant surprise. It gives him time to catch his breath.

Harry smiles at the surroundings and Louis can see the way his shoulders visibly relax. They’re standing in a small foyer that faces a set of stairs as well as an open doorway to what Louis assumes is their living room. There they find a portable cot with an absolutely adorable baby inside, busy playing with her toes.

“Eva,” Harry says, dragging her name out.

The baby looks up and lets out a loud shriek when she spots Harry. “Hey, hey, hey!” She yells, pulling herself up to standing using the sides on the cot.

Harry laughs, worry forgotten, and drops their bag carefully on the floor to free his arms for grabbing the baby. Eva only shrieks louder, which is probably why someone soon comes running into the room.
Louis recognizes her immediately as the girl from the night he met Harry, the one he assumed was his sister. She looks much the same as she did then, only now her hair is pink instead of blonde and is piled into a messy bun at the top of her head. From what Harry’s said, Louis knows Gemma’s around his age and up close she’s just as beautiful as Louis expected her to be. The look on her face, however, is positively murderous.

“Harry, you idiot,” she says, hitting him on the back on the head. “You scared the shit out of me, I thought something was wrong with her.”

Harry smiles and blows a raspberry against the baby’s neck. Eva shrieks again with laughter, her little body shaking with it. Louis finds himself smiling against his will.

“Missed you too, Gems,” Harry laughs.

Gemma rolls her eyes and pulls Harry in for a quick hug. “You know I missed you,” she says, her eyes flickering over to Louis as she pulls away. “Are you going to introduce us this time?”

Louis snorts and speaks without really thinking. “Doubt it. H is completely useless once babies are involved.”

“Hey,” Harry whines, though he still doesn’t take his attention from Eva. Point proven, Louis thinks.

The baby shrieks again, obviously pleased by hearing the word. “Hey, hey!” She shouts, not so lightly patting Harry’s cheek. Harry, of course, doesn’t look perturbed by this in the least.

“I’m Gemma,” his sister says, though they both know introductions really aren’t needed. “And you probably already know, but that adorable little angel is Eva. It’s nice to finally meet you properly Louis. I feel like I know everything at this point.”

Louis smiles back, trying not to appear terrified. He knows just how close Harry and his sister are, he absolutely needs to make a good impression. Harry is make or break when it comes to Gemma.

“It’s good to meet you too. Harry talks about you all nonstop.”

Gemma smiles slyly and reaches for her daughter who is idly tugging on Harry’s curls. “Well, we have something in common then.”

Harry makes a strangled sound at this comment and Louis smirks. “Do we?” He asks, loving the way Harry’s face quickly grows red.

Gemma must notice her brother’s embarrassment as well because her smile soon turns into just as devious as Louis’. “Oh yeah, it’s bad. Always Louis this, Noah that.”

“You can stop talking at any point,” Harry interrupts sharply. “Any time you feel like stopping.”

Gemma laughs and kisses Harry’s cheek as loudly as possible. “Come on H, it’s my job to embarrass you. Maybe later Mum and I can drag out the baby albums.”

Before Harry can start protesting, Louis quickly agrees. “I would love that.”

Somewhere in the house a door quietly snicks shut and a voice calls out, “Gemma? Is Harry here yet?”

Instead of answering, Harry’s face erupts into an absolutely beautiful grin. He reaches for Louis’ hand again and quickly tugs him down the hall and into a large and beautifully lit kitchen. A woman
who could only be Harry’s mother if only for how beautiful she is comes rushing at them as soon as they enter.


Harry chuckles and hugs his mother back just as tight as she’s holding him. “No Mum, you’re just getting shorter.”

His mother laughs, a soft musical sound that Louis finds himself loving almost as much as Harry’s laughter. She pulls away slowly and stares at him, taking in everything. Louis understands that look, only because he’s gotten it from his own mother a thousand times before. He supposes that someday this could be him, welcoming Noah home after he’s spent too long away.

“Well,” Harry’s mum sighs, absentmindedly fixing his jumper for him. “Where’s this boy of yours? The one you haven’t stopped talking about for weeks now.”

Gemma walks in just in time to catch that and starts giggling. She elbows Louis gently, just enough so he’ll step out of Harry’s shadow, and whispers, “Told you.”

Harry groans. “Mum, please. You promised.”

His mother just smiles and turns to face Louis, who is certain he’s about to throw up. He’s never been so nervous to meet someone’s parents before. Honestly, he’s never really had to deal with meeting someone’s parents before either. Luke’s mum and dad had never been able to come to terms with his “choice”, as they called it, and didn’t even make it to their wedding. All of the boyfriends Louis had before then were hardly serious enough to warrant meeting the parents—but this is different.

It’s more important than anything to Louis that Harry’s mum likes him. Jay absolutely adores Harry now, though it did take her some time to come around to the idea. There’s just something so calming knowing that his mum and Harry get along so well. It reassures him that he’s making the right choice, that Harry is good for both him and Noah. And of course he wants Harry to feel that. He wants Harry’s mum to like him because he intends on sticking around.

“You must be Louis,” she says, still smiling at him.

Louis decides to take this as a good sign and offers her his most polished smile back. “It’s lovely to meet you—”

“Anne, call me Anne,” she says, quickly stepping forward to pull Louis into a hug. He’s a bit shocked by the instant warmth from her, but comes to his senses and hugs her back.

Anne pulls back and gives Louis a once over, the smile never once leaving her face. Louis supposes he might be doing alright.

“I’ve heard so much about you—and your son of course. Harry is absolutely smitten with both of you.”

At this point Harry seems resigned to the fact that this little weekend trip he’s planned is going to be full of embarrassment. Louis looks over at him and smiles softly when he says, “I was hoping he might be.”

Gemma makes a retching noise. “You’re even grosser than Niall said,” she mutters.

“Oh, leave them be,” Anne says, looking between Louis and Harry. “I’m so happy you’re both here.
Now, let me see this son of yours. Harry said you couldn’t bring him along, but that doesn’t mean I can’t see pictures.”

In an instant Louis has his phone in his hands, opened to the album he has especially for pictures of his son. If there’s one thing he’s good at it’s gloating about Noah. Surely he and the other two women have that in common. It’s a bit sad, but Louis’ been planning how to act on this weekend for a while now. He knew that Noah would most likely be his in with Gemma and Anne, and Harry mentioned his step-father liked football which is his plan for getting Robin to like him.

“Oh, he’s adorable,” Anne coos at a picture of Noah helping to make breakfast one morning.

Out of the corner of his eye he catches Harry watching him with a proud smile and figures he must be doing well for now.

By the time they’ve all finished dinner and the sun has set, Louis is certain that Harry’s family loves him. It was probably one of the more stressful days of his life, but worth it.

He and Gemma get on like a house on fire, quickly settling into playful banter and teasing like they’ve known each other for years. Robin appreciates having someone to talk to about football, Louis learns, as Harry’s apparently useless when it comes to sports in general. And Anne just seems to bask in the happiness around her, with laughter and smiles and many more hugs. She’s absolutely lovely, though Louis wasn’t really sure what he was expecting. She is Harry’s mum.

Gemma heads to bed early with Eva, explaining that the two year old loves to wake her up early and any chance to sleep has to be taken advantage of. Robin soon headed up as well, excusing himself after they’d all helped to clean up dinner with a kiss to Anne’s cheek and a ruffle of Harry’s curls.

That leaves only Louis, Harry, and Anne together in front of the quiet telly. Both Louis and Anne have steaming mugs of tea in their hands, while Harry lays with his head in Louis’ lap. He’d put a good effort into trying to stay awake, but had of course failed. The fact that Louis is gently brushing his hand through Harry’s curls really didn’t help.

There’s a movie on but neither Anne nor Louis seem to be paying much attention. Anne smiles when Louis looks up at her. “Out like a light, that one.”

Louis smiles and nods. “It’s good for him. I worry about him not getting enough rest with all of this stress,” he admits. “Those bags under his eyes might start becoming permanent soon enough.”

Anne nods. “I do too. Really I worry about everything he does, but I think he needs to slow down every once in awhile.”

“He does,” Louis agrees with a soft laugh. Harry’ completely out though, sleeping soundly in his boyfriend’s lap despite the talking.

They both go quiet again, Louis turning his attention to the television while Anne watches him. He keeps one hand in Harry’s hair, gently brushing through his curls rhythmically and pressing light touches to his scalp. Even in his sleep Harry leans into his touch, seeking him out.
“I’ve never seen him so comfortable with someone before,” Anne says.

Louis raises his eyebrows. “Really? He’s pretty personable, I think.”

“He is, but I can tell when it’s different. It’s different with you.”

Louis smiles at her. “I suppose you’d know best.”

“They never stop being your babies,” she agrees with a soft sigh.

In his sleep, Harry mumbles something, his eyebrows furrowing. Louis reaches over and gently runs his fingers across Harry’s forehead, smoothing out the boy’s frown lines. In an instant, Harry settles and lets out a pleased sigh.

Anne smiles at them both, so genuine and sweet. “I’m sorry,” she says. “It’s just—it’s been a very long time since I’ve seen him so happy. I think I have you to thank for that.”

Louis tries to protest that, tries to tell her if anything he should be thanking her, but Anne won’t hear it. She interrupts anything he might have said and continues on.

“I…I’ve been worried for a long time now that he’d never be able to find someone that truly gives him what he deserves,” she says. “He’s wanted to fall in love ever since he was a boy, he was obsessed with happily ever after’s and he deserves that. Someone who treats him well, someone he thinks is worth calling me about after a date, someone who loves him for who he is and not what he can buy them.”

Louis winces at that and finds himself pulling Harry closer. “It makes me angry he ever had to deal with that, especially so young.”

Anne sighs and takes a sip of her tea before continuing. “I feel guilty for it myself. Sometimes I think I shouldn’t have let him go that early. Mostly for selfish reasons, because I feel like I lost both of my babies almost at once, but also because of everything that happened after. I’ve always wondered if I could’ve stopped him, but I know now that I had no chance. There’s no stopping him when he wants something as bad as he wanted that.”

Louis looks down at the boy in his arms, trying to imagine sixteen year old Harry being sent off into the world too soon. It only makes him upset, thinking of everyone who’s used his boy, everyone who’s tried. He brushes his hand through Harry’s curls once more, pausing at his temple.

“I love him,” he says to Anne. “I hope you know that I mean that and that-this isn’t me trying to use him. I understand if you don’t believe me, I wouldn’t be so quick to trust me either if I were you but. I love him so much it hurts. He’s everything.”

Instead of questioning him, Anne smiles. “I know you do,” she says. “And that’s why I want to thank you. Thank you for taking care of him and finally giving him what I’ve always known he deserves.”

“Always,” Louis replies immediately. The subject needs no consideration. He will always protect his boy, no matter what.

Anne whispers a quiet thank you and lets the conversation drop, falling into comfortable silence only disturbed by Harry’s soft snoring.
The next morning Harry wakes up thinking he must be dreaming. He isn’t, of course, Louis Tomlinson really is sleeping in his childhood bed beside him. The same bed where Harry used to wank off to pictures of David Beckham.

“Stop,” Louis mumbles against the pillow.

Harry smiles and rolls towards him, pulling Louis close to kiss his forehead. “Stop what, baby?”

“Lookin’ at me” Louis groans. “You always wake me up with your creepy serial killer eyes.”

Harry laughs and shakes his head. “Could never stop looking at you,” he whispers. “You’re so beautiful, Louis.”

Louis shakes his head against the sheets. Harry smiles and sits up, running his hand gently down Louis’ bare back. He leans down to kiss Louis’ shoulder blade and sighs. It really doesn’t make sense to him how he got this lucky.

“We should get up,” he says sadly. “They’re all early risers, Gemma’s going to come banging down the door soon enough.”

“Awful,” Louis mutters. “You’re all the same, you Styleses. Awful.”

Harry smiles and kisses his opposite shoulder blade. “I love you. You don’t mean that.”

Louis sighs and turns his head to look up at Harry. He smiles, his eyes so bright and beautiful even when he’s half asleep. “I don’t mean that,” he agrees. “But I think I might like your family more than I like you.”

With a dramatic gasp, Harry lets himself fall back down beside Louis. He clutches both hands over his heart and shakes his head. “You wound me, Tomlinson.”

Louis rolls his eyes. He sits up slowly, steadying himself with a hand on Harry’s chest. The slim fingers of his right hand slowly trace the swallows there, thumbing across their eyes and wings almost reverently.

“Young mum and I had a bit of a talk last night,” he says carefully.

Harry frowns. That doesn’t sound good. All he remembers of the night before was falling asleep in Louis arms and waking up to Louis gently whispering in his ear that it was time for bed. Anything between that is a mystery. He really hopes his mum didn’t bring out the baby albums despite his pleading.

“About what?” Harry asks.

Louis shrugs, moving his hand to gently trace the g and a on each of his shoulders. “You,” he replies, finally. Before Harry can say anything, he continues on. “When you were young, when you were sixteen to be exact.”

Harry winces. “She blames herself. I wish she wouldn’t.”

“It’s just something you do love,” Louis explains. “Parents blame themselves for everything bad that happens to their children. I don’t think it was her fault, though.”
The topic of Harry leaving home so early has always been a sore one with his mum. Anne will more often than not tell you that if she could go back and do it again she would keep him home for another two years, deny him when he begged to go to those auditions that changed his life. Harry however can’t blame her for the things that happened to him—he can only blame himself. Sure there were plenty of bad influences, plenty of sleazy meetings and friends he should have avoided, but when it comes down to it he made the decision to try the little pill someone slipped into his hand one night at a club. His mother had nothing to do with that.

Harry tells Louis as much, his voice trembling as he speaks. Louis spends the entire time gently caressing him, running his fingers over Harry’s chest, tracing the tattoos on the skin beneath his hands.

Finally, he says, “I just want to protect you love, that’s all. It makes me upset to think there was ever a time when you were so alone, when I wasn’t there to protect you. You were so young, Haz.”

“Still old enough to know the difference between right and wrong,” Harry mutters.

Louis sighs and shrugs. “Agree to disagree then, babes. I can hear someone coming, I think our time might be up.”

Harry frowns. “How can you hear that?”

“I’ve become quite attuned to the sound of little feet, love.” Louis laughs.

Sure enough, Harry hears the smacking of feet against the floor that’s soon followed by pounding hands on the door. “Hey!” Eva shouts. “Up, up hey!”

Harry smiles and rolls off the bed to open the door. Eva stands small in the doorway, still dressed in her sleepsuit. She gives him a gap toothed grin and reaches her arms up to be held.

“Good morning, little one,” Harry coos to her. “Did you have a good sleep?”

Eva giggles and rests her head on his shoulder. “Love ah,” she says, though her v’s sound more like b’s.

“I love you too babes. Come on, let’s go find your mum what do you think?”

Harry looks back and motions for Louis to follow. The three of them make their way downstairs, passing framed photos of Harry and his family from over the years. Louis smiles at one in particular but Harry tugs him along before he can linger.

“Well, looks who’s finally up,” Gemma sing-songs when they enter the kitchen.

“Mama,” Eva babbles, reaching for Gemma who scoops her up from Harry’s arms gladly.

Louis smiles and presses his fingertips to Harry’s waist. “Where’s the tea, babe?” He asks carefully.

“Oh love, don’t worry about that,” Anne says, waving him away. “Harry and I will make breakfast and he can fix you a cuppa. Won’t you, Harry?”

Harry smiles good naturedly. “Seems like I don’t have much of a choice.”

Anne rolls her eyes and sighs. “Harry, really.”

“Yes Harold, really,” Louis repeats.
Gemma hides her laughter behind her hand and Harry can definitely see a smile tugging at his mum’s lips. He shakes his head and kisses Louis’ forehead before going off to help his mother. Louis whispers something to his sister that throws her into hysterics and Harry finds himself not really minding that it’s probably at his expense.

While Harry helps his mum prepare breakfast, Louis and Gemma sit at the table together talking over coffee and tea Harry’s made for them. Louis holds Eva in his lap, bouncing and playing with her effortlessly while he talks. There’s probably something wrong with the fact that Harry finds Louis being domestic so hot but he can’t help it.

“Harold, do pay attention,” Louis says.

Harry snaps his eyes up and away from where he was blatantly staring and frowns. “Sorry-what?”

Louis smiles. “I told Gemma we could take Eva for a walk after breakfast so she can go shopping with your mum.”

“Oh, right, yeah,” Harry replies, nodding a couple of times. “That’s fine, of course.”

“Mm. Your eggs are burning, love.” Louis says with a wink.

Harry turns and gasps, quickly moving the pan off the heat with the hopes he can save them. It really isn’t fair that he’s so easily distracted by Louis. It’s ruining his reputation as the better cook in the family.

Anne pats his back reassuringly. “It’s alright love, I’ve been there.”

Harry makes a face and returns to trying to save his poor eggs.

They eat breakfast quickly, Gemma obviously anxious to get away for awhile. Harry really doesn’t understand how single parents do it, but he admires his sister for how strong she is. And Louis too, of course, who gets along wonderfully with his sister apparently.

Instead of getting the usual speech about bottles and phone numbers, Gemma is waved off by Louis who promises he can handle it. His mum and sister leave together in a flurry of noise and soft reassurances from Louis and they’re all soon on their way.

It’s early fall and Holmes Chapel is slowly growing even colder than usual. Eva is now bundled up within an inch of her life at Harry’s insistence. He ignored both Louis and Gemma’s laughter at his fussing, he won’t have his niece freezing to death on his watch thank you very much.

“So,” Louis says once they have the pram pushed out beyond the house a bit. “This is where little bitty Harry grew up.”

Harry grins. “Yeah. Had my first kiss just down there.”

Louis looks to where Harry’s pointing and laughs. “Under a tree by a bridge? Should’ve warned me how posh you were.”

“He was so much taller than me I had to stand on a rock to reach,” Harry giggles. “They had me tell that story in our movie, except I said it was a girl. He was probably too drunk to remember me though, I doubt he was too offended.”

Louis frowns, his eyebrows furrowing in thought. “Movie?” he asks.
“I’m offended,” Harry teases. “But also, please don’t ever watch it. It’s a million years old by now and if you think my family is embarrassing you have no idea.”

It’s obvious there’s no stopping him just by the mischievous little smile on his face. Instead of saying anything, Louis looks down at Eva and smiles at her. He asks her questions and listens to her babble along about nothing in particular. Harry walks a bit closer and Eva giggles.

“Hey, hey!” She laughs.

“Why’s she always saying hello?” Louis laughs. “Hey babes.”

Eva nods, obviously happy that he’s finally playing along. She claps her hands together and shouts, “Hey!”

“It’s how she says my name,” Harry explains. “Hasn’t quite gotten her r’s down yet, or most consonants really.”

Louis grins down at Eva. “You’re trying you best, aren’t you love?”

Eva squeals in delight and claps her hands some more.

“For the longest time Noah called Zayn mum,” Louis confesses.

Harry smiles, finding himself missing the boy who would usually be right by his side. Though they’ll only be away one more day, Harry kept help but wish Noah was here with them.

“I would have loved to see that.”

Louis shrugs. “You know I actually don’t think Zayn minded as much as he pretended to,” he says. “I caught him answering to it more than once.”

“Why’d he call Zayn mum exactly?”

That makes Louis smile. “Well I was Dada, of course, and he mostly called my mum Mama and we weren’t about to correct him right then. The poor thing could hardly make a g let alone a z, and so Zayn became Mama as well. It’s fitting actually, considering how much he was around when Noah was small.”

“You know this is the first thing I’m going to ask Zayn about the next time we see him, yeah?”

Louis chuckles and knocks their hips together softly. “Wouldn't be you if you didn't, love. Now tell me where little Harry would have taken his dates, let's see if I would have fallen for you.”

Of course Holmes Chapel so there really aren’t many places to take Louis. Harry decides on the park, mostly for Eva’s sake, and leads his boyfriend there slowly. He takes his time to admire Louis who’s wearing a coat and beanie stolen from him. He even snaps a few pictures of him, though Louis pretends to protest, and finally gets a good one of them together where Louis isn’t making a face.

They take Eva to the playground, Louis helping her along with a hand clasped in hers. He pushes her on the swing and catches her when Harry launches her down the slide. Eva is absolutely entranced by it all, her giggles not dying down until she falls asleep in Louis’ arms as he carries her back to her pram.

“She’s the sweetest baby ever,” Louis says for about the hundredth time that day. “Look at her Harry. She’s giving me baby fever.”
“I've had baby fever since I was 16 love,” Harry teases, kissing Louis’ forehead. “You and Gemma have only made it worse.”

Louis smiles. “I miss him. Stupid, isn't it? It's hardly been a day.”

“I miss him too,” Harry says. “Can we FaceTime him later on?”

Louis gives him a strange look, his eyebrows furrowing like they do when he's thinking particularly hard about something. He nods, however, and agrees.

Once Eva is tucked into her pram, still fast asleep, they head home. Harry pushes this time but keeps Louis close by, holding his hand whenever he gets the chance to. Louis walks beside him, still looking troubled.

“You miss Noah,” he asks Harry finally. “Honestly?”

Harry frowns. “Of course I do, babe. Feels weird not having him around. I wish we could have brought him. I understand of course why we didn't but I would have loved to spend a weekend away with both of you.”

“I'm sorry, it's just-”

“I know love,” Harry says. “Just please, if you ever doubt how much I care about him just ask. It's both of you I want, both of you I signed up for.”

Louis sighs. “I'm sorry. I don't mean to do that, this has just never happened to me before and I'm expecting it to come crumbling down soon enough.”

“I won't let it,” Harry says. “I won't lose you. Either of you.”

“I know baby,” Louis mutters. “We aren't going anywhere.”

Harry nods. “Good. I won't let you.”

Louis smiles again, finally, and falls into step beside Harry. He wraps an arm around Harry's waist and pulls himself closer as they walk. Harry looks down at Eva, fast asleep, and smiles to himself. It feels right, is all. It feels like everything he's ever wanted.

“You promise to visit again soon,” Anne says, eyeing Harry in a way that makes Louis a bit scared for him should he say no.

Harry nods. “Of course, mum. Once I find myself a house you'll be the first ones invited.”

Anne nods and moves to Louis, pulling him in for another hug. “You too love,” she whispers in his ear. “You're always welcome here, you and Noah both.”

“I'd say the same thing about my house but it's so messy you'd have a coronary walking into it,” Louis teases. “Thank you, really.”
Anne smiles and kisses his cheek before releasing them both. “Well, go on then. I know you’re both anxious to get home. I love you.”

“Love you too, Mum,” Harry calls, gently tugging Louis’ along out of the house. Louis suspects that if he hadn’t, Anne might’ve found a way to keep them there another few days. He still turns however, just to give her a quick wave and one last thank you before he goes.

“She loves you,” Harry laughs when he gets in the car.

Louis smiles and shrugs. “What can I say, Styles, I’m a lady killer.”

They slowly pull away from the house, Anne still standing in the doorway and waving as they drive away. Louis waves back while Harry just smiles that dumb smile of his. “I’m so happy,” he blurts out. “I can’t remember the last time everything was this perfect.”

Louis laughs, reaching across the center of the car to tug Harry in for a kiss at a stop sign. “I’m happy too, love,” he says. “Your family is lovely, you were right I had nothing to worry about.”

“I’m serious, Louis,” Harry whispers. “It’s you.”

The tone of his voice has Louis frowning in confusion. He nods a bit, smirking to himself. “It’s me? What does that mean?”

“You, Louis,” Harry says, sounding a little insane if Louis’ being honest. “You’re what I’ve been waiting for and what I’ve needed all this time.”

“Babe, you sound a bit crazy,” Louis teases him. “Are you writing a cheesy boyband song in your head right now?”

Harry shakes his head, making a face at that comment. “Stop teasing me, I’m trying to confess my love for you.”

Louis shrugs. “You’ve done that already babe, a few times even. I love you too, you know that.”

Harry huffs. “Maybe I will write a song, just to spite you.”

Louis grins and throws his feet up on the dash, shrugging at Harry as he does so. “Go ahead babe, I’m not complaining.”

“I have a showing at a house to go to,” Harry says, effectively changing the subject. “Would you come with me?”

Despite the fact that they haven’t been apart in days, despite the fact that Louis just spent the weekend away with his family, that question feels like a big step.

Louis thinks it over for a second and then gently replies, “You’ll be the one living in it love, not me. I hardly see why you’d need my opinion.”

“Because I always want your opinion,” Harry retorts without any hesitation. “Besides, you keep me grounded better than anyone. Who knows what I might buy without you around.”

And while that is absolutely true, Louis is still a bit hesitant. “When is this showing, babe?”

“Tomorrow, while Noah’s at school. It should give us enough time to get there and back if we leave early enough.”
When Harry notices Louis staring at him, he shrugs and blushes. “I might’ve been planning this for a few days now. Please?”

Louis sighs, trying to sound as put out as possible. “Fine,” he agrees. “But only on one condition.”

“Anything.”

“You have to meet Natalie when Noah and I meet with her for lunch on Wednesday.”

You would have thought Harry saw a ghost, his face grew so pale. Louis knows how intimidated Harry is by Natalie, only because Harry has told him every time she’s brought up. He doesn’t understand it, mostly because he knows Natalie is the least intimidating person alive, but Harry seems petrified by the thought of meeting her.

He’s almost ready to take it back when Harry finally nods. “Okay, it’s a deal.”

Louis looks at him, eyes wide. He was so sure he was winning this one. “Seriously?”

“Yes,” Harry says, his voice sounding a bit shaky. “She’s important to you and Noah, so yes. I’d love to meet her.”

Louis can only blink a couple of times. He shakes his head a bit and sighs. “Well, I guess we’re looking at a house Styles.”

Harry grins and reaches for Louis’ hand, holding it tightly for the rest of the ride home. Not for the first time, Louis wonders what the hell he’s gotten himself into.

“It’s…nice,” Louis says.

Harry hums at Louis’ comment but says nothing, instead walking into the kitchen with his boots echoing through the empty rooms. The realtor just about chases after him, explaining marble counter tops and great neighborhoods to him while Louis waits in the living room. Well, what he assumes would be a living room.

It is a nice home, he’s not lying, but something about it seems so cold. Louis isn’t sure if that’s to do with the fact that the sprawling home is completely empty, or just his personal opinion about how much house is too much for one 25 year old popstar on his own.

The sound of tapping boot heels again brings Louis’ attention back to Harry. The poor realtor is still talking, but Harry doesn’t seem to be paying attention anymore. Instead, he’s watching Louis.

“Babe,” he says softly. He does that a lot, but mostly when he wants Louis’ honesty.

Louis sighs and gives in. “Love, it’s huge. You’re one person and you’ll hardly be here anyway. I think it’d be easier to leave your things in storage and have them collect dust there rather than move them here for the same thing.”

The realtor lets out a choked sound at his remarks while Harry just smiles. She scrambles a bit with her papers, flipping sheets and pictures over. “It’s—it’s a wonderful location for—.”
“Sorry,” Harry interrupts. “I think we need some time to think it over.”

It’s obviously that being dismissed wasn’t what the woman was expecting. She shoots Louis an extremely dirty look and excuses herself, hurrying from the house in a huff. As soon as the door clicks shut, Louis lets out a laugh.

“She’s pissed at me, she really thought you were about to drop over a million on this place.”

Harry shrugs and walks up to Louis, kissing his forehead. “You really don’t like it?”

Louis makes a face and looks around once more, as if the house might suddenly become likable. “H, don’t get me wrong it’s absolutely beautiful. It’s just…it doesn’t make sense to me to buy a house like this if you’ll barely be in it. And who knows what you’re going to want in your future? But then again, I might just be thinking like a normal person—not like a popstar with money to burn.”

Harry sighs and looks around the flat once more. “I’m not sure if I even want to be in London,” he confesses quietly.

This is the first time Louis’ heard this. He’d always assumed London was where Harry needed to be, for work and everything else that comes with it. He reaches up, gently pushing a strand of hair away from Harry’s face. “Where do you want to be, my love? What would make you happy?”

Harry shrugs, leaning towards Louis’ touch. “I can’t have a normal life here. I’ll be followed constantly, it’s too busy as well, not the sort of place to—” Harry stops suddenly, his eyes flickering to Louis’ quickly before straying away again. “I’d never be here, like you said. I want to be close to you.”

Louis breathes in sharply and shakes his head. “Harry you can’t…you can’t just make a big decision like that based on me.”

“It’s not based on just you, it’s about what makes me happy like you said. You make me happy, being with you and Noah makes me happy. Besides, it’s not like I absolutely have to buy something.”

“Baby—”

Harry stops him. “What about a little flat in Manchester, or around there? It’s close to my Mum, close to you, close enough to see Gemma and Eva and get to London if I have to. And if I have to stay here I can always kip with the boys or get a hotel somewhere.”

The plan seems a bit rushed, but Harry is passionate about it. Instead of turning it down like his instincts are telling him, Louis just shakes his head. “Love, I want you to promise you’ll actually think about this. You can’t make decisions like that based on me,” he repeats.

“I told you I’m not,” Harry replies, but he’s smiling the smile that Louis knows means he’s lying.

“You’re ridiculous,” Louis groans. “I don’t know why I love you.”

“Me neither,” Harry agrees, reaching for Louis’s shirt. He tugs him in and kisses him gently, cradling Louis’ head in one hand even when he pulls away. “Let’s go break the news to her.”

Louis nods and reaches out to tangle their fingers together. “She hates me. There’s no way she’ll help you out after this.”

Harry grins and shrugs. “I think I’ll be alright,” he replies.
They walk outside together hand in hand so Harry can break the news to the realtor. She looks understandable upset about losing a sizable commission and gives Louis one last dirty look before leaving.

Harry and Louis follow behind her, walking out onto the street only to find three or four photographers with their cameras already flashing. In an instant, Harry’s pulling Louis close to him like always. Sometimes Louis wonders if it’s to shield him, or just to have someone close.

“I’m sorry love,” Harry sighs, gently steering him towards the car.

Louis bites his lip. It’s been happening a lot lately, is the thing. They’ll leave together to go to lunch, or even stop at the grocery store and paparazzi follow. Don’t get him wrong, Louis absolutely knew there’d be this sort of attention when he agreed to be with Harry so no one can say he didn’t know what he was getting himself into. It’s just different when the cameras are focused on you and they’re calling your name.

“It’s okay babe. It isn’t your fault,” Louis whispers back, stopping to briefly kiss him. He can hear the shutters explode when he does it and something about it all just seems wrong.

Harry pulls away and nods. “Let’s get out of here,” he says.

Louis wholeheartedly agrees.

The next day finds Louis trying to catch up with work as quickly as he can. Though he promised Jesy he’d spend the day before working at home, he and Harry arrived home just in time to pick Noah up and head off to dinner together. That combined with the fact that tomorrow is his one Wednesday a month off is giving him some serious anxiety. Maybe he should try meditating like Harry suggests.

“Hi,”

“Holy shit,” Louis replies, catching himself just in time so he doesn’t trip and fall right into the break room fridge. He turns around to find the creepy intern standing behind him. This is the first time Michael has actually approached him, after many days spent just staring when he thought Louis couldn’t see him. He’s a bit worried the boy might have a crush on him or something.

“Jesus kid, you scared me.” Louis scolds.

“Sorry,” Michael says, not sounding sorry at all. “You’re Louis Tomlinson aren’t you?”

Louis frowns. It’s not a large office and Louis isn’t a low-key person, so he knows Michael knows exactly who he is. “That’d be me. Was there something you needed? I mean I’m all for helping you guys out when I can but I’m sort of taking an unapproved break right now.”

Michael shrugs his skinny shoulders and looks Louis up and down. He raises his eyebrows a bit, for what reason Louis isn’t sure, and then says, “You met Harry Styles through this job, right?”

“Sorry,” Louis scoffs, crossing his arms over his chest. “But I’m pretty sure that’s none of your
Michael sighs. “I was just—”

“Hey Michael,” Anna calls, walking into the room with a brilliant smile. “Leigh-Anne was looking for you, said something about those papers you delivered being lost?”

Michaels eyes go wide and he darts out of the room without a word. Anna lets her smile drop and steps to Louis’ side, crossing her arms just like him. Honestly, Louis is a bit chuffed by how much this girl looks up to him. Leigh-Anne’s even teased him about breaking his promise to never “keep” an intern.

“He’s such an arse, that one,” she says, rolling her eyes.

Louis laughs. “Let me guess, Leigh doesn’t need him does she?”

“No,” Anna hums, smiling a bit when Louis laughs at her. “He was grilling you about Harry though, wasn’t he?”

That wipes the smile right off of Louis’ face. “How’d you know?”

“That’s all he ever talks about,” she groans. “Harry, you, and Harry and you together. It’s so annoying, like I like the band and all but christ let them live their lives y’know?”

“Does he really?” Louis asks, suddenly uncomfortable.

Anna frowns. “Yeah. Sorry, I thought you knew?”

Louis shakes his head, watching through the windows as Michael talks to Leigh-Anne. “No-I mean I always thought he was a bit weird but no. I had no idea.”

As if on cue, Michael looks up at the both of them and catches Louis’ eyes for a moment before quickly scurrying away.

“I’d watch out for him, he’s really weird,” Anna says.

Louis nods, finally tearing his eyes away to face her. “Thanks kid.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Anna replies happily. “I actually was coming to see you anyway, to ask if you want tea. I’m headed out.”

Louis wrinkles his nose. “I feel awful making you fetch tea for me,” he admits. That was his least favorite job as an intern. Without fail he would always get something wrong and hand the wrong cups to the wrong people. Starbucks was probably more of a stressful environment to him at that point than the offices.

“Well I’m going for it anyway, you might as well add your name to the list.” And then Anna pulls an honest to god list from her pocket to show him. Louis thinks that’s where he must’ve gone wrong, trying to memorize all the orders. He knew there was something about this girl that he likes.

He shakes his head however and waves her off. “I can handle it love. Besides, I’m flat broke until payday and the shit tea in here is free.”

Anna rolls her eyes but gives in, waving goodbye to Louis as she walks away.

In the quiet of the break room, Louis makes himself a cuppa and heads back to his desk. He’s only
just sitting down and getting back to work when his mum calls. Figuring that he can give himself yet another unapproved break, Louis answers.

“Hey Mum,” he sighs into the phone. They go through their usual routine, talking about the girls and Ernie, updating her on Noah’s school, discussing work. When they reach a lull in the conversation, Jay brings up why she really called.

“Love, can I ask you a question? And please don’t be upset when I do.”

Louis frowns and stops typing to give her his full attention. “Sure Mum, what is it?”

Jay takes a deep breath and asks, “Louis, are you moving?”

“What?” Louis laughs. “No, oh my god. Mum, why on earth would we be moving?”

“Well, I just saw pictures of you and Harry looking at houses and I thought—”

Louis groans, cutting her off mid-sentence. “Mum, you know not to believe that shit. I would tell you if I was even thinking about moving, especially to London of all places. Especially if I was moving in with someone!”

“Then why were you looking at homes, Louis?” Jay asks. “Not flats, houses.”

Louis smiles. “Well Mum, I hate to break it to you but Harold is loaded.”

Jay laughs, though she obviously tries her hardest not to. “I swear, Louis.”

“He sold his last flat before tour, Mum, he just wanted my opinion that’s why I came along. I managed to talk him out of it though,” he explains. “There’s no point in buying a giant house just for himself, that’s what I told him.”

“I suppose that makes sense,” Jay teases. “What’s he decided on, then?”

Louis cringes. It’s as if his mother knows when there’s something he really doesn’t want to talk about. “I’m still not sure. He thinks, or he says at least, that he wants to move to Manchester instead.”

Even through the phone Louis can hear Jay’s shock. “Oh,” she says, taking a sharp breath in. “That’s—for you? He wants to move there for you, is that it?”

“I told him not to if that’s the only reason,” Louis says softly.

Jay sighs and said something Louis never thought he’d hear her say. “I don’t think it’s such a bad idea. I think it’s lovely how dedicated he is to you.”

This coming from the woman who would have met Harry with a shotgun in hand if Louis had let her. It’s almost like living in some sort of alternate reality, except it’s real. His mum really, finally, approves of someone enough to not fear Louis’ committing to them.

“I just don’t want him to move here and then we don’t work out for whatever reason, you know?” Louis says, a bit quieter now so no one else hears. “He’ll have done it all for no reason and he’ll resent me for it. Besides, what’s he going to do up here?”

“Live a half normal life, I suppose,” Jay replies. “Love, I think you and Harry need to sit down and talk about this. It’s obvious you’re worried he’s going to leave you for one reason or another. If you think you’re having problems you should talk to him about it.”
Louis rolls his eyes and just barely suppresses a groan. He knows exactly where the conversation is going just by the tone in his mum’s voice, but he plays along anyway. “We aren’t having problems, Mum. Everything is perfect right now.”

Jay hums thoughtfully, like she had no clue this was coming. “Really? Then why are you so convinced he’s going to leave you?”

The springs in Louis’ chair groan as he tilts his head back, staring up at the ceiling and shaking his head. “Listen Mum, I really don’t want to discuss my feelings and insecurities with you right now, but you know I’m right. He’s Harry fucking Styles, who am I?”

“Louis fucking Tomlinson,” Jay replies immediately. Her profanity makes Louis laugh but she ignores him and keeps on. “You’re somebody Louis; you’re somebody to me, to your family and your son, to all of your friends, to your job. You’re worth it, Louis, don’t ever let anyone make you feel differently. It’s obvious Harry sees something in you, something that he loves enough to want to be with you. All you’re doing by trying to convince yourself otherwise is trying to self-destruct and you don’t deserve that. You deserve to be happy and loved and Harry makes you feel that way, doesn’t he?”

“Yes, Mum,” Louis sighs. “I’ll talk to him about it, okay? I promise.”

“Good,” Jay replies. “I love you Louis. No matter what you’ll always be my little Boobear.”

Louis makes a fake retching noise. “God, never say that again,” he pleads.

Jay laughs, any trace of the rant she just went on completely gone now. “Fine, but just never forget that. I love you.”

“I love you too Mum,” Louis sighs. “Thank you. I don’t know how but you always seem to know what to say.”

“It’s a super power all parents have, you’ll see love. I have to go now, try to have a good day. Bring Harry over for dinner tonight.”

Louis smiles and agrees, knowing Harry won’t need much convincing there. He hangs up after repeating his I love you’s.

Returning to work is easy, Louis finds, but ridding himself of the feeling that someone is watching him isn’t. It’ll pass, he convinces himself as he looks around the office for the tenth time only to find no one.

It’ll pass.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again!! Thank you for your patience with another big wait on this. My problem with this chapter and from here on out really is that it's mostly written in small portions, nothing is connected. So, really, it's a matter of putting things in order the way I like them and connecting them and that's a bit time consuming. Your comments and kudos keep me motivated though, and I promise I'm working hard to finish this monster of a fic sometime before I die ;)
In other news, I made a playlist! Well, the playlist was already made, but now it's on 8tracks for the world to see!!! :) I debated putting it on spotify but they don't always have all my artists and if I remember correctly you can only listen if you also have an account. Hopefully you like it, I'll be altering the note in the other chapters to post it as well if I get around to it. Here's the link!

That's it for this long note, I hope you enjoyed this chapter!! I love you all <3
Harry’s decided he’s more nervous to meet Natalie than he ever was or could be when meeting Louis’ entire family. Louis promises him over and over again that it isn’t a big deal, but Harry knows he’s lying. Natalie is one of the most important people in Louis and Noah’s lives, and no matter how many times Louis tells him he doesn’t need to worry he’s going to worry.

“My Natalie has a cat,” Noah says, each of his hands in one of Louis and Harry’s. He looks up at Harry, pouting a bit. “Daddy says no cats until I’m old, though.”

“Your Daddy’s no fun,” Harry laughs.

“Sounds good,” Noah says.

Harry shakes his head. “Awful, both of you.”

Noah giggles and squeezes Harry’s hand. “It’s okay, my Harry, we can take care of a cat together.”

Harry pulls the three of them to a stop so he can pick Noah up. “You’re the very best bean, you know that?”

“I know,” Noah replies.

Louis smiles at both of them and rests his hand on Harry’s lower back, gently leading them towards the door of a building. Harry watches as Louis leans on a buzzer until the door clicks open and quickly follows him inside. They head for the lift where Louis let’s Noah hit the button for the fifth floor.

“I wanna lift at our house,” Noah whines. “Our house is so not cool.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Love someday you can live in your very own flat with your very own lift, I promise. Until then you’ll just have to stick it out in our boring old house.”

Noah sighs and looks to Harry. “Harry, you gotta lift at your house?”

“I haven’t got a house here love, remember? But I promise I’ll add that to the list of things I’m looking for.”

Just the thought makes Noah giggle. “Promise?”
“Promise,” Harry says.

“Good,” Noah says happily.

Harry hears Louis mumble something that sounds like *Spoiling him* but when he looks over he finds Louis barely hiding a smile.

When Natalie opens the door to her flat, Harry feels like his heart is about to beat out of his chest from nerves. It’s a bit shocking, he thinks, just how much she looks like Noah. He supposes it makes sense but it’s still jarring to see.

“Aunt Natalie!” Noah yells, scrambling out of Harry’s arms as soon as the door opens.

“Noah bug!” Natalie laughs, catching him before he can knock her over. “Christ, you get taller every time I see you.”

“I know,” he says. “Soon I’m gonna be even taller than Daddy.”

Natalie looks up at Louis and smirks. “Not hard, that.”

“How dare you,” Louis gasps, sidestepping past the two of them and into the flat.

“You’re perfect height for me love,” Harry teases. “Just tall enough to rest my chin on.”

Louis laughs in shock. “Oh fuck off, Harold.”

“Daddy!” Noah gasps.

“Right I know, swear jar,” Louis finishes for him. Noah nods and lets his dad help him take off his jacket.

Natalie looks to Harry and smiles. “Well, is anyone going to introduce me?”

“Natalie, this is my Harry,” Noah says, apparently volunteering. “He’s mine and my Daddy’s boyfriend now. He’s very nice and makes the best cupcakes.”

Both Natalie and Harry laugh at that while Louis sighs and pats Noah’s back. “Close enough,” he mutters under his breath.

Natalie grins. “I think you’re a bit young to have a boyfriend, pal.” She teases.

Noah groans. “Not what I mean! You know it. Where's my cat?”

In an instant Noah is running across the flat shouting, “Stanley! Stanley, where are you!”

Harry smiles. “He named the cat didn't he?”

“How'd you guess,” Natalie laughs. “It's nice to finally meet you Harry, I feel like Louis’ been hiding you from me.”

“My fault I think,” Harry admits sheepishly. “I’ve been a little terrified to meet you.”

Natalie and Louis both laugh at that. “Me?” She asks. “What kind of horror stories has he been telling you?”

Louis doesn't get to respond because there's a loud yowl and Noah comes running into the room,
holding a fluffy, fat white cat in his arms.

“My Harry!” He shouts. “Look, this is Stanley. Here hold him!”

Without wasting a second, Noah practically throws the poor cat into Harry's arms. It yowls but doesn't scratch him, thank god. Harry looks down at the cat and frowns. One of its eyes seems permanently shut, it has one tooth that sticks out over its top lip, and it seems to be drooling and full of rage. It's the ugliest cat Harry has ever seen.

“Oh, he's only got one eye,” Noah explains when he sees Harry staring. Out of the corner of his eye Harry can see Louis trying his hardest not to choke on silent laughter. “And he's got weird teeth too, ‘cause he's kinda weird but that's okay. I like his smush face. Also he doesn't like Daddy very much and kinda scratches him a lot. He's got five toes my Harry, do you see?”

“I do see,” Harry says, carefully shifting poor Stanley around in his arms. “Well bean he's certainly…interesting.”

“He's best cat,” Noah says, reaching for Stanley again.

Harry winces and gently moves a raging Stanley to Noah's arms. He's more worried about the cat scratching Noah's eyes out than anything else. It looks like the sort of animal that could do that sort of thing with no remorse.

Of course Noah doesn't seem to think that. He grabs Stanley again, holding the cat so it's hanging half out of his arms, and carries it to the living room.

“Dear god, what is that thing?” Harry whispers.

Natalie is practically in hysterics at this point and Louis is crying with laughter. “That my love, is Stanley. This is what you've signed yourself up for.”

Harry shakes his head. “That isn't a cat, it's some kind of science experiment gone wrong.”

“Oi,” Natalie laughs. “Leave the poor mate alone, he's had a rough go of it.”

“Looks that way,” Harry says, smiling. “Why’s he called Stanley?”

Louis smiles. “Because Noah took one look at the thing hissing at everyone in sight from its cage in the shelter and said, ‘That cat looks like Uncle Stan’. The rest is history.”

This just throws Natalie into another fit of laughter with Harry joining her.

“Aren't you worried it's going to attack him or something?” Harry giggles.

Natalie waves her hand at that. “No, there's only one person in the world that cat likes and it's Noah. He tolerates me, but I think that's mostly because I feed him and let him sleep in my bed at night. I've tried kicking him out before, just about landed myself in hospital.”

“Christ,” Harry murmurs.

Natalie smiles. “Probably a bad time to mention I might not be able to take him huh?”

Louis frowns. “Oh no, absolutely not Natalie. Hell no.”

“Why not Lou,” Natalie teases. She then looks at Harry and winks. “No room left in the bed, I suppose.”
“Fucking nuisance,” Louis mumbles, tugging Harry into the living room with him. “Wait here love, I'm going to help Nat with dinner.”

Noah is sitting on the floor, rubbing Stanley’s stomach while he lays on the carpet. The cat has its one eye closed now, and Harry can hear it purring even from across the room. He supposes the cat can't be that bad, if Noah loves him this much.

“You like my Natalie?” Noah asks.

Harry smiles and sits down on the floor beside Noah, watching as he methodically pets the cat. “She seems lovely, bean.”

Noah nods. “She’s pretty cool. Hope she likes you.”

Harry laughs. “Me too, babe.”

The dinner goes well, and Harry can’t say he’s surprised. Once he’s through with being nervous and embarrassed, he quickly notices that Natalie and Louis are extremely similar. It makes sense then, them being such good friends.

To his delight, Natalie entertains all of them with stories of Louis in uni complete with embarrassing photos. Harry lives for it, he loves seeing the pictures of eighteen-year-old barely legal Louis dressed up in stripes and red trousers. Zayn is also in many of the pictures, looking just as embarrassing beside Louis and Natalie.

“Oh, this one’s good,” Natalie giggles, tossing Harry another photograph. They’re sat together at the dining room table while Louis helps Noah clean up the mess he’s made of himself in Natalie’s bathroom.

This picture makes Harry pause for a moment. It’s Louis of course, with one arm slung over Natalie’s shoulder. He does look ridiculous, as Natalie has said, with paint dotting his face over his brows and under his eye. He looks so much younger. Harry realizes with a start, but he doesn’t look happy anymore. In all of the other pictures he looked like himself, happy and vibrant, the life of the party. However in this one the light Harry is so used to seeing in his eyes has gone out and he can only suspect it’s because of the man with the curly hair and the piercing blue eyes holding onto his waist.

“That’s-” Harry starts but doesn’t finish because Natalie’s face goes sour.

“Right, yeah. That’s him.”

Harry frowns, looking down at the date in the corner. Where was he then, he wonders. Not that it could make a difference of course, Louis clearly couldn’t have belonged to him then even if they knew each other. There’s a ring on his finger already.

“Lou looks,” Harry trails off, not sure what to say. Louis looks broken, that’s the thing.

Natalie nods. “They were engaged, but Luke had cheated on him once already. Well, once that he was caught, god knows how many times he really did it. They got back together just before the party.”

“Why did you do it?” Harry can’t help but ask.

Natalie frowns. “Do what?”
“Have Noah,” Harry says, his voice dropping to a whisper. “If you knew Luke was cheating, if you knew he wasn’t good enough for Louis then why?

To his relief, Natalie doesn’t look offended by the question. Harry hadn’t meant to offend her, he’s just curious. He doesn’t understand.

“Louis,” she starts. “Has never wanted anything as much as he wanted to be a dad. When he asked me there was never even a thought to say no. I mean sure, probably ruined my figure for life but Louis has done so much for me and I knew that was all he wanted. I knew he needed Noah. He needed someone to love, someone to love him back. So that’s why I did it, and I don’t regret it. Never have, not even once.”

Harry looks down at the picture for a moment, gently thumbing over Louis’ fake smile. God, he wants nothing more than to go back. What was he doing then? He racks his mind, sure it was something stupid and not worth it. Holding hands with a pretty girl for the cameras, probably. A stupid waste of time.

“Thank you,” he says.

Natalie laughs softly. “For what, love?”

“For taking care of him, for giving him Noah,” Harry whispers. “Before I could be here. Before I could protect him and love him, I’m glad he had people to take care of him.”

Natalie sighs dreamily and takes a large sip of her wine. “Christ,” she murmurs. “Have you got a brother?”

Harry covers his laughter with his hand and gently reaches for his favorite picture of the bunch. It’s Louis and Noah, most likely from two years ago or so. Noah is younger, his curls are shorter and his face is chubbier but he still has that brilliant grin that makes Harry so happy. They’re sat on the stoop of a house, Noah sitting in Louis’ arms and giggling for the camera. Louis has his arms around Noah’s waist and he’s laughing as well. Both of his boys, Harry thinks, and they look so happy together.

“You can have it,” Natalie says. “I’ve got another copy. We made Louis actually get photos done, Jay and I, I mean. We’ve both got plenty stashed away.”

“Really?” Harry asks, already pulling the photo closer to him. It’s small enough to fit into his wallet, he thinks happily.

“You can have it,” Natalie insists. She watches him as he pulls his wallet out and sticks the photo inside. It’s something his Mum would do, keep photos of both him and Gemma close by. He supposes it’s a bit ridiculous, but no one has to know really.

Except for Natalie who is still watching him with a gentle smile when a boisterous Louis and Noah come crashing into the room again. It’s the best sign of approval he could’ve asked for.

It becomes quite apparent one day that Louis is broke.

The realization hits him as he goes through his bills for the month while Noah runs around the house, screaming at the top of his lungs about God knows what. Louis stopped paying attention awhile ago.
Shockingly it’s Luke’s fault, but Louis can’t help but feel like it’s his own. He’s an adult, he should be able to support himself and his child on his own shouldn’t he?

There’s a quick knock at the front door followed by the clicking of the lock as his mum lets herself in. She’d invited herself over for tea with the excuse that if she didn’t get out of the house she’d go mad. Louis isn’t sure why she thinks his house would be anywhere near calming.

“Gramma!” Noah shouts.

“Hello love,” Jay laughs. “Where’s your Daddy at?”

Noah says something Louis can’t quite make out and soon Jay enters the room. She steps across the mess of coloring pages Noah’s left on the floor when he insisted on helping, and stands behind him. She gently places a hand on his shoulder, like she’s afraid to frighten him, and kisses his cheek.


Louis shakes his head, making a move to hide the bills he knows his mother has surely seen.

“Oh, nothing’s wrong,” he lies.

Jay hums and pulls the chair Noah usually sits in to his side and sits down. “Really?” she asks, reaching for his hand. “Noah says you’re a bit grumpy today.”

“Just stressed is all, Mum,” Louis replies, which is definitely not a lie. He lets her take his hand however, pulling him away from the bills he’s trying to hide at his desk.

She squeezes his hand and Louis feels his lower lip trembling. Something about his mum giving him that pitiful expression just breaks him every time.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers, his voice cracking. In seconds his shoulders are shaking with barely contained sobs and Jay has him pulled into a hug.

“Sorry for what, darling?” Jay murmurs.


“Darling,” his mum sighs, gently tugging the knots from his hair. “You don’t have anything to be sorry for. Hush now love, just tell me what’s gone wrong and we can fix it.”

Louis nods, wishing so badly that she’s right. He just wants this to be fixed, he wants it all to be fixed and for his head to stop feeling like it’s going to explode at any second.

The door clicks open again and Louis curses Harry Styles and his shit timing. Noah again shrieks at the sight of his favorite person. Louis can hear them greeting each other loudly from somewhere in the house.

“Lou?” Harry calls. “Love, where are you?”

Louis sits up quickly and wipes the unshed tears from his eyes. Jay frowns at her son, watching him take deep breaths to get rid of any clue that he might’ve just had a minor meltdown.

Harry calls for him again, this time sounding closer. Louis shuffles his papers and organizes them into a neat pile in the corner of his desk.

Watching him closely, Jay shakes her head. “You shouldn’t have to hide from him.”
“He didn’t ask for this,” is Louis’ simple reply. His mum does not look pleased by that.

On cue, Harry enters the office with Noah on one hip and a bag in his other hand. His confused frown quickly bursts into a grin. “Jay, you’re here!”

Jay of course smiles for him, all soft natured and loving though Louis can tell that’s she’s still mad. “Hello Harry,” she greets him, the angry lines in her forehead softening when Harry bends down to kiss her cheek. “How are you, love?”

“I’m fantastic. Lou said you were coming for dinner, I hope I got what you liked. I just had to go off what he told me and what I remembered you liked.”

Christ, Louis just wants to shake his mum, tell her to look. Doesn’t she see how much better Harry is than him? Can’t she see how he could ruin all of this in just a matter of seconds? Is it that hard to see that Louis just doesn’t deserve someone like this?

“I’m sure whatever you bought will be perfect,” Jay says.

Harry smiles at the compliment and nods. “I hope so. Bean’s going to help me set the table.”

Noah nods, looking up from where he’s been playing with the string bracelet on Harry’s wrist. “I’m good at it, my Harry says.”

“So whenever you’re both ready, no rush though,” Harry says, then stepping forward to gently kiss Louis hello. “Missed you. Are you okay?”

Out of the corner of his eye Louis can see Jay watching him closely for his answer.

Louis nods and waves him off. “I’m fine, love. Go on, we’ll be right there.”

Apparently this is a good enough answer because Harry smiles again and leaves the room with Noah. As soon as he’s out of earshot, Jay levels him with a stern glare.

“That boy deserves your honesty, Louis,” she says. “Don’t screw this up over something so stupid.”

Louis sighs. “Mum, you don’t get it.”

“What don’t I get?” Jay demands.

But Louis doesn’t know how to answer that. Everything, his mind screams. Instead, he shakes his head and murmurs, “C’mon, the food will get cold.”

“We aren’t done talking about this.”

Louis rolls his eyes and leaves the room, finding that he doesn’t care whether or not his mum follows him.

When he enters the dining room he hears Noah and Harry singing along loudly to a song playing through the wireless speakers Harry has accidentally left, or so he says. Louis suspects they’re really a sneaky gift, but he hasn’t pointed that out yet.

The table is set perfectly and Noah is just laying down the last spoon when Louis enters. He grins up at his dad and points to the chair at the head of the table.

“You gotta sit here Daddy,” he says. “I make it special for you.”
Of course it looks no different from the other spots on the table, but Louis agrees. Noah made it special, after all.

“You’re a great help, love,” Louis says.

Noah beams. “My Harry says I’m the very best helper he has!”

“Well your Harry is right, babes. Come here.”

His son complies and lets himself be pulled into a hug. Louis sighs and squeezes Noah tight, kissing his temple and breathing in the comforting scent of baby shampoo.

“I’m sorry if I was grumpy with you earlier,” Louis whispers. “There’s just a lot of stuff going on right now, adult stuff at work okay? Nothing to do with you, little lad.”

Noah nods, bunching up Louis’ jumper in his fists. “Okay, Daddy,” he whispers.

“You’re the very best boy,” Louis promises. “And I love you so much.”

Giggling, Noah pulls away so he can hop up and kiss Louis’ cheek. “I love you too, my Daddy,” he whispers back.

“Are we trading secrets without me boys?” Harry asks from where he’s watching them in the kitchen. “Quite rude, y’know.”

“No secrets,” Louis says, knowing full well it’s a lie. “Let’s eat, yeah?”

Noah nods and takes the seat right next to Louis’ while Louis helps Harry set out everything he’s bought. It’s almost like he was planning for an army instead of just the four of them.

They talk about their days while Louis mostly listens, Harry and Jay get deep into conversation about the food, and Noah is happy. He doesn’t stop smiling the entire meal, looking from his dad, to his grandmother, to Harry and back again a hundred times over as he eats. Louis smiles as well, because as stressed as he is now nothing makes him happier than seeing his baby happy.

“Lou?”

Louis looks up from where he’s been staring at Noah and frowns when he sees everyone watching him. He’s obviously missed something. “Sorry?”

Harry’s smile turns down slightly at the sides. “Are you okay, love?” He asks quietly, gently reaching underneath the table for his hand.

Part of him is clamoring to tell Harry everything right then and there but he knows that he can’t. Louis can feel his mother’s eyes on him when he nods. “We can talk later, baby,” he whispers.

“Okay,” Harry whispers back, squeezing Louis’ hand gently.

Across the table Jay tries to catch Louis’ eyes and he ignores her.

Louis gets Noah to bed right on time for once, the boy obviously tired after an exciting day of school and hanging out with his grandmother. Harry lays out on the couch waiting for him, looking through his phone and biting the tip of his thumb as he scrolls.
“What’re you concentrating so hard on, pretty?” Louis gently whispers in his ear, making Harry startle a bit.

Harry smiles and turns his head a bit to kiss him where he’s leaning over the arm of the chair. “Nothing,” he sighs. “Just looking at things to do this weekend. Thinking about going to the zoo, what do you think? You, me, and the little lad.”

Instead of the grin he’d usually get, Louis’ face sort of falters. He stands up straight and shrugs, looking anywhere but Harry’s face. “I’m not sure if this is a good weekend.”

Harry frowns. “Oh, okay. Maybe next weekend then?”

Louis gives him an obviously fake smile and shrugs. “Maybe next weekend, love.”

Then he makes to walk away, but Harry quickly stops him. He sits up on the couch and reaches out, making a grab for Louis’ hand.

“Louis,” he begs. “Please talk to me, I can’t help you if I don’t know what’s wrong.”

With a sour expression, Louis shakes his hand out of Harry’s grip and crosses his arms over his chest. He doesn’t leave though, which Harry counts as a small victory.

“I’m fine,” he says, a lie. Harry knows he’s been lying all day and it’s driving him insane.

Harry racks his brain for something, anything that’s gone wrong but he can’t think of anything at all. “Is it something I’ve done?” Harry asks quietly.

Louis whirls on him, his face suddenly hurt. “No, Harry no of course not. You haven’t done anything wrong.”

Harry reaches for him again but this time Louis lets himself be tugged with down onto the sofa beside him. Harry kisses his cheek, gently pushing a lock of hair behind his ear. “Then what is it? I’ll fix it baby.”

Louis snorts and shakes his head. “You can’t fix everything.”

“Watch me,” Harry teases.

They go silent. Louis leans for his head now rests on Harry’s shoulder and he reaches for Harry’s hand, fiddling with the younger boy’s rings. It’s a nervous habit he’s developed, Harry’s noticed. Harry also finds himself wondering every time he does it what Louis would look like with a ring of his own.

“I can’t—I can’t afford to go to the zoo this weekend,” Louis says, finally.

Harry nods gently, careful not to disturb him too much. “Okay, so we don’t have to go this weekend.”

“Babe, I just don’t,” Louis cuts himself off and groans. “God, I hate this so fucking much. It’s so embarrassing.”

Harry shushes him gently, pulling him closer. “Babe, you know you can tell me anything.”

“Doesn’t make it any less embarrassing,” Louis mutters, spinning one of Harry’s rings around. “This is why Mum was mad at me all through dinner, she wanted me to tell you.”
Harry frowns, finally pulling his hand away so Louis will look at him. “Tell me what?”

Louis sighs and reluctantly explains. “So Luke—he’s been moving to give up his parental rights to Noah. It hasn’t gone through yet, nothing is set in stone of course, but he’s stopped paying child support the last couple months because I guess he just assumed he wasn’t obligated anymore. Not that he’s ever been consistent with it, it was never really something I let myself rely on anyway. But I guess maybe I was a bit, because now I’ve had to hire myself a lawyer as well and the bill is just bloody ridiculous. It all caught up with me today I guess, it just started to get real when the numbers came out wrong. That’s why I’ve been miserable all day, I’m sorry.”

By the time he’s finished speaking Harry is absolutely livid. “Fucking bastard,” he sneers. “He doesn’t deserve Noah anyway, he never did. That fucking absolute twat.”

Louis cracks a small smile. “Can’t say I don’t agree. I’m sorry H, really I know I’ve been awful today.”

“You have the right to be upset,” Harry is quick to point out. He doesn’t want Louis thinking any differently. “God Lou, I’m so sorry that asshole is doing this to you.”

Louis sighs and runs a hand through his hair. “It’ll be okay,” he says sternly, almost as if he’s trying to convince himself as well. “I’m talking to my boss about taking on a few more stories for a bonus, maybe getting an advance on my salary until everything’s sorted. It’s just a bad month.”

It makes Harry feel useless, which is why he offers.

“You’ll work yourself to death,” he murmurs, pressing his lips to Louis’ temple. “If there’s anything I can do—”

“No,” Louis immediately stops him. “No Harry, absolutely not.”

Harry pouts. “But Lou—”

“No,” Louis snaps again. “I won’t take your money Harry, don’t say things like that. I’m not going to take advantage of you.”

Harry deflates, moving so he can rest his head on Louis’ shoulder. “It isn’t taking advantage if I’m offering to help,” he mutters.

“Great, so it isn’t a big deal if I politely decline then,” Louis says. “This is just something I have to go through on my own.”

“But we’re supposed to go through things together.” Harry whispers.

Louis groans at Harry’s sad tone and tugs him away so they can face each other again. “Baby,” Louis sighs, gently thumbing at Harry’s cheekbone. “Listen, it’s so sweet of you to offer. I really appreciate it, honestly I do, but I just can’t. I can’t get into that sort of situation with you, I won’t let myself.”

“You would if I had a normal job,” Harry huffs. “You’d let me help you then.

Louis laughs and rolls his eyes. “You severely underestimate my pride, darling.”

“This isn’t about pride, it’s about making sure my boys are taken care of,” Harry shoots back. “You and Noah—Louis you’re the best things I have in life. I just want to take care of you.”
Louis sighs, his expression softening at Harry’s obvious care for them. “Thank you baby, really, but this is something I can handle. I promise if I couldn’t I would tell you.”

Harry isn’t happy about that. He knows it’s a lie, he knows there’s no way in hell Louis would ever admit to needing help. The problem is he doesn’t know what else to do. Louis won’t let him help, and so he’s out of options. Putting a ring on Louis’ finger just for leverages sake is sounding more and more appealing right now.

“I love you,” Louis sing songs, smiling at Harry’s upset expression.

Harry huffs again. “I love you too, but I’m still upset with you.”

“You’ll get it over it,” Louis teases, and Harry supposes he’ll have to.

To say Louis is in a bad mood the next day would be a massive understatement.

It started with Noah practically refusing to get up for school in the morning, only getting out of bed when Harry politely asked him to which just pissed Louis off more. Unfortunately, it was too late to save Louis from being almost late to drop Noah off for school and certainly late getting to work.

But what infuriates him more than anything is how Harry just seems to roll with all of it. He keeps rubbing at Louis’ shoulders, kissing his cheek, and telling him to calm down, which is clearly an awful idea. He refuses Harry’s offer for a ride and instead drives his own shit car to work, praying it won’t break down halfway there.

Work isn’t much better either. Jade is spastic over some music video he couldn’t care less about, Jesy is in an awful mood about something her fiancé’s done to piss her off, and Leigh-Anne is wisely telling anyone who’ll listen some bullshit about Mercury being in retrograde. All Louis really wants is for everything to slow down and stop for a moment, but Leigh-Anne says Mercury can’t control that.

So yes, it’s a bad day and Louis is already at his wits end when Michael shows up at his desk around noon.

“What do you want?” Louis snaps.

Michael doesn’t look a bit perturbed by his tone, which only reinforces Louis’ suspicion that he is an idiot. “I saw your boyfriend in The Sun today,” he says casually, like this is any sort of conversation to be having with your superior. And Louis is his superior, goddammit. “Is it true he’s cheating on you with some guy from off The X-Factor last season?”

Louis glares at him and wonders how much trouble he could possibly get in for throwing a well sharpened pencil at his eye. “Get the fuck away from me,” he growls.

The intern raises his eyebrows. “Tetchy.”

“You are walking a very thin line, Michael,” Louis sneers at him. “If you think no one’s noticed your little obsession then you must be even stupider than I think you are.”

Michael looks surprised by Louis’ tone, which he supposes makes sense. Louis has never fought back this hard before. Michael has picked a very bad day to make his move.
“It’s not an obsession-” he starts to say, but Louis interrupts him.

“Yes, it is,” he says, sitting back in his chair a bit so he’s less likely to jump up and strangle the kid. “And I don’t understand what you think is going to come out of it. Harry isn’t your boyfriend, he isn’t your friend, you don’t know him and trust me he has no interest in changing that. You’re not helping yourself by harassing me like this and if you plan on keeping your job I’d highly suggest you rethink your priorities.”

Michael’s eyes go sort of wide. “Are you threatening me?”

Louis barks out a loud laugh, and if everyone in the office wasn’t watching before they are now. “I don’t have time nor do I care enough about you to make empty threats. You know what I’m saying Michael, I’d be very careful if I were you.”

Michael scowls at him. “What does he see in you?”

Really it shouldn’t hurt Louis as much as it does, it shouldn’t hurt at all actually. And yet it does, because Louis asks himself the same question every moment of every day.

“Honestly, I’m not quite sure either,” Louis says, and he means it which is what he thinks gets Jesy to finally step in. “Kindly fuck off.”

“You need to go,” Jesy says to Michael, her voice hard as steel. “Get out. We’ll discuss your termination later, in the meantime maybe you’d like to call up your uni and explain how you’ve gotten yourself fired from an internship.”

Michael is escorted out and the office goes deathly quiet after that. Everyone pretends to return to work, even Anna who’s staring at him across the room with sad eyes. The only thing stopping her from coming over is Leigh-Anne, who Louis can see is whispering something to her. Jade tries to talk to him, tries to gently rest her hand on his shoulder and ask him if he’s okay, but he just shakes her off and says that he’s fine.

He takes an early lunch break and finds a quiet spot on a bench somewhere to smoke an unreasonable amount of cigarettes, hating himself more with every one. He can just see Harry’s disappointed little frown in his mind, he can feel the shame, and yet he does it anyway.

“Lou,” Zayn whispers.

Louis deflates and turns to find his best friend standing behind him. “How’d you find me?”

“You always go to the same place, Lou,” Zayn laughs softly. “Ever since uni.”

“I’m sure everyone’s told you what happened, then,” Louis says bitterly. “Everyone knows I’m a fucking loser who can’t even defend myself against a nineteen-year-old kid.”

Zayn sighs and walks up, fallen leaves crunching under his boots. He sits on the bench beside Louis and gently takes the lighter from his hand, reaching into his coat for a fag. They sit in silence together, Louis eventually leaning so his head is resting on Zayn’s shoulder.

“What’s wrong, love?” Zayn whispers.

Louis shrugs. “Everything,” he says, watching the smoke spill from his lips into the cold air. “Just everything is too much at once, y’know?”

“I know,” Zayn sighs, turning to gently kiss Louis’ temple. “But I’ve got you, yeah? Anything that
happens, no matter what you’re still my best mate. Whatever you need, even if it’s just beating up a snotty nineteen-year-old.”

Louis chuckles softly at that and wipes his eyes. He isn’t crying but he can feel it coming and he just can’t anymore. He’s sick of crying. So, instead of crying, he fills Zayn in on everything going on in his mess of a life right now.

“Harry tries to help,” Louis says after he’s spent far too much time explaining his problems. “And I appreciate it, I really do, it’s just I don’t know how to let him. Part of me wants to go all in, but part of me is still in the ‘you’re alone and you have to get through this alone’ mindset.”

“You were never alone,” Zayn replies.

Louis rolls his eyes fondly. “You know what I mean, idiot.”

“Yeah, I do,” he agrees. “But you’re not alone now, either. He loves you Louis, and he wants to help and you should let him.”

“He offers too much,” Louis murmurs. “He-he wants to help too much-”

Zayn shakes his head, apparently foreseeing where Louis’ train of thought is headed. “Because he loves you both. Let him, Louis, you deserve that. That’s the whole point of being with someone, having someone who cares that much about you, notices when something’s wrong, wants to help.”

Louis sighs and shakes his head. “I just need to think,” he says, because he really does. “I don’t know what I want anymore.”

“You should go home,” Zayn says, gently running a hand over Louis’ hair. “Some time alone to think would do you good.”

Of course he’s right, but Louis doesn’t get up. Instead, he moves closer to Zayn and closes his eyes, pulling his legs up so his knees are at his chest.

“It’s okay,” Zayn whispers, wrapping his arms around Louis’ slack body. “It’s okay, Louis.”

Louis nods and takes a deep breath. It’s okay.

Harry doesn’t have a key to the house, but Louis always keeps a spare hidden by the door in case of emergencies.

Not that this is an emergency per say, but he got a message from Zayn and a pretty frantic DM from Jade on twitter that had him heading back from his song writing session pretty quickly. Not to mention there’s some boy saying he was fired from his job because of Louis and Harry’s management has caught wind of it already. From what Zayn has said, that definitely has something to do with it.

Harry uses the emergency key to quietly unlock the door. The house is dark when he enters, which is a bit surprising considering that Noah should’ve gotten home from school awhile ago now. Harry quietly slips his shoes off and walks through the house. He’s about to call out for Louis when he sees the man through the kitchen window.

He’s laying in the grass of the back garden, facing the sky, a trail of smoke rising from the cigarette
between his fingers. Harry sighs and heads to the back door.

Louis doesn’t look his way, even when the door slams shut. He just continues smoking, staring up at the clouds. Harry lays down beside him, despite the fact that the grass is a bit damp from the rain that morning and he hates the smell of cigarettes.

“Hey,” he whispers.

There’s a pause, and then Louis’ eyes flicker over to Harry. “Everything’s a bit shit right now, H,” he sighs, before taking another long drag.

“I thought you were quitting.” Harry murmurs, eying the cigarette held between Louis’ cold fingers

Louis frowns and shrugs, leaning over to one side so he can flick the ashes away. “Thought so too, didn’t I?”

“Lou, tell me what’s wrong please. Tell me how to fix it.” Harry begs. He thought they were okay after last night, he thought he’d finally gotten down to Louis’ strange behavior lately. Obviously he was wrong.

“I don’t know,” Louis says, sounding like he means it. But then he asks, “When are you going away again?”

Harry frowns at the question. “What does that have to do with anything?”

Louis shrugs, his shoulders sliding against the grass. He’s wearing Harry’s denim jacket with the fur inside. He has the sleeves pulled over his hands, but he still has to be cold. “I’m just wondering. Self-destructing, as Mum tells me.”

“What does that mean?”

Again, silence. Harry hates that he doesn’t know what’s going on between them. It’s been so great lately, perfect even.

And that’s when it clicks.


Louis wipes his eyes furiously. “Shut up Harry Styles. You don’t know anything.”

“Darling. Put that thing out, come here.”

Instead of protesting, Louis stubs what’s left of his cigarette out and tosses it towards the concrete slab at the door. He lets Harry tug and pull and rearrange them so they’re curled together. Louis’ shaking and Harry is kicking himself for not noticing something was wrong earlier. He thinks back to that photo at Natalie’s, the sad smile on Louis face. The same one he’s been wearing more frequently.

“Just because things are working out doesn’t mean it’s all just going to go to shit,” Harry whispers in his ear, holding onto him fiercely. “I’m not going anywhere and just because things seem perfect doesn’t mean that they can’t be. I’m sorry if someone ever made you think that way because it isn’t true. I promise Louis, I’m not letting you go for anything. Even if you do stupid things like smoke three packs a day just to see if that’s the last straw, because it won’t be.”

Louis sniffles and whispers, “Even if I get people fired?”
Harry sighs. “From what I’ve heard, he got himself fired. And it isn’t true what he said to you. When I look at you Louis, I see everything I have ever wanted. You’re it for me, you know that? And I’m not going to let you, or that prick, or anyone else ruin it.”

“How do you know what he said?”

Harry smiles. “I’ve got my contacts too, y’know. My secret Louis network.”

“It was Zayn wasn’t it.”

Harry laughs and kisses Louis’ forehead. “Yeah, it was Zayn. You have so many people who care about you Louis, you know that? It doesn’t matter what some little prick says to you.”

“That’s not just it though H, it’s everything,” Louis says. “I don’t know what I’m doing. I just want to be okay.”

“We can make it okay, you and me. You don’t have to shut me out, Lou. If anything that just makes it harder on yourself.”

Louis groans. “Why do you make so much sense. I hate you.”

“You don’t.” Harry says.

“I don’t,” Louis agrees.

Harry sighs and runs his thumb along Louis’ hairline. Louis shuts his eyes and rests his hand on Harry's waist while Harry watches him. They lay there in the grass like a couple of idiots, looking ridiculous Harry's sure, but he doesn’t care.

“Louis,” Harry murmurs.

Louis hums, his hand tightening where he’s holding onto Harry.

“I love you,” Harry whispers. “I just want you to always know that. My management is going to take care of that boy, but I'm sorry that happened to you.”

“It's okay,” Louis sighs.

“It isn’t okay,” Harry sighs. He knows that Louis won’t admit that though, so he tries to change the subject for his boy’s sake. “I wrote you a song today.”

Louis opens his eyes and smiles. It’s a real smile. “Spoiling me. You know I'm going to write you a song someday.”

Harry raises his eyebrows. “Do you write? I feel like that's something I should know and I don’t.”

Louis laughs and shrugs. “I've just never told you, love. I did as an angst filled teenager, wrote a shit ton of awful songs. Stan and I had a band, I've told you that.”

“Your tattoo,” Harry remembers with a grin.

“Right love,” Louis laughs. “But yeah I did. I'll write you a song Harry Styles, bet you've never had that happen huh?”

Harry smiles and kisses Louis’ forehead. “I would love that. But only if you promise to sing it to me.”
“Piano and all,” Louis promises

They lay there for a bit longer and Harry sneaks a picture of the two of them to make Louis laugh. He succeeds and they decide to get up, both of them now smelling thoroughly of each other and the grass beneath them.

“You really should quit,” Harry says when he watches Louis pulls his pack of cigarettes out of the grass and into his pocket. “Noah needs you around. I do too.”

“I’m trying,” Louis sighs, running a hand through his hair. “I will I swear. I’ll quit.”

“I believe you,” Harry says, no hesitation.

Louis bites his lip and shoves the pack into Harry’s hands. “Take it. I have to go get Noah, are you coming along?”

Harry nods and stands up, reaching down to take Louis’ hand. It feels like a small victory.

Louis puts on a brave face for Noah, he always does. He smiles and laughs and plays along with his son’s games, never once letting on that he feels like his brain has been thrown in a blender after the day he’s had. It’s just hard to understand exactly what it is he’s feeling, Louis thinks, and he isn’t sure how to change that.

On one hand, yes things with Harry are perfect. They’re happy together, Harry seems happy with him, with Noah, with spending his time with the two of them instead of off being a superstar somewhere. Louis is of course happy with him as well, because who wouldn’t be? He’s perfect.

And yet there’s still a part of him that is counting down the seconds until it ends like a ticking time bomb. Luke seemed happy once. Things seemed perfect once then too, and then in a split second it all changed. Louis doesn’t know how to stop. He doesn’t know how to change.

“Love,”

Louis looks up from where he’s been staring sadly at his cup of tea.

Harry’s watching him, eyebrows furrowed. They haven’t said much after picking Noah up from his mum’s earlier. Louis can tell Harry isn’t happy about it. “Babe, Noah’s calling for you.”

Louis nods and stands up, leaving his mug on the coffee table. He enters his son’s room to find him laying in bed, pajamas on and book in hand just as Louis asked. Louis smiles and shuts the door softly behind him.

“You all ready for bed then, my love?”

Noah nods. “Got a good one!” He says, holding up the book. Louis isn’t surprised to see it’s the same book he wants every night.

Louis takes a seat on the bed beside him and opens the book. Noah is entranced by the dinosaurs saying goodnight, giggling at every joke and gasping at every picture he’s seen a thousand times. They take their time trying to pronounce the dinosaur’s names and looking at all the pictures again before Noah finally yawns so big Louis can’t ignore it any longer.

“I think that’s enough for tonight,” he says, quietly closing the book and putting it in its designated
spot on Noah’s bookshelf. “Give Daddy a kiss and hug, yeah?”

Noah reaches his arms up and tugs Louis down until they’re both laying down. “Stay, Daddy. M’scared.”

Louis frowns. “What are you scared of, little one?”

“Monsters under my bed,” Noah says, very matter-of-fact. “Lily at school says she’s got them and they can come to my house next.”

Louis smiles softly. “I promise there’s no monsters allowed here. If there were, we’d move out and make Harry fight them for us yeah?”

Noah giggles and closes his eyes. “Yeah.”


Noah nods, looking so sure of it. Louis still remembers when he thought his mother was never scared of anything, even monsters. “I know. Love you, Daddy.”

“I love you too, baby. Go to sleep.”

Louis watches as Noah slowly falls asleep, his breath ever so slightly evening out, his little hands loosening their hold around Louis’ jumper. Watching his son gives him a happy, tranquil feeling and Louis soon finds himself drifting off as well.

A hand gently pushing hair off his cheek wakes him up. It’s dark in the room now, meaning it’s been awhile since Louis’ fell asleep. He blinks his eyes open and sees Harry kneeling at the side of Noah’s bed, smiling at them.

“Serial killer eyes,” Louis whispers.

Harry chuckles. “I love you,” he says.

“Mm, that’s nice to wake up to,” Louis sighs. “What are you doing?”

“Got a bit worried about you when you didn’t come back,” Harry whispers. “You’re so beautiful when you sleep, you know that? Both of you.”

Louis smiles. “You just like when we’re both finally quiet.”

“Can’t say you’re wrong,” Harry teases. “I only woke you because someone’s texted you a couple times. Figured it might be important.”

Louis reaches his hand out for his phone and frowns when he sees the number. “Fucking hell,” he groans. “Fucking-”

He cuts himself off when he remembers the sleeping boy beside him and glances over. Sometimes he doesn’t understand how it happened. Sometimes it makes no sense that the loveliest boy on the face of the planet came from something so awful.

Louis kisses Noah’s forehead softly and climbs out of the bed. Harry watches him, obviously confused, trailing behind him like a lost puppy. Louis carefully shuts the door to Noah’s room behind himself and crosses his arms over his chest.

Harry’s expression turns stormy in an instant. “What does he want?”

Louis laughs, shaking his head. “To taunt me, what else? Saw something about me somewhere, said he thinks it’s funny that I’m the one who thinks I’m fit to be the parent of ‘his child’ when I act that way. I don’t know who the fuck he thinks he’s kidding, he hasn’t shown a bit of interest in Noah from day one.”

Of course he puts his brave face on, because he always does, but his stomach is churning as it always does. He hates when Luke flaunts the fact that biologically he’s Noah’s real father. As much as Louis knows that doesn’t matter, as much as he knows that isn’t what really makes you a father, it makes him nervous. There’s still a part of him so worried that someday Luke is going to shift back into their lives when it’s convenient and try to take Noah away.

“Lou,” Harry whispers. “Hey, look at me.”

Louis glances up and locks eyes with Harry. He’s trembling, he notices, and immediately folds both hands into fists.

“It’s stupid,” he whispers. “I know he doesn’t mean it, I know he doesn’t really want to take him from me but I just…” Louis trails off and shakes his head.

Harry leans forward and kisses Louis’ forehead. “It’s going to be okay. I’m here, I’ve got you. I’m not going anywhere Lou just relax.”

On command, Louis leans into Harry and collapses against his chest and finally lets himself cry. A thought comes to him out of nowhere. It’s a thought he’s suppressed many times before, every time Harry has ever looked at him with those sad doe eyes and offered something that Louis immediately declined out of pride. But he can’t anymore, he just can’t.

“I need help,” he whispers, and he hates himself as soon as he says it but he can’t keep pretending any longer. “Please. Harry, I can’t do this on my own anymore.”

“Baby,” Harry whispers, sounding heartbroken even though Louis knows this is what he’s been waiting for all this time. “Oh darling, of course. Don’t cry, you don’t have to do this on your own. I’m right here and I’m going to help you however I can Lou. He won’t hurt you anymore, I promise.”

It’s a ridiculous promise to make, something Louis is sure Harry really can’t change because it is always going to hurt. Seeing Noah grow up without his father is always going to hurt, knowing one day he’s going to ask why hurts. But for just one moment in time, standing there sobbing in Harry’s arms, he lets himself believe that everything can be fixed.
“Oh my god, oh my god,” Anna whispers, holding so tight to Louis’ arms that her nails bite into his skin. “Louis, oh my god.”

Louis smiles and carefully loosens her grip a bit. “Love, you’re going to have to calm down a bit yeah? Most people don’t like it when you scream in their faces.”

Anna shakes her head tugs Louis’ arm, stopping him in the hallway. “I can’t,” she says, sounding deadly serious. “Louis, really I can’t.”

A group of people who look quite important pass by them, giving Louis a look like he’s trying to control a screaming child in a grocery store. It’s just backstage in a club, it isn’t like there aren’t hundreds of other girls out there screaming right now, it just so happens there is one particularly loud one attached to his arm.

Pulling Anna to the side, Louis gently pushes her so her back is against the wall. “I’m a bit worried you’re going to hyperventilate,” he explains. “Take a deep breath, love.”

Anna nods and does as she’s told, taking one large heaving breath. “Fuck,” she whispers, her eyes going wide. “I can’t just talk to the people I worship, Louis. I’ve seen them in concert-I’ve cried at their concerts. They’re going to take one look at me and know.”

“Anna,” Louis laughs softly. “They aren’t going to know any of that unless you tell them. I’m sure they’d love to hear it though.”

With a scoff and a shake of her head, Anna says, “What was I thinking? I can’t do this. I should’ve gone to uni for business like Mum always said.”

It only makes Louis laugh harder and Anna looks ready to kill him for it.

“Babe,” he chuckles. “Listen, you’ll be brilliant. You don’t have to do any talking if you don’t want, I promise. Trust me, you’re doing far better than I did on my first real interning experience.”

That of course catches her interest.

“Yeah?”

Louis nods. “I ended up sat in a corner with my hands shaking because I was in love with the guy. He of course didn’t notice me at all and was completely focused on the man I was interning under. Well, until we were leaving and I took it as an opportunity to ask a dumb question, trip, and spill my tea all down his shirt.”

Anna giggles. “You didn’t.”
“I did,” Louis sighs. “And if you make it through this without spilling tea down anyone’s shirt, I’ll even tell you who it was so you can laugh at me.

Anna nods and takes another deep breath. “Okay,” she says sternly. “I can do it. I’m too pretty for business anyway.”

“That’s my girl,” Louis laughs, throwing his arm over her shoulder. “C’mon, if we’re late they’ll throw a fit. Proper babies these popstars, I’m telling you.”

The two of them make their way down the hall to the room where they’ll be interviewing the band. Louis knows they’re popular, he knows that apparently they’re being considered the next big thing, and that everyone from Anna to Louis’ mum thinks they’re brilliant. If Louis wasn’t so busy he might actually pay attention and have a clue as to who they are.

But he doesn’t, so he asks Anna.

As soon as the words are out of his mouth, Anna is gasping like it’s some kind of tragedy.

“Louis, really?” she demands. “You don’t know who The Sparks are?”

Louis rolls his eyes and takes a seat at one of the chairs set out for them. “Babe, the only things I pay attention to anymore are my son’s nursery rhymes, whatever it is Jesy makes me listen to, and the shit Harry sings in the shower.”

“They’re amazing,” Anna sighs dreamily. “They’re brother and sister, they’ve been signing together forever. They started on YouTube, y’know, years back. I’ve loved them ever since then.”

“Mm,” Louis hums. “They’ll be here soon. Promise not to scream?”

Anna nods. “Cross my heart.”

Louis smiles and starts sorting through his things, taking out his phone to set up the recording and giving Anna a notepad to take notes or something. That was Harry’s idea, Louis has never really taken an intern anywhere before, or worked with one before. It’s supposed to be a learning experience, he thinks, and most learning experiences include notes.

“Lou?”

Louis looks up from where he’s sending a quick text to Jesy to let her know how it’s going. Anna is looking at him with her eyebrows knitted together in thought.

“What’s up, kid?”

Anna bites her bottom lip and shrugs. “Do you really think I’ll be okay?” she asks.

“I think you’ll be brilliant,” Louis replies. “Don’t worry so much.”

Before Anna can reply, the door opens and a flurry of people interrupt them. A boy and a girl seem to be the center of it all, each ridiculously tall and blond and followed by an entourage of assistants.

“Hello!” One of the people in the crowd calls. “You must be Louis Tomlinson.”

Louis smiles and stands up to shake her hand. “That’s me,” he says, before gesturing to where Anna is still sat and staring in awe. “This is my intern Anna, she’ll be sitting in on the interview.”

The boy grins at them, toothy and young. He can’t be any older than eighteen, Louis thinks. His
sister looks a bit older, but most likely only by a year or so. The resemblance between them is uncanny, each looking like a perfect tan Barbie doll. Louis wonders how long it took their stylists to get them that way.

“I’m Oliver,” the boy says. “And this is my sister, Olivia.”

Louis raises his eyebrows. “Did your parents plan that?” he can’t help but ask.

Luckily, Olivia laughs. “Unfortunately,” she says, turning to look at Anna and shake her hand as well. “Anna, you said?”

Anna opens her mouth but all that comes out is a squeak. Her face flames bright red and she coughs before nodding back. “Yeah, sorry. I’m Anna.”

Olivia smiles. “It’s nice to meet you.”

For the entirety of the interview, Anna blushes bright red. She seems absolutely smitten with either Olivia or Oliver, Louis can’t quite tell. She still manages to do her job though, powering through and even asking a few questions herself about their new album and their YouTube days. Louis is impressed and as soon as they’re alone again, he tells her so.

“Really?” She asks. “You think I did okay?”

“You did wonderfully,” Louis corrects her. “Come on, let’s get going before they kick us out.”

Anna nods and follows Louis out. There are paparazzi outside, unsurprisingly. What is surprising is the fact that they start shouting Louis’ name as soon as they see him.

He frowns and slings his arm over Anna’s shoulders, steering her away from them.

“What the hell?” Anna laughs.

Louis sighs. “I’m apparently quite interesting now,” he grumbles.

It really isn’t that big of a deal, Louis reminds himself. It just makes him feel extremely unprofessional and a bit unsafe, but Harry has told him over and over again that he’s having it handled. It just doesn’t feel handled, is the thing.

“What did it feel like?” Anna asks, once they’re safely back in Louis’ car and driving away. “When you and Harry first met, I mean.”

Louis smiles. “He was my job, love,” he says. “So it felt like my job. But then, later when we talked and when I actually met him, not Harry Styles, it felt like…like waking up. Like what I needed all this time was standing right there in front of me wearing a stupid hat and giggling at all my awful jokes.”

Across the car, Anna looks down at her hands and starts pulling at her fingers one at a time. A nervous habit, Louis’ noticed.

“Why?” Louis teases, remembering how flustered she was in the interview. “Have you got a crush on someone?”

“Yes,” she says, before correcting herself. “I mean, I think so? I don’t know. This has never happened to me before.”

That makes Louis frown. “You’ve never had a crush before?”
“No, of course I have,” Anna scoffs. “Just not…not on this type of person before.”

Louis eyebrows furrow and from the corner of his eye he watches as a blush rises on Anna’s cheeks. He thinks back to the interview and how she stared at Olivia, how she stumbled over her words and blushed when the other girl looks at her. It clicks.

“Oh, love,” he whispers. “Is this you coming out to me?”

“A bit,” Anna mumbles with a shrug. “I don’t-I don’t know. Sorry, I know that this is totally overstepping but I just didn’t know who else to talk to and I figured that you might-”

Louis shakes his head. “Hey, don’t apologize. I’m here whenever you need me, yeah? I’ve got a million little siblings, I am well versed on being a big brother. We can talk about it if you want, or if you never want me to mention it again I won’t.”

Anna nods and seems to think it over. “Maybe later on?” She says gently.

“Of course,” Louis agrees.

“Thank you,” Anna sighs. “Really, thank you so much for everything you’ve done for me. I’m not going to let you down, I promise.”

Louis smiles and nods. “I know you won’t. Someday you’ll have my job, just you watch.”

Anna beams and shrugs a bit. “Never liked business all that much anyway.”

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Harry wakes up to the gentle vibration of his cell phone against his ear.

He’s fallen asleep with it under his pillow again, something Louis always laughs at him for. You never know when big popstar things could happen, Louis had reasoned, even in the middle of the night.

Carefully shifting over a bit, Harry reaches for his phone. It’s an email from his assistant regarding an invitation to an album launch party for one of his friends. He smiles and quickly emails his assistant back to say he’ll be able to make it. It’s been awhile since he’s been out to any parties, and the thought of Louis coming with him is enough to make him want to go.

Louis, who is still asleep beside him. He’s covered in the white duvet that he’s systematically rolled himself up in during the night. He’s a blanket thief, Louis, but Harry loves it just as he loves every other ridiculous thing about his boyfriend.

Harry rolls over to check Louis’ phone and sees that his alarm is set to go off any minute. He takes it upon himself to silence it, knowing how grumpy the awful tinny ringtone makes Louis in the mornings.

“Lou,” Harry whispers. Leaning across the bed, Harry gently reaches up and pushes the hair off of Louis’ forehead. He then follows his fingers up with his lips, kissing Louis’ frown lines away. He always frowns in his sleep, Harry finds it disgustingly adorable.
Groaning, Louis shakes his head and buries himself deeper into the blankets.

Harry moves closer and kisses the top of Louis’ head, the only part of him peeking outside of the blankets now.

“Baby,” he sing-songs. “C’mon love, you’ve got to wake up.”


Harry laughs. “Nuisance? Is that anyway to treat the man who’s about to make you breakfast?”

Under the blankets, Louis goes still and silent for a bit. After a few seconds, he shifts around and pops his head out. Fringe falls over his eyes and his lips are pursed into a thoughtful frown.

“What kind of breakfast?”

“Anything you like, my love,” Harry says softly.

Louis seems to think it over for a second before relenting. “Not a nuisance, then,” he decides. “I want french toast, can you handle that Styles?”

Harry nods and kisses Louis’ forehead once more before reluctantly pulling away. “I think I can handle it, Tomlinson. Should I wake up Noah?”

“Please,” Louis groans, stretching his arms out of above him. “I’m going to jump into the shower quickly. What are you up to today, pretty?”

Harry blushes like he always does at the pet name and shrugs. “Writing, mostly. I’m meeting up with Liam for a bit as well.”

Louis nods and closes his eyes again. “I’ve got something for you later on,” he says. “A surprise.”

“A surprise?” Harry repeats with a laugh. “Should I be scared?”

“Yes, terrified,” Louis says quite seriously.

Harry shakes his head and leans down to kiss Louis before pushing himself out of bed. “I’ll meet you for lunch,” he suggests. “We can go to the studio, if you want.”

“Sounds lovely,” Louis sighs, blinking his eyes open again. They always seem darker in the mornings, when he’s tired after days spent working too hard and chasing after Noah. He smiles up at Harry and reaches up to ruffle his curls.

“I love you,” he says, and to Harry it always sounds like a promise.

Harry smiles and leaves Louis to lay in bed and sulk about the early morning.

Noah, on the other hand, is bright eyed and happy to be woken up. The minute he opens his eyes to Harry’s gentle whispers, he’s grinning. He throws his arms around Harry’s neck and demands that he be carried to the kitchen.

“Can’t you walk, bean?” Harry teases him.

Shrugging, Noah lays his head on Harry’s shoulder and closes his eyes. “Probably, but this is better.”

Harry smiles and nods. “I think you’ve got me there, love.”
While Noah sits at the table eating the french toast Harry has made him, Harry gets dressed and texts Liam. Niall is off in Ireland seeing family, but Liam has been using the recording space in Manchester with Harry lately to work on demos for their next album. It’s quite nice, actually, Harry thinks to himself with a smile. He likes being able to go off to a job and return home at the end of the day to Louis and Noah.

And yes, Harry realizes he’s just referred to Louis’ home as his own. Probably time to start looking at flats in earnest, then.

“Love,” Harry whispers as he moves past Louis in the kitchen.

Louis hums in reply, too busy fixing himself a cup of tea to look up.

Harry smiles. “A friend of mine has an album launch coming up,” he explains. “Would you want to go with me?”

“Depends,” Louis replies, sounding upset straight away. “When is it? I’d have to find a sitter for Noah.”

The reply makes Harry frown. Admittedly, he hadn’t thought of that aspect at all.

“It’s this weekend. Is that too late?”

“No, love,” Louis sighs, finally meeting Harry’s eyes. “I’m sorry, I don’t mean to burst your bubble but I can’t just fly off places at a moment’s notice like you can. I have a life, I have a job and a kid.”

Harry shakes his head. “I know that, Louis.”

“Okay,” Louis whispers, putting his hand on Harry’s. “I’m not accusing you of anything, babe, I just want you to know that I want to go, of course I do. I’ll try, okay?”

Harry nods and pulls Louis in for a quick kiss. “Let me know?”

“I will,” Louis promises, fussing with the buttons on Harry’s shirt.

Behind them Noah shouts, “Ew! Stop kissin’, we gotta get ready for school Daddy!”

Immediately, Louis is back to his happy self he reserves for Noah. He pulls away from Harry and beckons the boy over. “You’re right little love. C’mon, let’s go get you dressed.”

Noah giggles and runs up to Harry, hugging him around the legs. “Just kiddin’,” he says softly. “You can kiss, I know you’re in love.”

Harry laughs and picks the boy up, swinging him around in a circle before handing him off to Louis. “Go on, you don’t want to be late.”

Noah nods and points Louis in the directions of his room. “Come on Daddy! Don’t want to be late!”

Harry stays in the kitchen and watches them go, Noah babbling to Louis the whole way about school and Louis listening intently. Minutes later, Harry gets an email confirming another flat showing with his realtor.

He ignores it.
“Wow,” Louis says quite loudly as they walk into the recording studio. “Quite posh in here, innit?”

Harry smiles and shrugs. “It’s alright,” he agrees.

Everyone else has gone out for lunch together except for Harry, apparently. Instead, he picked Louis up from work and brought him here. It’s a lot more intense than Louis had thought it would be, there are a bunch of instruments all plugged in and laying around inside the booth. At the center of it all is a huge, beautiful piano.

Humming to himself, Louis opens the door and steps into the studio, heading straight for the piano almost out of instinct. A tap to the keys emits a beautiful clear sound, nothing like the shitty old keyboard Louis had growing up. He smiles to himself and taps another after that, routinely running his hands over the keys and playing the melody he’s had stuck in his head for days now.

“What’s that?” Harry asks, taking a seat on the bench beside him.

Louis shrugs. “Something that’s been stuck in my head. Don’t you have work you should be doing, love?”

“No,” Harry replies, smiling at Louis. “Didn’t you promise me a surprise?”

Suddenly Louis feels hesitant. It’s not that he’s awful at piano or anything, he really isn’t, it’s just that this is an actual recording studio where actual musicians play. What he’s written mostly in between work and mostly on the notes of his phone just doesn’t feel like enough.

It’s certainly not a new feeling.

His fingers, though, seem to be against him because he’s soon playing again in a steady rhythm. Louis hums along with it, trying to remember it all before Harry stops him again.

“Stuck in your head?” he asks.

Louis smiles. “About that surprise,” he says softly. “Remember when I said I’d write you a song?”

You would have thought Louis had discovered something amazing with the way Harry’s face lights up. All he’s really done is write a song.

“Lou, really?” Harry asks, sounding breathless.

“If you’re quiet I’ll keep going,” Louis replies.

Of course Harry goes deathly silent in an instant. Louis takes a deep breath and starts playing again, faster and surer this time. Each clear note sounds so light and beautiful in the room and before Louis knows it he’s singing.

_I wanna write you a song_

_One as beautiful as you are sweet_

“Lou,” Harry breathes.

Louis pauses and raises his eyebrows. Harry quickly mimes zipping his mouth shut and nods.
Picking up where he left off, Louis sings,

*With just a hint of pain*

*For the feeling that I get when you are gone*

Louis keeps playing, letting the lyrics that have been stuck in his head for days now spill out for the first time in so long. It’s been years since he’s written anything of substance. The last time he truly put his time and effort and finished something, Luke had absolutely hated it. He laughed when Louis played it for him and Louis had pretended it never happened.

He’s proud he’s finished something again. He’s proud that Harry is staring at him with his eyes all star struck and awed. Maybe it’s not as shit as he thinks it is, then.

The ending doesn’t feel quite finished to him, Louis thinks as he trails off. It needs something more, but there just don’t seem to be enough words to explain how he feels. It’ll just have to do for now, Louis thinks, because that’s all he has.

Slowly, the song ends and the piano drifts off along with Louis’ voice. He pulls away from the keys and rests hi hands on his legs, looking down nervously at his fingers.

Harry breathes out a sigh into the quiet room. “Louis-”

“Holy shit!”

Both Louis and Harry jump up from the bench at once. They turn to find Liam and a few people Louis has never met before standing there behind the glass. His face goes red and it only gets worse when Liam speaks.

“Louis, that was amazing!”

Great, so they must’ve heard most of it then. Louis wants to disappear.

Harry frowns. “What are you all doing here?”

The group laughs. “We heard you,” Liam says, moving closer to the mic so they can hear him better in the booth. “Louis seriously, it sounded amazing. Harry did you write that?”

It really shouldn’t offend Louis as much as it does. He can feel the tips of his ears blushing red along with the rest of him. Of course they wouldn’t think he wrote it, why should they? When has Louis ever shown himself to be more than just Harry’s boyfriend to these people?

But it does hurt, and Louis really doesn’t want anyone to notice that.

“I better go,” he says, quickly shoving his hands in his coat pockets before Harry can make a grab for him.

Harry looks shocked. “But Louis-”

Louis smiles at him and shakes his head. “No, it’s okay. I really should be getting back to work soon anyway. Good luck with all of this.”

Before Harry can stop him, Louis heads out of the booth and past the group of people who he’s sure are very important and who are now all staring at him. Properly embarrassed, Louis just about runs out of the studio and into the hall.
Of course Harry follows him.

“Louis, stop!”

Louis shakes his head and presses the lift button repeatedly, willing the doors to open.

“It’s okay Harry, really,” he lies. “You have work to do.”

“Louis please,” Harry begs, coming to a stop in front of him. “Please, let me just tell you how amazing that was. It was beautiful, your voice is beautiful and the lyrics—”

Louis shakes his head and clenches his fists inside his pockets. “You don’t have to lie to me,” he says with a sad sounding laugh.

Harry reaches out and rests his hand on Louis neck, pulling him close once it’s obvious Louis won’t pull away. “I’m not, Louis, I would never lie to you. It was beautiful, thank you so much,” he pauses for a moment before whispering, “Baby, don’t leave. Talk to me.”

Despite how much Louis wants to run away right now, he doesn’t. They’ve been working on this lately, on Louis actually talking to Harry and telling him what’s wrong. He asked for help and Harry’s trying, but Louis knows he has to try too.

“I feel stupid now,” he says, leaning into Harry’s touch. “I feel stupid that they heard me singing to you and probably think it’s awful. Or they think it’s great, but that I could never write something good could I? I’m just Louis.”

“You aren’t just anything,” Harry says, sounding angry on Louis’ behalf. “Louis, you’re everything to me. God—what you wrote was amazing, I’m pretty sure Liam’s going to want to buy it off you just so he can pretend he wrote something that great.”

Louis smiles. “Leave Liam alone, he can write just fine.”

“You’re better,” Harry says, stupidly. He’s heard one thing Louis has written and now he’s going to try to convince Louis and the rest of the world that he’s the greatest songwriter in history. Harry really is a ridiculous human being.

“You’re ridiculous,” Louis tells him, just to make sure that Harry realizes that as well.

Harry nods and leans in to kiss Louis. “Ridiculously in love with you,” he croons.

“Oh my god,” Louis groans. “You’re so sappy, Harold. Why are you like this, it’s awful.”

Laughing, Harry leans in again and Louis finally allows him a kiss. The lift doors slide open behind them and Louis just about falls in, stopped only by Harry’s arm around his waist.

“Let me take you out,” Harry whispers, putting his foot out to stop the lift doors before they close again. “Please?”

Sighing, Louis pulls away and steps into the lift. “Well?” he says, lifting his eyebrows. “Come on popstar, I haven’t got all day.”

Harry grins and jumps into the lift beside Louis, pushing him up against the wall and kissing him until Louis forgets why he was ever so upset in the first place.
The launch party Harry’s friend is throwing has a red carpet and all, apparently, something Harry neglected to mention. Though, Harry had also neglected to mention his friend is Olly Murs. All in all, Louis is at a loss for what to do.

Leigh-Anne, on the other hand, is taking it as an invitation to get Louis as dressed up as possible. She and Zayn have both come over to his house to grill him on what exactly he’s going to wear and how he’s doing his hair and other ridiculous things like that.

“I don’t know if I should even be going,” Louis groans as Zayn messes with his hair.

Scoffing, Leigh-Anne puts her wine down long enough to tug at his hair. “Oh, hush. You’re his boyfriend, you need to have those red carpet power couple pictures taken.”

“Are we a power couple?” Louis asks Zayn, tilting his head up long enough to see his best friend rolling his eyes.

Instead of answering, Zayn takes his hands away from Louis’ hair and sits down beside him. “What are you wearing?” he asks.

“No clue. Harry’s trying to get me to him buy me a suit.”

Zayn raises his eyebrows. “Do you own a suit?”

Louis laughs. “Do you think I own a suit?”

“Good point,” Leigh-Anne says, raising her glass to him.

They smile at one another and Leigh-Anne takes a seat near the two of them. “I vote you let him do it,” she says. “Besides, the party is in two days and you have nothing to wear.”

“I’ll wear this,” Louis says, gesturing to himself broadly. By the looks on their faces you would’ve thought Louis suggested he go naked.

“You are not going to an album launch party in jeans and my Adidas jumper, Louis,” Zayn says, clutching onto Louis’ arm like he might just get up and go now.

Louis rolls his eyes. “You’re both so dramatic, I’m only joking. It isn’t like those stupid paparazzi haven’t already seen me like this. Fuckers.”


Louis sighs and shakes his head. Lately there have been paparazzi everywhere. Just today there was a small group of them outside his work, lazily snapping pictures of him as he jokingly asked who they were waiting for. All he was trying to do was go to lunch, and now he’s sure there are pictures of him floating around looking like shit just like there were at The Sparks show.

Anna had thought it was the coolest thing ever, seeing her face in a magazine. Harry’s manager hadn’t thought that Louis scowling and holding onto Anna so close was good for their image. All Louis really wanted to say to that was for Harry to tell his manager to go fuck themselves.

He didn’t, of course. He had just smiled politely and asked Harry how that whole keeping the
paparazzi at bay thing was working out.

“It’s fine,” Louis lies. “I don’t want to talk about it. I do own a suit, by the way.”

“You do?” Zayn asks, obviously skeptical.

Louis nods. “Yeah, remember when we had that fancy gallery party thing when Modest turned twenty? Jesy made me wear a suit, it’s somewhere in my closet still.”

Zayn frowns. “I thought you rented that.”

“I did, but Noah spilt milk on it. You can hardly tell, but they wouldn’t let me bring it back so I had to buy it. I was pissed, but at least I didn’t have to buy a tux for me mum’s wedding.”

Jumping up from her seat, Leigh-Anne takes off towards Louis’ room. “What are you doing, let’s go!”

“I’m not wearing a full on suit to a party, Leigh,” Louis says.

“Well duh,” Leigh-Anne groans. “You can wear the blazer with one of your stupid band shirts under it and skinny jeans. You’ll look fantastic Louis, just trust me.”

Zayn shrugs when Louis looks at him. “Better than letting Harry buy you a suit,” he points out.

Louis sighs. “Fine,” he yells after her. “But my shirts aren’t stupid, they’re vintage!”

Leigh-Anne just mocks him and keeps walking.

It takes quite a lot of people to dress a popstar, Louis notices.

For example, it takes Louis about five minutes to get dressed and toss his hair about to get it how he likes. It takes Harry hours to meet with his stylist, try on three equally ridiculous looking jackets, get his makeup done, and have his hair pulled up into an artfully messy bun.

“This is ridiculous,” Louis groans from where he’s laying on the hotel bed.

Harry smiles at him from across the room where he’s picking out rings to put on. “Not all of us can just wake up and look as beautiful as you do, baby,” he teases.

Louis rolls his eyes while the makeup artist laughs and calls Harry adorable. Yeah, Louis bets she thinks he’s adorable-among other things. The way she’s been staring at Harry and giving him little lingering touches has Louis feeling grumpy and possessive.

“I’ve gotten dressed up for you and all,” Louis points out. “I wanted to wear my Adidas jumper but Zayn wouldn’t let me.”

Harry smiles and walks over to Louis, leaning over the bed to kiss him. “You look lovely in anything,” he says, gently running his hands over Louis’ shoulders. “I do love you in this blazer, though. Still wish you would’ve let me buy you something.”
Louis laughs. “Is my milk stained rental blazer not good enough for you?” He teases, sitting up so Harry doesn’t hurt his back leaning that way.

“Of course it is,” Harry says quickly. “I just want to spoil you, that’s all. One day you’ll let me—I know it.”

Louis shakes his head. “Never.”

Harry rolls his eyes and leaves Louis with a kiss to his forehead. “You’re impossible.”

The makeup artist laughs like she was part of the conversation at all. “He seems it,” she says, eyeing Louis from across the room. “I’d certainly let you spoil me!”

Louis rolls his eyes. “Well I guess that’s the difference between you and me, huh?” he says, quite loudly.

Harry smirks and shakes his head at Louis. “Babe,” he laughs softly.

Shrugging, Louis falls back onto the bed and stares up at the ceiling.

About twenty minutes later, the makeup artist finally makes her exit. She makes sure to give Harry quite a long hug first, telling him she hopes to see him soon. Louis shakes his head and sticks his tongue out at her as she walks away.

As soon as the door is shut, Harry laughs. “You’re awful.”

“Yes I am,” Louis agrees, pushing himself up from the bed. “Are we leaving now? I’m quite tired of sitting here letting you be the center of attention.”

Harry nods and slips into his sparkly boots that make him ridiculously taller than Louis. Secretly, Louis loves them.

Harry walks over and wraps both arms around Louis’ waist, pulling him close.

“You’re going to love it,” he promises. “Have you ever listened to Olly’s music?”

Louis nods. “He’s alright. Just don’t abandon me, popstar, god knows who I might find.”

Harry smiles and presses his lips to Louis’ temple. “I love you so much. I’ve never done this before, you know? I’ve never been out like, officially with someone who isn’t a beard. I’ve never been able to have a date who’s my actual date and not either a supermodel or my mum.”

“You take Anne to parties?” Louis chuckles.

Harry nods. “Mum was my date to a few movie premieres, she secretly loves being all dressed up.”

Louis smiles and reaches out to touch the edges of Harry’s floral blazer. He doesn’t quite understand how Harry is so brave to leave wearing this sort of thing. He supposes he understands in a sort of daring aesthetic way, and as much as he jokes he truly thinks Harry looks lovely in anything, but Louis is too caught up in what others would think of him.

It’s been worse lately. Seeing his face caught off guard and posted online for the world to see is a little unnerving.

“I love you too,” Louis says, because that’s all that seems to make sense to him anymore. “I’m nervous, but I know how much this means to you.”
Harry smiles and he looks so proud that Louis can only swallow his fear and smile right back.

“Car’s here,” Harry says, grabbing Louis’ hand.

They go out together hand in hand, leaving Harry’s hotel and getting into the back of a large black car and sitting close together. Harry makes small talk with the driver while Louis sits beside him, silently squeezing Harry’s hand as if telling himself that it’ll be okay.

As they approach the party, Louis can already hear yelling and see a crowd of people and flashing lights. Harry had said it was a small party, but he’s obviously understated a bit.

“Fuck, H,” Louis whispers.

Harry finally squeezes his hand back. “I’m right here next to you,” he says. “It’ll be okay, really.”

Louis nods, as there’s no going back now. The car pulls to a stop and all too quickly, Harry’s getting out and Louis is following him into the frenzy of cameras.

It’s a bit like an out of body experience. Louis has never really been on this side of the cameras, he’s never had so many people shouting his name and asking him to smile. He stumbles a bit straight off the bat and the cameras go wild as Harry instinctively catches him with his hands on Louis’ hips.

“How on earth do you do that all of the time?” Louis asks, breathless. “Aren’t you worried you’ll have something in your teeth or a hair up your nose?”

Harry smiles and tips his head up a bit. “Do I?”

“No…wait, do I?” Louis shoots back, suddenly alarmed.

“No, love,” Harry laughs. “You were amazing, you look stunning as always. Now, stop worrying about it and relax. It’s a party Lou, enjoy yourself.”

So Louis does. He finishes his first drink and has another, and then another after that. Harry introduces him to about a thousand different people. Some of them Harry has apparently known since he was sixteen and they’re more than happy to tell Louis embarrassing stories of Harry over the years.

The common theme, however, seems to be everyone commenting on just how happy Harry is. Practically everyone they talk to mentions it, each giving Harry and Louis that little knowing smile. Nick Grimshaw goes so far as to ask when their wedding is. Louis of course laughs at such a ridiculous suggestion while Harry blushes bright red and promptly tells Nick to go fuck himself.

Despite what Louis had feared, he’s actually having a wonderful time. The music is nice, the drinks
are even better, and the people are surprisingly down to earth. They talk about music and Louis’ work, Harry’s new album, and of course Noah.

Louis is in a deep conversation with a woman he thinks he once saw on telly about the trials of IVF when he feels Harry bristle beside him.

“That’ll be the wife!” The woman laughs, holding up her ringing phone. “It was lovely to meet you Louis, Harry darling I’ll see you around I’m sure.”

Harry nods but his smile is completely fake.

Louis grabs two glasses of champagne off a waiter passing by and hands one to Harry. “What’s wrong, babe? You’ve gone all quiet.”

Shaking his head, Harry knocks back his drink. “I need some air,” he says, reaching for another glass.

Louis snatches it back from him in an instant. “Slow down,” he says sternly.

Harry sighs and turns away from Louis, walking towards the other side of the party. Louis pawns his two glasses off on a waiter and takes off after him, following Harry into a mostly deserted hallway.

There he finds his beautiful boyfriend who has spent the last few hours with people practically gravitating around him, hanging onto his every word, sitting on the floor crying.

“Harry,” Louis whispers, crouching down at his side. “Hey, darling—what’s going on?”

Harry laughs and shakes his head. “I’m such an idiot, aren’t I?” he mutters.

“Of course not,” Louis says, tucking a piece of Harry’s hair that has escaped his impeccable bun behind his ear.

“My ex is here,” he says. “And I haven’t seen him since he—it’s been a really long time.”

Louis frowns and sits down beside Harry. “Which ex is this?” he asks, though the feeling of dread is settling deep in his stomach.

“Tom, which is the one you’re thinking of probably,” Harry says. He then reaches behind his head and tugs the elastic out of his hair, letting it fall to his shoulders.

“The one who leaked those pictures of you?” Louis practically growls out. “The asshole who outed you, that piece of shit?”

Harry nods and tips his head back against the wall. While he breathes, he gently tugs at the little rainbow string bracelet on his wrist. As dressed up as he is, he still refuses to take Noah’s bracelet off.

“Where is he?” Louis demands.

“He was in the party,” Harry says. “He saw me, he looked right at me and I started panicking.”

Louis looks back at the door as if Harry’s ex might just burst through it. “Why is he here?”

Harry shrugs. “Probably as a date to someone,” he mutters. “He was hanging off some other guy. Tom’s always been like that.”
“Like what, a leech?” Louis spits. “Fucking prick. I should go in there right now and-”

“Lou,” Harry whimpers.

The pain in his voice makes Louis’ stop. Harry looks so upset, eyes red from crying and hair hanging loosely around his face. He reaches out for Louis’ hand and squeezes it gently in his own.

“Just stay with me?” he whispers. “Please.”

Louis nods and wraps his arms around Harry’s shoulders. “I’m right here,” he promises. “It’s okay, babe.”

“I shouldn’t be this scared of him,” Harry whispers against Louis’ shoulder. “But he has more on me-I know he does Louis and I-”

“Hey,” Louis hushes him gently. “Baby, just breathe. I’ve got you. You don’t have to be scared of him, you’re better than that. He’s scum, absolute scum for doing that to you.”

Harry nods and closes his eyes, letting Louis just hold him for a bit. It’s quiet in the hall and Louis is content to just hold Harry and try to comfort him.

“I’ve had a good time tonight,” Louis points out. “I can see why these supermodels like you so much.”

Grinning, Harry snuggles in closer to Louis. “I’m glad. You know, I don’t think any of those supermodels would’ve held me in a hallway while I fought off a panic attack.”

Louis kisses Harry’s temple and smiles. “I love you, baby. It makes me so angry that anyone ever treated you that way.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Harry whispers. “Because I have you now. It was always meant to be you.”

Louis smiles and gently runs his thumb across Harry’s cheekbone. Sometimes Louis wants so badly to believe Harry that he can feel himself giving in to it. Maybe they were meant to be. Maybe fate is real and Harry was really always meant for him.

It’s a nice thought, is all.

After the party, things only get worse.

People recognize Louis now more than before, more than they ever did when he was just some guy Harry was dating. Apparently going to a party together has solidified their relationship for the rest of the world, though Louis thought it was pretty obvious before this.

It isn’t so bad, Louis reminds himself each time he catches someone taking his picture. It could be worse.

Harry continuously apologizes for the paps that now practically stake out at Louis’ work and says that he has someone working on it. Someone who apparently isn’t working hard enough—but it’s not
so bad. Louis is an adult and he can handle this sort of thing.

It becomes bad the moment Noah gets involved.

Noah’s birthday is only a week away and he’s decided to take the boy shopping for party decorations and invitations. Noah has insisted he be involved in the planning, which essentially means throwing as many dinosaur decorations as he can into the cart when Louis isn’t looking. Not that Louis minds so much, his baby is turning five and he can have whatever he likes.

Also, Louis’ mum is pitching in for the party which does change his perspective on things a bit.

“Daddy,” Noah says as they’re walking out with bags upon bags of decorations. “Who’s those people?”

“Who are,” Louis corrects out of habit. And then he looks up and freezes.

There’s what seems to be in Louis’ eyes, a massive crowd of paparazzi on the sidewalk. There’s more now then Louis has ever had to deal with on his own, and the fact that they have somehow followed him here is unnerving.

“Come on love,” Louis says softly, reaching into the cart to pick Noah up. He’s really trying to calm himself down more than his son at this point, as his heart is starting to pound a bit.

The photographers are yelling at him and demanding that he Look here and Smile Louis! and they’ve seem to have taken him stopping at his car as an invitation to get closer.

“Noah, look over here!” One of the men starts shouting, and for Louis that’s the last straw.

Louis signed up for this—well, not this exactly, but he knew what he was getting into with Harry. Noah didn’t. Noah is a child with no choice in the matter and Louis isn’t going to sit idly by and let random men yell things at his baby and take pictures of him to sell off. It’s sick and Louis wants no part in it.

“Daddy, do they wanna say hi?” Noah asks, trying to crane his neck to look out of the car.

Louis stops him and pastes on a smile. “No, love. Stay right here, okay? We’re leaving.”

Noah looks suspicious but nods and sits back in his seat. Louis kisses him on the forehead and shuts the door, braving the crowd of cameras as he walks to the other side of the car.


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“No, love. Stay right here, okay? We’re leaving.”

With that, Louis gets into his car and peels out of the parking lot. Almost on instinct, he heads for his mother’s house instead of his own.

In the back of the car, Noah gently moves the bags of decorations away from where they’re sitting on Hank and holds his stuffed animal to his chest. “Daddy?” he says carefully. “What’s wrong?”

Louis shakes his head and smiles at Noah in the mirror. “Nothing, my love. We’re going to head to Grandma’s house for tea, what do you think of that idea?”

Noah beams and claps his hands together. “Yes! Good idea, Daddy.”

Despite the fact that he has groceries in his car that he really should be taking home, Louis carries
Noah into his Mum’s house and collapses on the couch.

No one is home yet, his Mum is probably off getting the girls from school, so he’s free to wallow for a bit while Noah plays with blocks on the carpet.

Dan gets home first and raises his eyebrows when he sees Louis laying on the couch face down, one eye peeking out to watch Noah building a scarily high tower.

“Hey Louis,” he says, a bit awkwardly. “You uh—are you alright?”

Louis sighs. “Everything’s shit, Dan.”

Dan smiles softly. “A bit, yeah,” he agrees. “Listen, how about I take the kids out for ice cream when your mum gets back. She’s probably the person you want to talk to right now.”

That almost makes Louis start crying in relief. “Thank you,” he mumbles against the couch cushions.

Dan nods and then turns to Noah. “Hey, little man, what do you think about getting ice cream?”

Noah gasps and starts babbling about his favorite ice cream flavor which somehow turns into a conversation about how Harry is going to make him a cake for his birthday. It only hurts Louis more, so he turns his face back against the couch and prays that the world might just disappear when he pulls his head back up.

The girls and the twins come storming through the house loudly but Louis stays pressed to the couch until Noah gives him a quick kiss to his cheek and they’re all leaving again.

His mum lets him lay there a bit and feel sorry for himself, her adult son practically crying into the upholstery. However, Louis can only spend so long trying to hide before his mum eventually reaches out and rubs his back.

Louis sits up slowly and frowns.

“What’s going on, darling?” Jay murmurs.

Louis shrugs. “I can’t even go to the fucking store,” he mutters bitterly.


“There were a bunch of paps earlier when Noah and I were at the store,” he explains. “And I normally like—well, you know it’s been worse lately, but I can deal with it. But Noah was there and that crosses a line. I don’t want this for him, Mum, he’s just a baby. I was so angry I couldn’t even think straight.”

Reaching out for him, Jay kisses the top of Louis’ head and rubs at his shoulders. “You know I don’t want that for him either. You need to talk to Harry about this, Louis. You need to decide if there’s something he can do to work this not.”

Louis rubs his forehead. “I’ll leave him if I have to,” he admits, and it feels a bit like stabbing himself in the heart. “I don’t want to, but if that’s what it comes to-Noah always comes first. But it’s so fucking hard, why is it so hard?”

“I don’t know darling,” Jay sighs. “I’m sorry. I wish I could protect you from all of this.”

Louis smiles. “I’m not a kid anymore,” he reminds her.
She laughs. “It doesn’t matter how old you get, Louis, you’re still my baby.”

With a soft sigh, Louis nods and lets himself be wrapped up in his Mum’s arms.

They spend the rest of the afternoon there, Louis trying to avoid leaving at all costs because it only means he’s going to have to call Harry. It’s only after Noah practically asks to go to bed and Jay has sent him off with a hug and kiss for good luck that Louis is finally brave enough to leave.

Unfortunately, Harry calls Louis first. He hardly has enough time to put Noah to bed before Harry is calling him from London.

Really, Louis was planning on having a civil conversation with Harry. He wants to talk things out, he wants to find a reasonable solution to the problem. That is, until Harry says that there’s pictures and a story online about what Louis’ done and that his management isn’t happy about it.

“They’re just like, upset about it I guess,” Harry tells him cautiously. “Because you were ignoring them and then you were hostile and they said it’s not a good look I guess.”

Louis scoffs, suddenly angry all over again. “Well what is it that they wanted me to do?” he asks, faking sweetness. “Hold Noah up to the fucking sky so they could swarm my four-year-old? Maybe I could’ve let him go out and field questions Harry, what do you think, is that good for your image?”

Harry sighs. “Lou, I get it—”

“No you don’t, Harry, you don’t get it,” Louis growls. “You don’t have a child, do you? Noah isn’t your son, and you have no clue what it’s like to deal with random people you don’t know getting that close to your baby when he’s just trying to have a normal fucking life.”

There’s nothing but silence from the other line. Louis knows what he’s just said is harsh, but he means it. As much as he loves Harry, Noah comes first. Noah always comes first.

“Okay,” Harry whispers, obviously hurt. “Okay Lou, I’m sorry if I overstepped. I’m going to have someone fix this, I’ll fix it I promise. Would it…would it help you if we took a break?”

That was not what Louis was expecting at all. As angry as Louis is, he doesn’t want to leave Harry. He loves Harry, he wants this to work so badly. It’s been years since Louis has been as happy as he is right now—but Harry suggested it didn’t he?

Maybe they moved too fast, maybe that’s why Harry wants out. Maybe he’s realized Louis really won’t ever be the perfect silent boyfriend his management wants him to have. Maybe it’s just Louis in general.

Louis breathes out heavily. “Are you sick of me, is that it?” he asks with a forced laugh. “I’m sorry that my son comes first, but I thought you knew that.”

Across the line and hundreds of miles away, Harry lets out a wounded noise. “Louis, come on, please don’t do this. That isn’t what I meant—”

“No, you stop,” Louis practically shouts. “Stop acting like I’m the one in the wrong here! Jesus Christ Harry, we’ve talked about this so many times. I’m not one of your little media trained boyfriends that you can just expect to be okay with this. I am trying as hard as I can, but at some point you’re going to have to try too and I’m sorry, but this is where I draw the line. You cannot expect me to put up with a situation where I don’t feel like my son is safe. I love you Harry, fuck I love you so much, but I’m not going to do it. I won’t.”
Instead of answering, Harry does possibly the worst thing he could’ve ever done in this situation, at least in Louis’ opinion. He says nothing. Harry says absolutely nothing, just as Louis imagines he’s been doing all the times Louis had quietly told him how uncomfortable the attention was making him. Louis just can’t deal with that any longer. He needs someone who will stick up for him, not someone who will just sit by and go along with what someone else tells him what to do.

He needs someone willing to fight for him, and right now Louis is doubting Harry will ever do that.

“I love you. I can’t do this,” Louis croaks out, his voice already thick with unshed tears. “I’m sorry Harry.”

And with that, he hangs up.

Chapter End Notes

Hello loves!! Please don't hate me :) Funfact: the last part was actually one of the very first scenes I ever wrote for this story!! Does that help at all? No?

I've had this chapter finished for a few days now, but I was a bit hesitant to post it. I'm still hesitant now, but I know that some of us really just need an escape from reality once in awhile. (Not that angst is exactly the greatest escape, but oh well.) On another somewhat related note, I've been working on a oneshot that is mostly finished by now that I'm hoping to post soon, which is a major part of why this chapter took so long despite being mostly prewritten. Hopefully that oneshot is good enough to make up for the wait....

Thank you so much for reading, I hope you enjoyed :)

baby please don't leave me

Chapter Notes

A new chapter and a oneshot all in the span of two days? What have I become...Speaking of oneshots, I just wanted to say thank you for all of the support on that awful piece of sap I posted the other day. It gives me hope, considering the end of the story is near and what I have planned for after that is just pure sap and fluff :)

Enjoy!!

p.s. the chapter name comes from this song which is wonderful, give it a listen

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry’s been broken up with before, but he’s never taken it quite this hard.

Usually he cries a bit, keeps his sister up far too late on the phone, and then Liam and Niall drag him out for a drink and he’s soon back to his old self. This, of course, is different. No one has ever meant what Louis means to him, and he’s never blamed himself so much. It was entirely his fault-Louis left him and he only has himself to blame.

Instead of staying in his lonely hotel room or alone in London, drinking himself into a stupor, Harry practically flees to his mum’s house and lays in bed for two whole days in tears.

Anne is angry with him, Harry knows that. At first she was angry with Louis as any mother would be, angry that her son came running home with a broken heart. It was only after a glass of wine and Harry explaining exactly how this happened that Anne became furious.

They aren’t talking now, not after the huge blowout fight they had over Harry’s stupidity and his priorities in life. Anne had, rightfully, pointed out that Harry had put his management and his image over Louis, something he had always sworn he’d never do. He betrayed Louis’ trust, made Louis feel unsafe with Noah, and never once stood up for him.

It didn’t feel great having his mother lay him out bare that way, though, so Harry did what any respectable person would do and locked himself in his childhood bedroom to cry.

On the third day, Harry comes down the stairs as slowly as he can, feeling massively hungover from his heavy drinking the night before. It’s unhealthy, he’s been told so by practically everyone, but Harry sees it as the lesser of two evils. Drinking himself to sleep is nothing compared to what he could be doing.

There’s noises coming from the kitchen and Harry follows them, entering to find Anne fixing herself a cup of tea. She looks up at Harry and sighs.

“You look rough,” she says.

Harry nods and sits down at the kitchen island. He leans his elbows on the counter top and drops his head down, running his fingers through his messy hair. “Feel rough,” he mutters.

Anne hums but says nothing else. A few minutes later, she pushes a mug across the counter and
reaches out to gently ruffle his hair. She looks far less angry now than she did yesterday, but chances are she’s still angry.

“You need to go home,” she says.

Harry shakes his head. “Haven’t got one.” In fact, when he called Liam last night, drunk out of his mind, that was one of his major complaints.

“You need to go to Louis,” she tries again. “You need to apologize to him before it’s too late.”

“It’s already too late.”

Anne sighs and takes a seat across from him. She reaches out across the counter and places her hand in the crook of Harry’s elbow, gently tugging until he finally pulls his hands away from his face. Their eyes meet and Harry hates how disappointed she looks. It’s been awhile since he’s seen that look.

“He isn’t used to this, Harry,” she whispers, like he doesn’t know that. “This is never something he wanted for himself or for Noah. But he wants you, love, and it shouldn’t be so hard to work that out. I know you can.”

Harry shakes his head. “He doesn’t want me anymore. I know he doesn’t.”

Anne takes a sip of her tea and looks at him thoughtfully. “Have you tried calling?” she asks.

“A thousand times,” Harry whispers, wincing at the memory of all the drunken voice mails he’s left for Louis since they spoke last. “I miss them so much. Noah’s birthday is Saturday, I promised him I’d be there. I don’t want to break my promise to him, I never would.”

The string bracelet that still sits on Harry’s wrist suddenly feels so heavy. Harry reaches down and runs his finger under it, spinning the frayed bracelet round and round over his wrist bone. It isn’t just Louis that he misses. Harry would give anything just to be able to say goodbye to Noah, promise him that he’ll always be there for him no matter what happens, maybe just give him the present that Harry’s had wrapped and waiting for weeks now. Noah doesn’t deserve to be abandoned all over again, left wondering why.

Anne lays her hand over his and smiles, the pride back again in her eyes when he looks at her. “Then don’t,” she says, like it’s all that simple. “Go back, love. Be there like you promised, show Louis that you care about both of them. Apologize and change things—I’m not going to let you ruin this, Harry. Louis is so good for you, love, they both are.”

Tears prick at Harry’s eyes and he quickly scrubs them away. “I just don’t want to lose them,” he whispers.

“Then go,” Anne says, nodding her head towards the door like he may just leave now. “Fix it, love. Louis deserves that.”

Harry looks down at his mug of tea and nods. There’s no other option, he can’t just stay here and do nothing, letting Louis believe he never fought for him. He has to fix this.
Louis really isn’t expecting the knock on the door so early in the afternoon. It’s soft and quiet and Louis almost doesn’t hear it over the noise of his family helping him set up for Noah’s birthday party. The party which isn’t scheduled to begin for a half hour, and Louis really hopes someone hasn’t shown up early.

“I’ll get it,” he says to no one in particular, leaving Noah in Perrie’s capable hands to finish getting dressed.

When he opens the door, he immediately goes to slam it shut again. Harry apparently sees this coming because he sticks his foot out to prop the door open, looking up at Louis with wide eyes.

“I’m sorry,” he says, quietly. “I know I probably shouldn’t be here-”

“No, you definitely shouldn’t be here,” Louis corrects him.

It hurts so badly seeing how Harry’s face crumbles then. He looks down at the ground, blinking his eyes furiously and taking deep breaths. The last time Louis saw him was the morning of the incident with Noah. They’d said I love you, kissed and parted ways. It’s crazy, Louis thinks, just how quickly these things can change.

“I know,” Harry says. “Louis, I know but-I promised him I’d be here.”

Before Louis can tell Harry exactly where he can stick that promise, Louis hears Noah running to the door.

“Daddy, who’s here?” he asks, sliding to a stop at Louis’ side. The instant he spots the man outside the door he gasps and yells, “Harry!”

Harry crouches down just in time to catch the boy as he runs to him. His sad frown turns to that beautiful happy grin on a dime and he holds onto Noah as tight as he can.

“Hey bean,” he laughs. “Happy birthday, sweetheart.”

Noah wraps his arms around Harry’s neck and squeezes while Harry carefully picks him up. He giggles and kisses Harry’s cheek, whispering, “My Harry, Daddy said you couldn’t come anymore. I was so sad.”

Tears well up in Harry’s eyes and he shakes his head. “Oh bean, I promised didn’t I? I can only stay for a bit, though.”

At that, Noah gasps and frowns. “No, you gotta stay for having cake, getting presents, meeting my friends. It’s gonna be fun, Daddy got me dinosaur balloons.”

Part of Louis, the awful spiteful part, wants to point out he bought those balloons right before he and his son were practically chased from the parking lot by paparazzi. Somehow, he holds this back.

Harry bites down on his bottom lip and looks over to Louis with hope in his eyes. Louis can’t say no to his son, of course, not on his birthday.

“He can stay just for a little bit, my love. Just long enough to say hello to everyone and give you your present.”

Noah cheers and hugs Harry again. “I knew Daddy was telling stories,” he whispers, so quiet that
Louis has to strain to hear him. “I knew my Harry wouldn’t break a promise.”

That has Louis storming from the room, making a beeline for the kitchen. Zayn raises his eyebrows as Louis passes by and follows him.

“What is that about?” Zayn asks.

Louis wrenches the fridge door open and grabs a beer. “Harry’s here,” he says.

Zayn leans against the fridge once Louis’ shuts it again and stares at him. “Why is he here?”

“Because he promised,” Louis snarks, taking a long sip of his beer. From the kitchen he can hear Harry entertaining Noah and Louis’ younger siblings and it fills him with a strange sort of bitterness. “He promised Noah-god, months ago now-that he would be here for his birthday. I didn’t think he’d actually show up.”

They both go silent and Louis leans against the counter, angrily sipping at his beer. Jay walks in soon after, looking understandably confused. Zayn sighs and runs his hand through his hair.

“You’ll hate me for this, but I really don’t understand why you’re upset,” he admits.

Louis glares at him. “Do I have to spell it out for you? We aren’t together anymore, Zayn, and he’s using my child in an attempt to get back with me.”

“That isn’t what’s happening,” Zayn shoots back. “He isn’t using Noah for anything, we both know that. He promised Noah he’d be here for his birthday and he is. It’s exactly what Harry promised Noah, so why does that upset you?”

“No one should be making promises to him but me,” Louis says, and he knows how stupid that must sound. “I don’t want people lying to him.”

Jay frowns. “Louis, Harry has never lied to Noah. You’re saying he promised to be here for Noah’s birthday and he is, and it’s obvious that’s what Noah wants right now. You brought Harry into your son’s life, no one forced you to do that, and the fact that Harry isn’t just disappearing without a word is a good thing. Besides, the two of you need to talk and you know that.”

Louis groans. “Mum—”

“No,” Jay stops him. “Don’t ruin this for Noah. He’s happy, you and Harry can talk after the party.”

As much as he hates it, Louis knows she’s right. He doesn’t want to ruin Noah’s party, and he and Harry probably should have a talk. All of those drunken voicemails are starting to pile up and Louis would love the space back. Also, he’s getting a bit tired of being back in the days where he has to hide in his room to cry while Noah sleeps.

The party goes off without a hitch and Louis’ house is soon full of excited toddlers looking for dinosaur eggs hidden around the house and spinning Noah around before he stabs a laminated tail on the giant dinosaur Zayn drew out just for the occasion. Louis feels a bit like he’s running a daycare at his own expense once all the parents leave.

Harry, of course, is delighted. The kids treat him like a jungle gym and he seems just as into the games as the little ones are. Normally, Louis would find this terribly endearing. Now-well, Louis still finds it terribly endearing, but that’s not the point. He can’t focus on how much he’d love to walk right over there and kiss Harry when he’s supposed to be angry.
Of course, that all goes completely to shit when Noah starts opening presents.

Most of them are the standard toys any parent may be forced to bring to a party. If Louis’ own experience as a dad is anything to go by, half of them were probably bought on the way to the party and hastily shoved into a bag. Louis and his mum went in together on a tablet, which Noah of course loses his mind over, and Zayn and Perrie bought him little things to go with it.

Harry’s present is last. It’s not much bigger than the other presents, but Louis is still a little concerned Harry might give his son something far too expensive.

“Go on, Bean,” Harry says, nudging Noah’s hand.

Noah beams and rips the wrapping paper off in a flurry of laughter from his friends. The present sits in a plain white box which Noah quickly tears the top off of. Louis stares in complete silence as Noah reaches in and pulls out a child’s size guitar.

The looks on Noah’s face can’t really be described. His eyes are full of wonder as he runs his hands over the polished wood of the guitar, gently plucking a string and gasping at the noise it makes. He looks like Harry’s just made all of his dreams come true and really, he has.

Harry takes the opportunity to say, “Now you can learn to play, yeah? You can be just like Niall someday.”

In that moment it becomes so clear to Louis just how much his son loves Harry. Noah carefully puts the box down and launches himself into Harry’s arms, holding onto him tight. From where Louis stands at the front of the room beside them, he can see Noah squeezing his eyes shut and fisting his hands in Harry’s jumper.

“Thank you,” Noah whispers. “I love the music, Harry, wanna be just like you and my Daddy when I’m big. It’s my very best present ever.”

Harry smiles but Louis can see his eyes are welling up a bit, just like his own. “You’re so welcome, my little bean, I’m so happy you like it. Happy birthday, love.”

Louis wipes at his eyes as discreetly as he can. This is awful. He feels awful knowing how much Noah cares about Harry and knowing this could very well be the last time they see each other. And Christ, the thought of never seeing Harry again himself has him wanting to burst into tears.

It’s just awful seeing the two people he loves more than anything in the world and knowing he’s the one tearing them all apart.

Jay and Perrie start directing all the children towards where Zayn is pulling the cake out while Louis gently puts his hand on Noah’s back.

“Darling,” he says. “I think it’s time for Harry to go.”

Noah pulls away from Harry and stands up, frowning at his father in the process. “But Daddy, Harry has to stay for candles,” Noah whines.

Harry smiles and shakes his head. “Bean, it’s probably best that I go,” he says, standing up from the mess of wrapping paper around him.

Noah looks from Harry to Louis, his face turning red in anger. He stomps his foot on the floor and crosses his arms. “No,” he shouts. “No, Daddy, I don’t want my Harry to go yet! It isn’t fair!”
The sheer amount of anger in his voice shocks Louis a bit. Noah never yells at him, and usually he’d be in an insane amount of trouble for it, but his lower lip is wobbling and he’s just been so upset lately that Louis doesn’t have the heart to scold him.

“Sweetheart-”

Noah starts to cry, full on sobs, and Louis can’t take it. He immediately picks Noah up and holds him close, shushing him quietly.

“Baby, shh,” he murmurs. “Talk to me, tell Daddy what’s wrong.”

Sniffling against Louis’ shoulder, Noah whispers, “I missed my Harry and now he’s gonna be gone forever because you don’t love him. Harry’s not your love anymore, and he’s gonna go away.”

If someone had come up to Louis a year ago and told him his worst fears about relationships had come true, he probably wouldn’t have believed them. He never would’ve believed that he let his guard down long enough to allow for something like this to happen. It has, though. Louis let Noah get attached to Harry and now that it hasn’t worked out he’s broken his baby’s heart. He broke up with Harry. This is all his fault.

Harry clears his throat and gently reaches out to press his fingers to Louis’ waist. “I uh, sorry. Can I talk to you alone?”

Louis nods and rocks Noah around a bit more until he stops crying. “Baby, Harry and I are going to talk about this okay? We’ll figure it out. Let’s go find Zayn, what do you think?”

After Noah is passed off to Zayn and Jay and the cake is postponed, Louis leads Harry back to his room. As soon as he shuts the door, he whirls on Harry.

“You need to explain yourself,” he growls.

Harry runs a hand through his hair and rubs at his eyes. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have come, I know that now.”

“I know but I just,” Harry stops. “Louis, I promised him I’d be here for his birthday. I would never break a promise to him, and I didn’t want to just disappear. He deserves better than that.”

Louis shakes his head and goes to his bed. He sits down and gestures for Harry to sit beside him.

“We can’t do this,” he says, once Harry is settled beside him. “If we’re breaking up you have to stay away, Harry. I can’t deal with these emotions and Noah can’t either.”

“I love you,” Harry replies. “And I’ve missed you both so much even though it’s only been a few days. I don’t want to lose either of you, Louis, and I’m sorry that you don’t trust me anymore. I know that’s my fault.”

Louis shakes his head. “It isn’t that I don’t trust you, Harry, it’s that-when you called me saying those things I felt like I didn’t know who I was talking to. You didn’t want to protect us, you didn’t stick up for us.”

“I know, I’m so sorry Louis,” Harry says, tugging at his fingers. “My mum yelled at me for it, if that makes you feel any better. I fucked up, I just repeated what my management had told me because I was too scared to tell them this isn’t what I want. I’ll fix it, Louis, really I will.”
“I just don’t know if I can ever believe that you mean that.”

Harry nods. “I understand,” he whispers. “I’m trying to learn to be without you, but it’s so hard
Louis. I love you so much, and I love Noah too, as hard as that may be for you to understand or
believe. I’m sorry for showing up and hurting you both again, that’s never what I meant to do. I’m so
sorry.”

Louis wipes at his eyes and breathes out a whispered, “Fuck.”

“I’ll go,” Harry says.

When Harry stands the spot beside Louis suddenly feels so cold. He doesn’t know why he says it,
other than a last ditch effort to fix this.

“I love you too,” Louis whispers. “Not that it matters, but I love you. Part of me will always love
you.”

Harry spins right around and in an instant his expression goes from terrified to hopeful again. “I’d do
anything,” he says, his whispers quickly turning to pleas. “Louis, please, I’ll give it all up. The band,
the tours-everything. Please, if that would fix it-just tell me what to do, I’ll do it.”

Louis blinks up at him, shocked by what he’s saying. “Harry, God no. Never, don’t ever do that for
anyone, do you understand? No one’s worth that.”

And that’s when Harry Styles drops to his knees at Louis’ feet.

“You are,” he says, reaching out and putting his hand on Louis’ knee almost desperately. “You and
Noah both are.”

Louis shakes his head. “Don’t say things like that.”

Don’t say things that aren’t true, his mind whispers.

“I would give it all up,” Harry continues. “I would find something to do, I could write and sell my
songs-I’ve done it before, I still do. I can stick around like it’s normal, like I have a normal job that I
going to in the morning and come back from at night and days off for my boys without people following
us.”

“Harry-”

“I would do anything, Louis, so tell me what you want. Tell me what I have to do for you to want
me back. Do you want me to get out of the spotlight for awhile? I’ll do it. I’ll go into fucking hiding
if I have to, Lou.”

In front of him, Harry is practically crying at this point. Louis reaches out and gently threads his
fingers through Harry’s curls, brushing his thumb along Harry’s ear. It’s a stark contrast to the man
who’d practically told Louis his image was more important than he is. Louis finds himself believing
him, though, believing that Harry is sorry, that he wants to fix things. He wants to believe him, is the
thing, because he wants Harry back.

“Just try, Harry,” Louis whispers. “That’s all I want from you, just to try for us. We deserve that.”

Harry nods his head and quickly says, “You do, Louis, you deserve that. I’m going to fix all of this, I
promise.”
Louis nods back and sighs. “I don’t want you to go,” he whispers.

“Baby, really?” Harry asks.

“I don’t want to lose you,” he admits. “And if you can find some way to make this work, then yes Harry, I want you back. But you aren’t quitting the band for me or anyone other than yourself and the boys, okay?”

Harry practically whimpers and pulls Louis into a tight hug. “Thank you,” he whispers. “I’ll make this work Lou, I’ll do anything to make it work. You won’t regret this. You won’t regret me.”

Louis hugs him back just as tight. “I could never regret you, baby. I could only regret not trying hard enough to keep you.”

Just in time, as usual, there’s a short knock at the door. It soon squeaks open and Noah appears, popping his head into the room.

“Daddy?” he asks. “Not mad with my Harry?”

Louis laughs softly and shakes his head. “No baby, your Harry and I are fine.”

Noah smiles and runs up to the two of them, jumping into Harry’s lap and giggling. “My Daddy and my Harry are love again?”

“We always loved each other, bean,” Harry murmurs, reaching out and fixing Noah’s stray curls. “We just had a little fight, but it’s all better now. Just because your Daddy and I have a fight doesn’t mean we love each other any less, okay?”

“Okay. So, you’re happy again?” Noah asks, looking up at Louis for confirmation.

Louis smiles and leans down to press a kiss to the top of Noah’s head, quickly following it up with a kiss to Harry’s as well. “We’re happy again,” he confirms. “I love you both so much, darling.”

Noah giggles and reaches up to pull Louis down so they’re all sitting on the floor together. Both men hug Noah as he cuddles in close between them, closing his eyes. Louis looks from Harry’s smiling face to the way Noah clutches at his jumper and smiles.

“Happy birthday, sweetheart,” Louis sighs. “How about we cut that cake?”

It isn’t until many, many hours later that Louis’ house is finally empty of all of the children and his family except for himself, Noah, and Harry. Noah has finally fallen asleep in Harry’s arms after keeping them all up for awhile, trying out his brand new guitar. Harry gently takes it from his hands and sets it down before wrapping both arms around the boy.

“He’s completely worn out,” he murmurs.

Louis smiles and nods. “All that running about. Sugar’s finally worn off, poor thing.”

Harry smiles back and flicks his eyes over to the guitar. “Do you think he likes his gift?” He asks,
and Louis could laugh at how genuinely concerned he sounds.

“Love, you’ve spent too much,” Louis admonishes. “But yes, he loves it baby. He’s well on his way
to becoming your backup guitarist.”

Harry grins and shrugs. “Good, I spent a lot of time picking it out. Niall helped me get a good one, I
didn’t want to mess anything up. I know how much he loves music, we can teach him guitar and
piano, he can be our little rock star.”

“I missed you,” Louis blurts out.

“I missed you too,” Harry replies immediately. “Missed both of my boys.”

As if hearing this somehow, Noah moves closer to Harry and sighs against his neck. He has his little
fingers tucked around Harry’s wrist, tangled in the friendship bracelet that’s gone frayed by now.
Louis heart feels so full of love for the two of them he’s sure he could burst at any moment.

“I bought a flat,” Harry says out of nowhere.

Louis laughs and raises his eyebrows. “Love, most people cut their hair or something after a
breakup-they don’t go out and buy a flat.”

Harry shrugs and reaches out, gently running his fingers through Noah’s curls. “Well, I’m not most
people I suppose. It isn’t that big really, nothing like the house we saw. It’s only two bedrooms but
it’s close by, close to my mums as well.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Louis says, but there’s no bite in his tone. If anything, he’s overwhelmingly
fond of the man currently staring at him with those dark green eyes. “Does it make you happy?”

Harry nods. “When you…I mean, I went to Mum’s, because I didn’t have anywhere else, and she
told me to go home. I realized I didn’t have one, Lou, because I let myself get so caught up in this
but then it was just gone and I—”

Harry stops. Louis suddenly feels so terrible. He hadn’t thought about that, about the fact that
Harry’s search for a flat had only come up in dead ends. He really wouldn’t have anywhere else to
go after he was done working in London, and Louis never considered that.

“I need somewhere that’s mine, that’s all,” Harry continues. “Somewhere I can go that’s just mine.”

“I’m sorry,” Louis whispers. “God, Harry, I didn’t even think about that.”

With a sad smile, Harry shrugs his shoulders and waves Louis’ apology away. “Louis, it’s fine.
Space is a normal thing in most relationships, you know. If one good thing came out of this, I finally
settled on a flat.”

“No exactly a normal relationship,” Louis points out.

Harry shakes his head and reaches out with his free hand, pulling Louis close to him. “I wouldn’t
have it any other way.”

“Sap,” Louis declares. “Is it nice, this flat?”

“Yeah, I was hoping you might come over soon,” Harry says. “I figure you and Noah could stay
over now and then, I’m making the second bedroom kid friendly for him and Eva too when she
stays. Well, I mean, we were apart then but I’d hoped…”
Louis shakes his head. “Don’t worry about it,” he whispers.

Harry nods and then says, “There’s a gym, I’m getting terribly out of shape and the drinking certainly hasn’t been helping. There’s also a pool and stuff too, I know you said Noah loves to swim.”

Louis smiles and nods. He can’t help but feel like Harry needs this approval, and so he gives it. “It all sounds lovely, my darling. I missed you so badly, I’m sorry for how I treated you.”

“No,” Harry says, shaking his head and looking down at Noah. “I’m sorry, it’s my fault. I shouldn’t have treated you like I did, spoke to you like that-like you aren’t the most important parts of my life. You are, Louis, both of you are, and I promise that I’m going to take care of both of you. My management has already got lawyers on it, even if there are pictures of Noah they won’t be able to do anything with them without blurring out his face. It doesn’t really matter, though, because you never should’ve been in that position in the first place. I’m so sorry, Louis, I promise it won’t ever happen again.”

Louis moves closer to Harry and rests his head on Harry’s shoulder, reaching out to brush his fingertips through Noah’s messy curls. “I forgive you,” he whispers. “As long as you forgive me for being so rude to you.”

“There’s nothing to forgive you for,” Harry says quickly. “Love, you were only trying to protect Noah, you’re entitled to be upset about something ridiculous like that.”

Sighing, Louis closes his eyes and listens to Harry’s heartbeat, letting the steady rhythm fill his thoughts. “Noah was so upset at the thought of you not coming,” he whispers, hating the memory. “He kept telling me that you promised, that you would never break a promise to him. It’s a horrible feeling, Harry, feeling like I’ve failed my son.”

“You haven’t failed him,” Harry whispers, gently playing with Louis’ hair. “God Louis, you’re the best father I’ve ever met in my life. How could you think that?”

Louis shrugs but refuses to open his eyes. “He loves you, Harry, I don’t think I realized how much. I introduced you to one another, I let you stay here, I told him about us and he got so attached to you and that’s my fault. He really is attached to you Harry, he looks up to you so much, and when you didn’t come back that day or the next I had to tell him you weren’t coming to his birthday I broke his heart and that’s what makes me feel like a failure. He’s already lost a father and I know what it’s like, I know he might blame me for that someday, but I can’t bear the thought of putting him through pain like that again.

“That’s why no one I’ve dated has ever met him before, besides you of course. Not that I’ve ever gotten serious enough with anyone for that to happen, but I always knew that even if I had I couldn’t do that to him. I couldn’t bring someone into Noah’s life that was only temporary, but I did. I have, haven’t I? Because I was so stupid, I let myself believe that you weren’t temporary.”

The fingers in his hair go still for a moment and Louis can hear the way Harry’s breathing stutters a bit. “I’m not temporary,” he says, sounding so incredibly sure of that fact. “You and I, Louis, have something I’ve never felt with anyone before in my life. I’ve been in relationships that lasted years but never felt as loved and happy and safe as you make me feel. It was a fight, Lou, a big fight yeah, but still a fight. Even if something happened and we did for some reason break up, really break up, I would never just bail out of Noah’s life completely without so much as a goodbye. I hope that you see that now. Noah and I have a relationship outside of you, if that makes any sense?”

Louis frowns and shrugs and Harry continues. “What I’m trying to say is I don’t just tolerate him
because I’m dating his father, I care about him because he’s possibly the most amazing kid I’ve ever met in my life. I don’t want Noah to hurt or to hate me, or you for that matter. The thought of not showing up today after promising him for so long that I would, it was awful because I knew how upset he would be. Noah deserves better than someone who bails out when things get tough. He deserves the best and so do you, and I’m trying so hard to be that for you both. You’re all I want, Louis, this right here is all I have ever wanted.

“You can’t see the future, you can’t protect Noah from ever being hurt, that’s just part of life. There are going to be times you can’t protect him, but I want you to know that no matter what I’m going to be right here with you protecting him too. I won’t leave you like Luke did, I would never leave my boys that way.”

Louis smiles softly and opens his eyes so he can reach up and take Harry’s hand. He pulls it down where he can see, gently running his hands over the little cross tattoo. “You know I love that,” he says.

“Love what?” Harry asks, though Louis knows that he knows.

“When you call us your boys. It’s sweet. You’re very sweet, Harold, do you know that?”

Harry chuckles and intertwines their fingers. “I have to be sweet to you,” he teases. “We can’t have my mum finding out I’m not, she was ready to kill me when she found out why we were really fighting.”

Louis grins. “Your mum’s so lovely, that must be why.”

“Why what?”

“Why you’re so lovely,” Louis clarifies.

“I’ll be sure to let her know you think that,” Harry laughs.

As Harry’s laughter fades away, Louis closes his eyes again. It’s quiet in the house, so quiet he can clearly hear both Harry’s heartbeat as well as Noah’s steady breathing. They lay together that way for god knows how long before Louis feels brave enough to speak again.

“I’m so scared,” he whispers.

Harry squeezes their fingers together. “Of what?”

“Being a bad father,” Louis reveals. “I spend so much time being scared of it that I hardly take a step back. I’ve done quite well, haven’t I?”

Harry moves their hands, gently tilting Louis’ chin up so he’ll open his eyes. When Louis does, he finds his boyfriend staring at him in what can only be described as awe. He slowly shakes his head and brushes his thumb over Louis’ cheekbone when he speaks.

“Darling, you’ve done wonderfully. You’re the most wonderful person I have ever met and I love you so much. I don’t understand how you’ve done this all alone, raised Noah so wonderfully, but you have and you should be proud of that. I’m proud of you.”

Louis smiles, scrunching his nose up a bit because he knows Harry loves it. “You’re a sap, Harry Styles.”

“I’m your sap,” Harry replies, leaning down just enough for a quick kiss.
Only moments later, Louis finds himself laying back against Harry’s chest. He deserves a nap, he thinks as his eyes slowly drift closed. Besides, Harry’s back now and as much as Louis would hate to admit it, he hasn’t been sleeping well without him. The world won’t end if Louis falls asleep just for a moment, wrapped up between his two favorite boys.

Louis smiles as he slowly begins to drift out of consciousness. His boys. It does have a nice ring to it.

“Whoa!” Noah shouts as he runs into the building ahead of Harry and Louis, quite obviously startling everyone else in the lobby. He skids to a stop, his small light up shoes reflecting on the marble floors. “My Harry, you did it?”

Harry laughs and walks to him, scooping the boy up into his arms. “What did I do, bean?”

“Got a lift, you promise me!” Noah says, pointing towards the lifts on the far end of the lobby. “So cool Harry’s gotta house here, Daddy.”

Louis smiles and gently bumps into Harry’s shoulder. “Well, Harry’s pretty lame so the flat has to make up for it,” he teases.

Noah shakes his head and pats Harry’s shoulder. “Do not listen to Daddy, just jealous ’cause we don’t got a lift at our house.”

Harry smiles and ignores when Louis laughs at the two of them. “I think you’re right about that, little bean. C’mon, let’s head up yeah? You can press the button and all.”

And Noah does just that, slamming down on the button Harry shows him, as well as the one beside it. Luckily they’re the only ones inside, so only Louis is around to laugh about it. Noah obviously doesn’t see what’s so funny, he’s more preoccupied with gasping at how fast the lift takes them up to Harry’s floor. Louis watches on with a smile, watching the way Noah looks at Harry like he’s given him the whole world with just a lift.

The flat Harry’s bought is actually quite lovely, Louis decides, much better than the house they saw for sure. He’s had someone decorate it so it feels more like a home, and it’s not so giant that he feels like letting Noah run about would be akin to letting him run wild in a museum. Of course Noah does just that, scrambling from Harry’s arms as soon as the door opens and shouting that he’s going to explore.

The entryway leads into a living room, but everything is open so it feels more like one big room, unlike Louis’ home which is noticeably dated and cut up. The large living room is home to floor to ceiling windows and two rather large gray couches that look too comfortable for words. There’s an inordinate amount of throw blankets, Louis notices, and he supposes that’s just Harry’s way of ensuring there will be a lot of cuddling going on. Behind the living room is a dining room with a large table, and then the absolutely massive kitchen that already looks used.

“Well?” Harry asks, holding his hands together behind his back. He’s so obviously looking for Louis’ approval it’s adorable.

Louis smiles. “It’s cozy,” he replies.”
Harry beams and shrugs. “I want it to feel like home, it’s been awhile since I’ve had one. Might’ve gone a bit overboard on the throw blankets, but I like it.”

Just as Louis is about to tease him for that, Noah shouts, “Oh my gosh!”

“That’d be the dinosaur then,” Harry says cryptically.

Louis frowns, already walking towards the sound of his son’s voice down the hall. “What are you on about?”

Harry says nothing, just motions for him to keep walking, so he does. The hall has a few doors, but one is open with all of the lights on, so Louis heads there. This is where he finds Noah sitting on the floor next to an absolutely giant stuffed dinosaur in the corner.

“Harold,” Louis sighs.

“Don’t start,” Harry says, coming up behind him and putting his hands on Louis’ hips. “It wasn’t even that expensive, I got on sale you’d be proud of me. Besides, I want him to feel at home, like I said.”

Noah giggles, jumping to his feet again to wrap his arms around the dinosaur’s neck. It’s a little taller than he is, and he obviously loves it. “It’s the best, Harry!” he says. “Hank loves it. And I gotta big bed just for me.”

“Noah, Harold,” Louis sighs.

“Just for you little one,” Harry confirms. “So when you stay over you’ll have plenty of room to lay around.”

Noah beams at him and then looks to Louis. “So cool. It’s nice, right Daddy?”

“Very nice,” Louis confirms.

The room isn’t outwardly made for a child, it could just as easily be a guest room, but Louis sees the little things. The dinosaur, for one, but there’s also a bookshelf in one corner filled with books Noah would love, a night light plugged in by the bed so Noah isn’t scared at night, and a bed that could easily fit two people but has a little set of wooden stairs sitting at one side so Noah can climb up easily. If Louis isn’t mistaken, he also spots the little guards he uses for Noah’s bed tucked underneath it.

“Well, you’ve gone all out haven’t you?” Louis asks.

Harry squeezes his hands where they still sit on Louis’ hips and blushes. “I just wanted him to like it, that’s all. It’s important to me.”

Louis smiles. “You’re ridiculous.”

“I love you,” Harry replies, as always.

Louis shakes his head, turning his attention back to his son who is currently dumping everything in his backpack onto the bed. “Noah love, what do we say to Harry?”

“Thank you!” Noah shouts, remembering himself. He jumps off the bed and runs for Harry, throwing his arms around both of them. “So nice Harry, I love it.”

Harry smiles and reaches down to hug Noah back. “You’re welcome, love. I hoped you’d like it.”

While Louis watches, Harry picks Noah up and settles the boy on his hip. Noah smiles at him and
sends, “You’re my best friend, Harry.”

The smile on Harry’s face is so wide that Louis is sure it has to hurt. He kisses Noah’s cheek and says, “You’re my best friend too, little bean. Come on love, you and I are going to make tea for Daddy.”

Louis raises his eyebrows, following behind the both of them as they walk out into the kitchen. “Excuse me?” he calls.

Harry points towards the couch and pulls his most serious face. “Sit down, Louis Tomlinson,” he orders. “Noah and I have this handled.”

“I can help-”

“We don’t need help,” Noah interrupts, looking just as serious as Harry does. “My Harry’s got it.”

Louis holds his hands up in defeat and does as he’s told, watching on as Harry and Noah head into the kitchen with determined looks on their faces.

It takes Noah all of five minutes to create a mess of Harry’s kitchen. It’s hilarious though, at least Harry thinks so. Louis watched on from the couch, horrified, as Noah accidentally spilled flour everywhere.

Harry refuses to let Louis help though, and after that minor incident Noah is a bit more careful with the measuring cup. Of course, he’s extremely excited to help Harry, especially when he reveals they’re making spaghetti. Louis teases him about owning a pasta maker, but Harry chooses to ignore him.

They make the pasta together, Noah seemingly amazed by how the dough turns into noodles. Harry serves it all on his giant dining room table that he hasn’t yet used and Louis praises both of them for it. Of course, there’s a bit of teasing in his tone but Harry will take it.

After dinner, the three of them settle into the couch together to watch a movie. Noah takes up most of it, spread out on his stomach with his head pillowed on his arms. Harry finds he doesn’t really mind so much, considering this gives him the excuse to make Louis practically sit in his lap.

The first movie ends with Louis carefully carrying Noah to bed with Harry beside him. Apparently the guards he spent almost twenty minutes picking out on the phone with Gemma are perfect, and they even earn him a kiss.

“It’s kind of hot,” Louis mutters as he slowly pushes Harry from the room and towards his own.

“Yeah?”

Louis nods. “Stupid, huh? That I find it hot how much you care.”

Harry smiles. “I’ll take it.”

Hours later, hours later Harry thinks with a smug smile, he and Louis have thoroughly broken in his
new bed.

Louis now lays on Harry’s chest, fast asleep with one hand resting on Harry’s neck. Really, Harry should probably try to sleep as well. Noah is going have them both up at the crack of dawn and it’s already nearing three in the morning. He can’t, though, because there’s something weighing on his mind.

“Louis,” Harry whispers, shaking Louis’ shoulder. “Louis, wake up. I want to talk to you.”

Louis groans and smacks his hand around a bit until he lands on Harry’s arm. “Harry Styles, something better be on fire if you’re waking me up right now.”

Harry smiles and reaches out, tangling his fingers in Louis’ hair. “Love, I’ve had an idea.”

Louis groans and rolls off of Harry, pulling himself away and throwing a pillow over his head. “Fuck off with your ideas,” he grumbles, muffled a bit by the pillow.

Laughing, Harry moves so he’s laying down beside Louis, facing the pillow where he thinks Louis’ face probably is. “We’re spending Christmas apart,” he whispers.

“Only because I need a break from you,” comes the reply.

“We can spend New Year’s together, though,” Harry continues. “In New York. Louis, love, listen to me.”

Slowly, the pillow lifts off of Louis’ head and he stares out at Harry with a grumpy frown. “What are you on about?” he demands.

Harry reaches out and pushes the pillow off onto the floor. “We’re performing for New Year’s Eve in Times Square, Louis, and I want you to come with me. Please.”

Louis sighs and shakes his head. “Noah-”

“Can come too, I’ve already planned it out and everything,” Harry is quick to interrupt. “It should only take a couple of weeks to get him a passport, we’ll be back in time for him to get back to school, and I’ll have extra security just for him. I want my boys with me there, Louis, there’s so many things I want to do. I want to take you both ice skating, take Noah to that museum with the even bigger dinosaur, go to Central Park, maybe a huge candy store, and I want to kiss you at midnight. It’s supposed to be good luck you know, kissing the one you love at midnight on New Year’s Eve. That’s how I want to start it out, I want to spend my New Year with the two people I love more than anything else in this world.”

Louis looks absolutely breathless for a moment. He opens his mouth to speak but promptly closes it again. Harry waits on baited breath as Louis shakes his head and reaches out, gently tracing Harry’s cheekbones with the tips of his fingers.

“It’d be his first plane ride,” he says softly, but Harry knows his resolve is crumbling. “Noah might be scared.”

Harry shakes his head. “I’ll be there every moment holding his hand.”

“It’s expensive,” Louis points out.

“It can be your Christmas present if you like,” Harry says, though it almost physically pains him to give up being able to spoil his boyfriend for Christmas. “I’ll pay for everything, take you out like you
deserve.”

Louis sighs. “Make it my birthday present as well and you have a deal.”

Harry beams. After all, just because Louis said no Christmas or birthday presents doesn’t mean he can’t spoil Louis rotten in New York.

“Thank you,” Harry whispers, surging forward to kiss Louis. “God, Lou, I’m so excited. You’re going to love it, I’ll make sure you both love it.”

Louis tilts his head down so Harry’s lips land on his forehead. He reaches out and gently touches Harry’s chest, whispering, “Sometimes I feel like I don’t deserve you.”

“I love you,” Harry replies. “I love you more than anything, Louis. We deserve one another, we spent long enough chasing and being hurt by the wrong people.”

“Too long,” Louis agrees. “I’ve never spent New Year’s with anyone.”

Harry laughs. “Me neither. Unless you count a beard, I’ve definitely spent New Year’s with a beard before. Here’s hoping you’re a better kisser.”

Louis gently slaps his chest and rolls his eyes. “You’re an idiot. Go to sleep, love, Noah’s going to have us up as early as he can.”

Harry smiles and shuts his eyes, pulling Louis so he’s back to laying on his chest. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Chapter End Notes

One day I will write smut. Today is not that day.

In other news, I’d originally planned to get this chapter out much earlier than I did but it didn't happen, so we're all just going to have to be okay with a New Year's storyline many, many days after New Year's ;) Until then, I'll leave you with this, and the knowledge that every time I spell check these chapters it is a fight between myself and my word processor trying to improve poor Noah's grammar. Leave my baby alone!!

playlist
Christmas for Louis is mostly a blur of wrapping paper, screaming children, and the copious amounts of tea he has to drink just to keep his eyes open.

Noah, Ernest, and Doris take it upon themselves to wake the entire house up at the crack of dawn, running through the halls and yelling that Santa’s been here. Louis is then led, regrettably, from the comfortable bed in the guest room to the living room to watch as the floor is covered in wrapping paper. Of course, Noah is completely spoiled by everyone around them, but it makes Louis smile. He loves seeing his baby happy.

Just as Noah opens his very last present and Louis has finished opening his own, his mum appears from nowhere with two more.

“Harry sent them along,” she says with a smile. “He told me you’d be upset if he gave them to you himself, I promised to keep them safe for a bit.”

They had agreed no presents, Louis and Harry. After all, in only a few days Louis and Noah will be flying out with Harry to New York, that’s present enough. However, it obviously didn’t stop him.

“Goddammit Harold,” Louis sighs.

Noah rips into his present and grins when he finds a box inside along with an envelope containing his very own string bracelet. It’s practically an exact replica of Harry’s, just smaller to fit Noah’s wrist. Louis helps his son put it on, tying it tightly while Noah practically shakes with excitement.

“It’s just like my Harry’s,” he says. “He made it just for me, Daddy.”

Louis smiles and nods. “He did, baby. Now you’re matching, aren’t you?”

Noah nods and then reaches for the box, pulling the top off to reveal a hat inside, just like the one he stole from Harry all those months ago. Noah gasps and shoves it on his head, looking up at Louis with a bright grin.

“How do I look cool, Daddy?”
“The coolest, lad,” Louis agrees.

Noah giggles and reaches out to grab Louis’ present, putting it in his father’s lap. “Open yours, Daddy, see what my Harry gets you! We gotta call and say Happy Christmas today. I miss him a lot.”

The words hit Louis hard. He misses Harry too, it’s been weeks since they’ve seen each other last. Harry had to go away for promotion with the other boys for a bit at the beginning of the month. Louis had almost forgotten what it was like to be alone.

Louis puts a smile on for Noah and kisses his son’s forehead. “I miss him too, darling. I have a surprise for you later on.”

“Is my Harry coming?” Noah gasps.

“No love,” Louis chuckles. “He’s spending time with his family today. We’ll talk about the surprise later on, yeah? Together. Here, help me open this.”

Noah nods and helps Louis rip into his present. Louis is almost relieved to find it’s simply a jumper, nothing incredibly outrageous. Then again, the designer has a name Louis can hardly pronounce, but it’s so soft and just the right shade of blue that Louis finds he almost doesn’t care.

*I know we said no presents*, the small card tucked into the box reads. *But I saw this and could only think of how lovely you would look in it. Don’t be too mad.*

*All my love always xx*

“Oh, that’s lovely isn’t it?” Jay comments, taking a seat beside Louis.

Noah nods, tilting hat back a bit on his head. “My Harry’s got good presents. He’s the best to me and my Daddy.”

Jay smiles over her tea and eyes Louis thoughtfully. “Well, someone’s quite smitten with him,” she says.

Louis shrugs and runs his hands over the jumper once more. “They’re a little fond of one another,” he replies, a complete understatement.

Jay’s smile just grows. She reaches out to squeeze Louis’ shoulder and Louis knows she’s happy he’s finally gotten it right.

Later on, once everyone has settled down and everyone is either off playing with their new presents or napping, Louis decides to take Noah aside for that talk.

“Is it my surprise?” Noah asks once Louis has led him to sit on the sofa together.

Louis smiles. “Well, love, Harry and I have decided that since we didn’t get to spend Christmas together that we might spend New Year’s together instead. What do you think?”

Noah’s eyes light up. “Yes! I love bein’ with my Daddy and my Harry.”

“But we’re going on a trip, love,” Louis continues. “On a plane ride, it’s pretty far away, and you’ve never been on a plane before. Are you okay with that?”

Noah nods quickly, not letting Louis try to talk him out of this for even a second. “Yes, I wanna go super bad Daddy. Where we flyin’ to?”
Louis smiles. “New York City, love. Do you know where that is?”

“No,” Noah says, his eyebrows furrowing in thought. “Hear it in music a lot, though. Is there lots of music there, Daddy?”

“Tons of music, baby,” Louis promises. “We’re going with Harry, Liam, and Niall and they’re going to be singing there. There’s tons of other fun stuff we’re going to do though, fun things just you, me, and Harry. Does that sound nice?”

Noah giggles and nods, reaching out to hug Louis. “I’m excited, Daddy. I gotta tell everybody—I’ve never even been in a plane before!”

“It’s exciting love,” Louis agrees. “Go on and tell everyone, and when you get back we can call Harry.”

With an excited gasp, Noah climbs off of the sofa and starts running across the house, yelling for Jay as he goes.

It’s far busier in the airport than Louis had expected to be. They have to practically fight their way through the doors, Noah carrying Hank in one hand and the other firmly clasped in Louis’.

“Whoa,” he breathes as they finally get inside and past the crowds. “It’s so cool here, Daddy.”

Louis laughs and squeezes Noah’s hand. “This is just where we check in love, we haven’t even seen planes yet.”

“Louis!” A voice shouts from somewhere across the room. Alberto waves to them and Louis sighs in relief. He really isn’t sure where he’s supposed to be, honestly, just that he was meant to meet up with Alberto almost twenty minutes ago. Traffic was a bit hectic, to say the least.

Alberto walks up to them, taking Noah’s suitcase from Louis with ease. “Right on time, both of you,” he says. “Hey Noah, how are you kid?”

“I’m good,” Noah chirps. “Goin’ on a plane today with my Harry and my Daddy.”

The other man grins and starts to gently nudge Louis towards the direction they’re supposed to be going. “That’s exciting,” he says, sounding earnest. “Have you ever been on a plane before?”

Noah shakes his head. “No, but it’s okay because my Harry talks to me on the phone and says I don’t even have to be scared. It’s kinda little scary, though.”

“Harry’s absolutely right,” Alberto agrees. “There’s nothing to be scared of, it’ll be fun. You’ll see, those boys always make it fun.”

It’s been awhile since Louis’s flown last, but it certainly was nowhere near as complicated as it is with Noah. Of course, he’s carrying about a thousand things, and he’s very reluctant to let Hank go through the machine—all the while, Louis tries to juggle their passports and make sure Noah gets through alright.

“Jesus, what a mess,” he sighs, once they’ve finally made it through and created an absolute mess of the security check.

“Hank!” Noah yells as Louis hands his dinosaur back. “You went on a ride, I saw you. Did you
Louis smiles and Alberto chuckles at the boy. He helps Louis get everything back together and takes a bag from Louis before pointing them down the hall. “C’mon lads, plane’s this way.”

“Is my Harry on the plane?” Noah asks, skipping along beside Louis.

“No yet love, but he’ll be here any minute I’m sure,” Louis replies.

The three of them are scheduled to arrive together, Harry, Liam and Niall. Apparently, their management arranged for paparazzi to meet them there, Louis and Harry thought it’d be wise to keep Noah out of it all. Instead, Louis and his son stayed the night in a hotel that Harry paid for, not without a fight of course, and have yet to see him.

It’s been weeks, Louis thinks as they walk through the airport terminal. He’s missed Harry so much it almost hurts to think about.

They make it to the terminal where the plane is waiting, but aren’t allowed on just yet. Alberto explains that they still have to finish checking it or something, and with that leaves the two of them to sit while he heads out to meet the boys.

“Whoa,” Noah gasps, pressing himself up against the window to look outside. “It’s giant, Daddy! How can it fly?”

Louis smiles and shrugs. “I hardly know, love. It’s a very good question, though.”

“So cool we go on a plane,” Noah says, quietly. “Can’t wait to fly and to see my Harry.”

“I’m excited too, love,” Louis tells him.

On cue, there’s a commotion behind them that Louis knows can only be attributed to the band and their entourage of people. Noah whirls away from the window and gasps, and before Louis can stop him he’s running across the terminal as fast as he can.

“Noah,” Louis calls, jumping to his feet, but it’s too late. Harry has rounded the corner and Noah is jumping at him. Luckily, Harry manages to catch him despite all of the bags he’s holding on to. He wraps his arms around Noah's back and spins him around a bit, laughing against the boy's neck.

“Harry!” Noah squeals.

“Noah,” Harry laughs back, dropping his bags so he can hug the boy better. “I missed you so much, bean.”

Noah giggles and kisses Harry’s cheek. “Missed you too, my Harry, I missed you tons.”

Harry smiles and pulls Noah up a bit further so it’s easier to carry him. Niall scoops the bags up for him and elbows Louis slightly as he walks back.

“Good to see you, lad,” he says. “Harry’s been absolutely annoying lately, wouldn’t shut up about how much he missed you both.

“Stop telling lies,” Harry says as he approaches. He reaches out and wraps an arm around Louis’ waist, tugging him close. “Hello, love.”

It feels so right, Louis thinks as he leans up to kiss Harry. Being without Harry for so long has just enforced how much Louis leans on him, how much he loves and needs him. When Harry’s gone,
Louis almost feels like he’s missing a piece of himself.

And yes, he realizes how sappy that sounds, but he doesn’t care. He’s in love, he’s allowed to be sappy.

Harry kisses him back enthusiastically, pulling Louis in by the small of his back while Noah shouts Ew! at the both of them.

“Hey, baby,” Louis whispers when they pull away.

Harry grins and rests his forehead against Louis’. “Missed you,” he sighs, reaching up to run his thumb over Louis’ jawbone. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Louis promises.

Of course, their moment can only last so long before Noah interrupts. He waves his hand around a bit until Louis and Harry pull apart, at which point he practically shoves it into Harry’s face.

“Look,” he says, insistent as ever. “I got my present on!”

Harry laughs and moves his hand from Louis’ neck to lift it up as well, showing off his own bracelet.

“Now we’re matching, aren’t we?”

Noah nods and grins at Harry. “Uh huh, we’re best friends for real now.”

“We’re best friends no matter what bean, even without the bracelets,” Harry promises. “Now come on boys, we have a plane to catch.”

Louis rolls his eyes fondly. “I don’t think it’s going to leave without you, popstar,” he teases.

“It just might,” Harry jokes.

Smirking, Louis moves to grab his and Noah’s bags again but is stopped short when Liam sweeps in beside him.

“I can’t get some too, Lou,” he says.

“Thank you, Prince Charming,” Louis laughs. “Take notes, Harold, Liam is a proper gentleman.”

As usual, Liam goes bright red at the compliment and shrugs his shoulder. “Shut up,” he mutters, swinging Louis’ bag over one shoulder while Louis takes charge of Noah’s.

“Liam,” Noah says, reaching out to pat Liam’s shoulder. “My Harry got me a guitar for my birthday and I’m learnin’ it and then I can be in a band with you and Niall too!”

“Yeah?” Liam asks, sounding genuinely interested in Noah’s babbling. “You know, we’ve been thinking about getting a replacement for Harry for a couple of months now. I think you might be just the lad for the job with those curls.”

Harry gasps out an affronted Hey! and Noah bursts into laughter. He pats Harry’s cheek and shakes his head before giggling, “It’s okay my Harry, you can still come and see us sing!”

Niall throws his head back and cackles. If everyone in the terminal wasn’t watching them before, they definitely are now. Harry, as if sensing this somehow, tightens his arm a bit around Noah and reaches out with his other one to hold Louis by the waist. He gently nudges Louis in the direction of the plane and that’s how they board; Liam with Louis’ bags in hand, Niall laughing so hard that he
can hardly breathe, and Harry rolling his eyes at the both of them.

Sometimes, Louis thinks, they act more like brothers than a band.

As soon as they step onto the plane, Noah scrambles out of Harry’s arms. He’s the first one in, walking into the center of the giant plane and looking around in awe. “Whoa,” he gasps. “Daddy, it’s even huger inside! Where do I sit?”

“Anywhere you like,” Harry says. “But you’ll want to sit next to Daddy when we take off, won’t you?”

Noah nods and makes a beeline for one of the little cluster of seats. There are two by the window and one directly across, which he points Harry to.

“I sit here,” he announces, putting Hank down in the seat closest to the window. “Daddy sits next to me and my Harry can sit across.”

“You heard the man,” Niall says, slapping Harry on the back as he makes his way to his own seat.

Noah smiles and nods. “I’m the boss,” he says, before seemingly thinking it over for a moment. “Well, Daddy’s the boss, but then me.”

“Sounds like you’ve got it all figured out, love,” Louis teases. “Sit down, yeah? We’re taking off soon.”

Noah nods and sits down beside Hank, bouncing up on his knees to get a better look outside the window. While he watches in awe as planes take off, Harry moves closer to Louis and smiles.

“You’re wearing my present too,” he says, reaching out to gently touch the hem of the jumper.

Louis shrugs as if he hadn’t agonized for twenty minutes this morning over what to wear. “Cold in New York, innit,” he says casually. “We said no presents, Harold.”

Harry at least has the decency to look a bit shamed by that. He bites down on his lower lip and moves his hand further down a bit before whispering, “But you look so lovely in it, I knew you would. Can you blame me.”

“Absolutely,” Louis says. “Go on and kiss me popstar, I feel terribly neglected.”

Without wasting a moment, Harry happily obliges him. He pulls Louis closer by the waist, his cold fingertips slipping underneath the warm knit of Louis’ jumper. Louis sighs happily and reaches out as well, just wanting to feel his boyfriend after so long.

“I missed you,” Harry whispers, moving his lips to Louis’ forehead. “I hate being away from you, even if it’s not for long. Feels like an eternity when you aren’t here with me.”

Louis smiles and shakes his head. “Popstar,” he teases. “Those are positively shit lyrics, try again.”

Harry smiles and presses his lips to Louis’ skin, whispering in his ear, “I’m missing half of me when we’re apart.”

“Better,” Louis concedes. “We’ll work on it.”

“Alright lovebirds,” Niall calls. “Let’s break it up, we have to leave sometime today!”

Behind them, Louis sees Noah shake his head. “They kiss all the time,” he says to Niall and Liam.
“It’s yucky, but they’re in love I know.”

“You’re a brave lad to put up with all that,” Niall says, faking sincerity.

Louis rolls his eyes and finally pulls away from Harry to sit down beside Noah. His son smiles up at him, his arms wrapped tightly around Hank.

“Daddy, are you excited?”

“I am,” Louis says, reaching out to fix Noah’s hair. “You’re a mess, love, how do you have something on your jumper already?”

Noah shrugs and grins that smile that makes Louis’ heart warm. “Dunno. It’s a vacation, my Daddy.”

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean you can run around all messy,” Louis laughs. “People are going to think you’ve got an awful father.”

Noah shakes his head and reaches out to hug Louis around the waist. “You’re the best,” he says. “I love you.”

Louis smiles and hugs him back. “I love you too, baby. Let’s buckle our seatbelts now, yeah? We’re taking off soon.”

While Noah fusses with the buckle on his seatbelt, Louis turns to face Harry across from him. He’s smiling that creepy smile of his, the one that makes him look a bit insane, but that Louis loves so much.

“What are you looking at, popstar?” Louis asks.

Harry shakes his head. “Nothing,” he says. “Just missed you.”

Before Louis can reply to this, the pilot appears and starts running through the normal speech about keeping their seatbelts buckled. Noah listens to all of it with wide eyes, nodding his head along with everything the man says. Louis smiles and reaches out to gently smooth the boy’s curls out over his forehead fondly.

The first time the plane moves, Noah gasps. He reaches out and grabs Louis’ hand, squeezing it tightly.

“Hey,” Louis soothes. “It’s okay, baby. I’m right here, I would never let anything bad happen to you.”

Noah nods, but he’s still swinging his legs around and tapping his fingers nervously. Harry looks concerned, but doesn’t say anything, which Louis almost thinks is better. If they don’t make a big deal out of it, maybe Noah won’t worry so much.

As the plane picks up speed, Noah’s grip on Louis tightens. Before Louis can move to comfort him, they’re taking off. Noah gasps loudly and whispers, “Whoa!” as the ground slowly starts to disappear underneath them.

“Oh my gosh,” Noah says, shaking Louis’ arm. “Daddy! We’re flyin’, do you see it?”

“I see, darling,” Louis says, leaning over to watch with his son as they pass clouds.

Noah smiles. “So cool,” he says. “I love it, Daddy, love flyin’. Not even that scary.”
Louis smiles. “No?”

“Nu-uh,” Noah replies quickly. “’Cause I got my Daddy and my Harry here to protect me.”

Across from them, Harry’s nervous expression quickly turns into a grin. Louis squeezes Noah’s hand and smiles at Harry as he watches both of them; Noah incredibly amazed by the fact that they’re flying, and Louis, almost shock by how in love he is.

Almost eight hours later, Harry walks off the plane at JFK with Noah sleeping soundly in his arms. After spending quite a long time just staring out the window, Noah had taken his guitar out of his bag and moving to practice with Niall. Harry took his seat then, letting Louis cuddle and fall asleep laying against his chest for a few hours.

It always makes Harry feel bad, seeing how tired Louis is after he’s been away for awhile. As much as Louis protests it, Harry knows how hard it is for him alone. It makes Harry feel useless, he hates that he can’t always be where his boys are, that he can’t always be there to help like he promised Louis he would be.

Towards the end of the flight, Noah had passed out completely in Harry’s arms while Louis worked on his laptop beside them. The landing was a little bumpy, but Noah hardly even stirred. He hadn’t even woken up when Harry had scooped him up in his arms and wrapped him in a blanket to fight the cold.

“Christ,” Louis mutters as they step out into the cold. “I haven’t been to New York in ages, s’bloody cold.”

Harry smiles, carefully pulling the blanket tighter around Noah to block his face from the wind. “Good thing you’ve got that jumper, huh?” he teases.

“Fuck off,” Louis laughs.

Paparazzi are waiting for them as they walk out, but the band’s body guards keep them back for Noah’s sake. Niall and Liam also take it upon themselves to walk closes to the cameras, keeping Harry and Louis away. Either way, Noah is completely covered by the blanket so the flashes don’t disturb him. Louis holds onto Harry’s hand as tight as he can and Harry squeezes back.

Neither of them mention it as they get into the back of a car, but Louis doesn’t look too concerned.

“Daddy,” Noah mumbles while Louis carefully buckles him up. He blinks his eyes open softly and pouts. “Are we here now?”

Louis smiles and kisses Noah’s forehead. “We are, love. Go back to sleep for now, okay?”

Without protest, Noah closes his eyes and leans over against Harry’s side. He carefully tugs his blanket up to his chin and buries his face against Harry’s ribs. Only a moment later, he’s back to his soft, snuffling snores.

Harry smiles and reaches out, gently running his hand through Noah’s curls, brushing his thumb across the boy’s temple. “I’m so excited,” he sighs. “I’ve missed you both so badly, spending time with you makes me happier than anything else.”

Careful not to disturb the sleeping boy, Louis leans over Noah to rest his head on Harry’s shoulder.
“You make us happy too, love. I love you.”

Their car drives practically silent through the night, the driver keeping the radio down for Noah’s sake. Harry stares out the window for awhile, admiring the way the city sparkles at night. It’s something he would never be able to get used to, he’s sure of that.

One day, he thinks whilst still brushing through Noah’s curls, he wants to buy a flat here. Something just big enough for the three of them, close to the things Noah and Louis would both like. They could visit for holidays, maybe in the summers when Noah’s not in school. There’s hardly enough time in these four days to do everything Harry wants to, so really it’s a logical investment. He knows Louis probably wouldn’t think of it that way.

While Noah sleeps soundly against him and Louis rests, Harry starts looking through his emails. They have rehearsals tomorrow morning, but after that his assistant has confirmed he has the entire day to spend with just Noah and Louis. After that he finds an email from his publicist that was sent only minutes ago.

Didn’t I say they were good for your image? is all it says, followed by a link.

Harry clicks and soon finds himself on the Daily Mail, of all places, looking at an article that describes him using words like loving and perfect. Harry raises his eyebrows in shock. It’s been quite a long time since he’s seen anything positive about himself in the press, especially from a shitty site like this.

Included in the article is a grainy video someone shot at the airport of Noah running at him and Harry swinging him around in his arms. It’s only ten seconds long but is followed by pictures, apparently from the same person, of him holding Noah and kissing Louis, and updated with pictures of them leaving JFK. As Harry suspected, Noah is nothing more than a lump underneath his blue polka dot blanket, his little socked feet that are hooked around Harry’s hips being the only part of him showing.

The article is weirdly nice, talking about Louis and Harry’s relationship and their obvious love for one another. It makes Harry smile for a moment, which is something he’s sure he’s never done before when reading an article about himself.

Well, besides Louis’ of course, but he doesn’t think that counts.

Spurred on by this, Harry posts a picture of the thee of them to his instagram. Niall had taken it earlier, when the three of them were squeezed into two seats. Noah is laying against Harry’s chest and Louis has his laptop out, showing Harry something he’s been working on.

Harry captions it with three simple hearts, one green between two blue, and tags Louis in it.

“We’re quite cute together,” Louis mumbles groggily.

Harry grins and nods. “We’re perfect together,” he says.

Their hotel is just off of Times Square, something Harry resents. He doesn’t like being in such a busy area, but he doesn’t get much of a choice when it comes to band things like this. When he’s by himself he’s free to stay in as many quieter hotels as he wants, or just rent someplace out for a few days which is what he normally does. Luckily, no one seems to have noticed they’ve arrived just yet, and they get inside with no problem.

“Poor love’s absolutely exhausted,” Louis sighs, gently moving the blanket off of Noah’s face once they’re safely in the warm lobby. “Jet lag’s going to make him grumpy.”
Harry frowns and looks down at the sleeping boy in his arms, holding tightly to his arms even as he dreams. “After we get something to eat, we can all go to bed early. It’ll be okay, it evens out at some point.”

Louis smiles at Harry’s words and reaches out to gently move one of Noah’s stray curls before kissing his sleep warm cheek. Then he says, “If he wakes up at 3 am, it’s your problem Harold.”

Harry laughs and kisses the top of Noah’s head. “Don’t even worry about it.”

Someone comes to take all of their bags, including Niall’s and Liam’s before they head out to some party. Technically, Harry was invited along as well, but he’d much rather spend the night in with his boys than spend time with socialites who will no doubt be trying to sleep with Niall.

They’re at the lifts when a soft voice whispers, “Excuse me?”

Harry turns and smiles when he sees a teenage girl standing with her family a few steps away. She’s practically shaking with excitement as she speaks, the grin on her face infectious and warm.

“I-I just wanted to um, say hi. I’m a huge fan, and I think your family is really sweet, and I love your music so much, and… I’m sorry—”

Before Harry can say anything, Louis interrupts her. “You don’t have to be sorry, love,” he says, and the girl looks shocked that he’s speaking to her at all. “Harry’s ego needs the boost now and then.”

This shocks a laugh out of the girl and Harry can see her parents look relieved. He isn’t surprised, he’s sure they thought this was a terrible idea that would end in her being shouted at. Sadly, Harry’s seen that happen far too many times.

“I’m really excited to meet you too, Louis,” the girl reveals. “Everyone always says how nice you are and I want to be a writer someday too, like you. And your son is so cute, he looks just like you.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry can see the way Louis’ smile falters just a bit when she says it. He looks just like you.

To his credit, Louis rebounds quickly and laughs.

“Well, thank you love. Here, hand me him H so you two can get a picture.”

“No, it’s okay!” The girl says quickly. “You don’t have to wake him up, he looks really tired.”

Harry smiles at her concern and carefully moves Noah over to free one of his arms. “I’ll sign something for you then,” he says. “For being so sweet.”

The girl’s face goes red at this, but with some help from her mother she’s able to find a little notebook and a pen. Harry signs it one handedly while the girl’s mother smiles at how he juggles Noah knowingly.

“Have a great night, yeah?” he tells them.

“Thank you, Harry!” The girl says, holding the notebook tight to her chest. “And you too, Louis.” With that, she hurry back to her parents and excitedly shows off the autograph she’s just gotten.

As she walks away, Louis elbows Harry’s side. “Look at that, Harold, I’ve got fans of me own now. Soon I’ll be bigger than you.”

Harry laughs and pulls him in for a quick kiss. “Don’t let that fame get to your head, love,” he teases.

They get into the lift and stand close together as it shoots up to one of the topmost floors where the
band is staying. Louis sighs.

“Bit disappointed we aren’t in the penthouse, now that I’m such a big celebrity,” he says.

Harry bites down on a smile and shakes his head. “I’m almost positive someone lives up there part time, Lou, but I’m sure we could kick them out just for you.”

Louis sighs and waves his hand haughtily, turning his nose up. “No, no, this floor will just have to do. Sleeping among the peasants is good for my image.”

Harry barks out a laugh that he quickly stops before he wakes up Noah. “God, Louis,” he giggles.

Smirking, Louis slips the keycard out of Harry’s back pocket and leads the way out of the lift as soon as the doors open. Their suite is at the very end of the hall, cut off by two huge double doors. Louis quickly slides the card through and pushes them open.

“Jesus,” he breathes.

“Well it’s no penthouse,” Harry says.

Louis shakes his head and steps inside, Harry following after him. It’s absolutely huge, though Harry wasn’t expecting less when he asked for enough room for the three of them. They enter into a living room with a couple of couches that attaches to a kitchenette in one corner and two bedrooms with arched doorways separating them from the rest of the suite.

The view is breathtaking, Harry thinks as he looks out towards the floor to ceiling windows. For a moment he’s a bit glad this is where they are for Noah’s first trip to the city. Harry wants this to be something the boy remembers forever.

Our first trip as a family, he thinks.

“Harold, you really do go all out,” Louis says in awe, running his hand over the bottle of champagne already waiting for them in the kitchen.

Harry smiles, loving that Louis is happy with him. Some primal part of him that has probably always been loves showing Louis that he can take care of them.

“Just want the best for my boys,” he says, rubbing Noah’s back. “Where shall I put him?”

Louis walks back over to Harry, having already rid himself of his coat and shoes. He stands barefoot now, wearing the jumper that Harry bought him. It’s a bit too large on purpose, and Harry loves that it dips down low enough to show off Louis’ collarbones just as he hoped it would.

“We should try and wake him,” Louis decides, pointing Harry towards one of the couches. “Long enough to eat at least, I don’t want his sleeping pattern to be too messed up.”

Harry nods and takes Noah to the couch, gently setting the boy down. He has a tight hold on Harry’s arms, but Harry somehow releases his fingers and lays him out with Hank in his arms.

Grumbling, Noah blinks his eyes open. “Oh,” he yawns, reaching out to pat Harry’s arm. “Hi, my Harry.”

Harry smiles, forever terribly endeared by him. “Good morning, love,” he says. “Did you have a good sleep?”

Noah nods and smiles sleepily. “I messed gettin’ outta the plane.”
“I know you did, but guess where we are now?”

Sitting up on the couch, Noah takes in his surroundings. He seems in awe of the room before his eyes catch on the window and gasps. “Daddy!” he says, looking to Louis. “We’re in New York now, aren’t we?”

Louis laughs and nods. “We are baby, did you want to come and look?”

Noah nods and takes off across the room to fearlessly press himself up against the windows. They’re facing downtown, a view that not-so-surprisingly cost an arm and a leg, and it gives them a clear view of everything from Times Square below them all the way out to Lower Manhattan.

“Oh my gosh,” Noah breathes. “Daddy, they’re never gonna believe me at school! This is the coolest ever.”

“I think you’ll have more than enough evidence to convince them,” Harry laughs.

Louis frowns at this slightly and reaches down to gently pull Noah back from the window. “Noah,” he says quite seriously. “You’re not to brag about this, okay? You’re very lucky to have someone like Harry that can do nice things for you, but lots of other kids don’t get that. That means you need to be respectful of their feelings, which means no bragging. If you’re rude at school about any of this, there will be no more trips.”

“Okay Daddy,” Noah says, sounding quite serious. “I promise, no bein’ rude, I don’t wanna hurt people’s feelings. They don’t gotta be upset because they don’t have a Harry to go places with…but I can bring pictures to show and tell, can’t I?”

Louis smiles and ruffles Noah’s hair. “Of course you can, baby.”

Harry frowns as Louis comes back to the couch to sit beside him. “What’s that about?” he asks.

“I won’t have him turning into a spoiled brat,” Louis says. “He needs to be grateful for the things he gets, none of this is normal Harold, I’m not sure if you noticed.”

Harry shakes his head. “Why can’t it be our normal?”

“Because it isn’t,” Louis says sternly. “If this…if this is how his life is going to be, he’s going to be grateful for everything he gets. He’s not going to expect these things just because of who you are, and if he does then I’ve quite obviously failed.”

Harry sighs and takes a moment to think it over. It makes sense, of course, what Louis is telling him. Noah shouldn’t be spoiled and Harry is sure that Louis would never let that happen, anyway. Still, he thinks, this is what he wants to spend his money on. It just sits around mostly, accruing interest his investors assure him, but he has more than he could ever possibly use himself. Sure, he sends some of it off to charities, some of it to Gemma or his mum even though they refuse it, he has a fund set up in Eva’s name for when she’s older, and of course there’s just daily expenses and his love of anything silk or patterned.

But what Harry has always wanted, what he’s really been saving for since he got his very first check, is a family. Expensive cars, clothes, and shoes are nice, but nothing could ever compare to seeing the look on Noah’s face when Harry’s done something wonderful for him. Nothing compares to that little exasperated grins Louis gives him, the way he kisses Harry and whispers Thank you and I love you into his ear. Harry loves them, he wants to spend his money on them because they’re worth it.

“It makes sense,” he concedes finally. “I don’t want him to be spoiled either, I would never really do
anything too crazy like you always tease me. But Louis, I like doing these things for you; taking trips, buying you both presents, taking you out. It doesn’t have to be a constant thing though, I get that.”

Louis nods and reaches over to intertwine their fingers, squeezing tightly. “Things like this are lovely, Harry, and I’m so grateful for the things you do for us. But this is a holiday, it isn’t going to be how his life is constantly. He’s a kid, he needs to learn to be responsible, to work for the things he wants, he needs stability and some kind of normal in his life. God knows something like that is hard to find for the poor lad, but he isn’t going to be jetting off at a moment’s notice to, I dunno, Bali or some shit. It’s isn’t healthy.”

“You’re right,” Harry agrees. “Of course, Lou, I would never want his life to be like that. I get what you’re saying love, I really do. Besides, the humidity in Bali is awful to my hair.”

Louis smiles softly and leans his head on Harry’s shoulder. “Shut up, Harold,” he laughs.

“Daddy!” Noah calls. “I’m super, super hungry.”

“I’ve got this,” Harry announces, gently kissing Louis before standing up. “Come on bean, let’s order some room service.”

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“Harry,” a voice whispers, shaking Harry’s shoulder. “My Harry, wake up.”

Harry groans and blinks his eyes open, seeing only the curve of Louis’ bare shoulder in the dark. He’s about to put it off as a very strange dream when little hands clamp down on his arm again, shaking him more insistently.

“My Harry.”

Frowning, Harry turns over to find Noah standing at the side of their bed, pouting. The light sifting in through the windows show tear tracks on his cheeks and his lower lip is wobbling where it’s stuck out.

“Darling,” Harry says, sitting up quickly. “Hey, what’s wrong love? Why are you crying?”

Noah shrugs his shoulder and wipes his nose with his arm. He’s hold Hank in one and while the other is still on Harry’s arm, holding him tight.

“M’scared,” he hiccups. “I had a bad dream, and I woke up and didn’t know where I am, and it’s dark, and my bed is really huge, and-”

Harry silences the boy by lifting him up onto the bed and into his lap. He wraps his arms around Noah tightly and rocks him side to side. “Bean,” he sighs. “I’m sorry you’re scared, love, but I’m right here okay?”

Noah nods his head and sniffs, his hiccups slowly growing quieter until they stop completely.

“Do you want to sleep in here with me and Daddy?” Harry offers. “Would that make you feel better?”

Noah nods, clutching onto Harry’s arms. “Uh huh, please. M’sorry.”

Harry hushes him and shakes his head. “Don’t be sorry bean, you have nothing to be sorry for. We
all need a good cuddle now and then, don’t we?’

After quietly agreeing, Noah crawls out of Harry’s lap and squeezes between the two men. He pulls the blanket up to his chin, wrapping his arms around Hank. Harry smiles and lays back down beside him, stretching his arm out to cover both of his boys.

“Goodnight, Harry,” Noah whispers, closing his eyes.

“Goodnight, Noah,” Harry whispers back, reaching down to gently push a few stray curls off the boy’s forehead.

Noah smiles softly, eyes still closed, and reaches out to pull Harry’s arm down over him. “I love you,” he whispers.

Harry is almost certain his heart stops. He freezes, unable to think of what to say, while Noah makes himself comfortable. He’s obviously not as phased by what he’s just said as Harry is. Instead, Noah turns onto his side and pulls Harry’s arm up over his shoulder while he rests his forehead against Louis’ collarbone. Hank is tucked up close under his chin and Noah sighs out in content.

“I love you too,” Harry whispers back, finally coming to his senses. He means it more now than he ever has before, he realizes. It feels different, how he loves Noah, different from anything he’s ever felt before. “I love you so much, Noah. Okay? Don’t ever forget that.”


Harry smiles and kisses Noah’s temple. “Okay, love. Sweet dreams.”

It isn’t hard to fall asleep after that, Harry finds, because he has both of his boys in his arms again, both sleeping soundly and content. It feels right, being back with them, right where he’s supposed to be.

Louis does not enjoy waking up early, even if he has technically slept in when you take in account the time change. Noah, on the other hand, is full of energy at seven in the morning, because of course he is. Toddlers are an entirely different species, Louis is sure of this.

It certainly didn’t help that Louis was woken by little fingers poking and prodding his face, demanding cereal. Harry was still asleep, the bastard, sprawled out on his back with Noah in the middle of them. When asked what on earth he was doing there, Noah happily explained that Harry had let him in after a nightmare and woken the other man up next with a few shouts of his name.

Now they’re all in Times Square together, something Louis finds a bit insane. Harry, Liam, and Niall are together up on a stage, getting their marks while Noah and Louis wait below it. Fans have gathered to watch them practice, screaming from beyond the barricades.

“Daddy,” Noah says, looking up at all of the buildings surrounding them. “I’m gonna be a singer when I grow up.”

Louis smiles at him. “You can be anything you want to be, love.”

“I’m gonna be a singer,” Noah repeats. “And you and my Harry are gonna come see me singing when I’m old. It’ll be super cool.”
Louis laughs and picks the boy up in his arms, hugging him tightly. “Lad,” he sighs. “You don’t even know how happy you make me.”

“Boys,” Harry calls down to them. “Come up here!”

Louis smiles and puts Noah on his hip, jogging up the steps to the stage and right into Harry’s arms. Harry grins and grabs Noah, carefully lifting the boy up onto his shoulders.

“There you are,” he says, holding onto Noah’s ankles. “Now you can see better, can’t you bean?”

Noah nods and continues looking around the buildings, taking everything in.

Harry kisses Louis quickly and sighs. “We’re almost done here, I promise.”

“It’s okay love, really,” Louis whispers back. “The whole reason we’re here, isn’t it?”

Harry pouts and shakes his head. “Not the only reason.”

With that, Harry is called off again. He doesn’t let Noah down, as Louis expected him too, and instead goes about his business with a giggly five-year-old perched on his shoulders. It’s absolutely ridiculous, but no one seems too upset about it. Liam and Niall both seem incredibly amused at how Noah giggles when Harry bounces him around.

As he passes by, Niall claps Louis on the back and shakes his head. “He’s so fucking in love with you,” he laughs. “It’s disgusting.”

Louis rolls his eyes and pushes Niall away. “Fuck off, Horan.”

Niall cackles and runs off as an impatient sounding person with a headset calls his name once again. Louis smiles and walks to the edge of the stage, deciding to sit and wait until the boys are done. He kicks his feet back and forth a bit and looks around.

There’s a crowd of fans at one end of the barriers that separates them. They all scream and yell his name when Louis waves at them, so he takes this as an invitation to start making faces at them.

“Lou,” Harry calls. “C’mon love, we’re done.”

“Come on Daddy!” Noah yells for backup.

Behind him, Louis can hear all of the fans *aww*-ing at his son. Louis smiles and gives them one last wave before jumping to his feet and walking across the stage.

Harry is holding Noah in his arms now, the boy holding on tightly with his arms around Harry’s neck. He smiles at his father as he approaches and says, “Daddy, my Harry’s takin’ us to go do cool stuff today!”

Louis smiles and walks up close enough to kiss Noah’s cheek. “Is he? Well, then I suppose he’s allowed to hang out with us.”

“Daddy,” Noah giggles. “We can’t leave our Harry! He’ll be sad without us.”

“He certainly would,” Louis agrees, smiling at Noah’s words.

Harry smiles as well and pulls Louis in with a hand on the small of his back. He gently leads Louis and Noah off the stage and out to the car that’s waiting for them. A much smaller group of fans are waiting a few feet away, all calling their hellos to Harry and the boys. Noah seems delighted by it all,
waving to them as Harry carries him to the car.

“They’re nice,” he says to Louis. “Just love my Harry a lot, that’s all, but my Harry loves me most. I’m his only Noah in the whole world.”

Louis raises his eyebrows and turns to see Harry’s positively beaming. After they get Noah into his car seat and shut the door, Harry pulls him in for a kiss.

“He said it to me last night,” he mutters, moving his lips to press against Louis’ jaw. “Told me he loves me, Lou, he said that. I almost woke you up just to cry about it.”

“Babe,” Louis laughs, pulling Harry away to look into his eyes. “Baby, of course he loves you. You’re his Harry, aren’t you? That’s all it’s ever meant.”

Still, Louis can feel his heart pounding at the thought of Noah actually saying that to Harry. It isn’t surprising at all, but it still stuns him for a moment.

“I love you both so much,” Harry whispers. “Come on, love.”

Harry opens the car door for him and climbs in next. The driver takes them on a short ride away from the bustle of people in Times Square while Harry changes into one of Louis’ jumpers instead of the sheer shirt he had been wearing. It’s far too cold for that, and Louis isn’t so sure he likes the idea of thousands of people seeing his boyfriend’s nipples.

“Harry, watcha doing?” Noah asks.

Louis smiles. “He’s disguising himself,” he teases, watching as Harry pulls a beanie on. “He doesn’t want anyone to know he’s with us.”

“Shut up Louis,” Harry laughs.

Noah smiles at them and wraps his hand in Louis’ until the car stops to let them out. They’re at one of the many entrances to Central Park and Harry seems ecstatic about all the walking they’re about to do today. He and Louis each take one of Noah’s hands and they start their way through the park.

Noah looks up at the bare trees above them and smiles. “It’s nice here,” he says. “Kinda like at home, but people talk funny.”

Harry laughs. “Maybe they think you talk funny, love. You do have your father’s accent.”


Harry shakes his head and ruffles Noah’s hair. “It’s cute,” he says. “I like his little Yorkshire accent, it reminds me of you.”

Noah beams and nods. “I’m just like my Daddy, right?”

“Right, bean,” Harry confirms.

They walk around for a bit, Harry taking about a hundred thousand pictures of Louis and Noah doing simple things, like walking over a bridge or standing next to a pond. Noah entertains it all like the ham he is, posing for the camera to make Harry and Louis laugh.

“Whoa!” Noah says when they come upon a playground full of children. “They got swings here too, Daddy!”
Louis smiles. “I reckon they have those almost everywhere, baby,” he laughs.

Noah ignores that and tugs both of them towards the swings. It’s strangely warm for the end of December, the sun melting a lot of the snow that had been on the ground earlier in the day. Noah hops on a swing and calls to Louis and Harry for help.

They take turns pushing him for awhile before walking around some more. Noah just about loses his mind when he sees the castle, which is only topped by him finding the Alice in Wonderland statue. They stay in Central Park until Louis is so starved he thinks he might cry, which is when Harry finally calls them a car to go for lunch. Afterward, at Harry’s insistence, they end up in an absolutely giant candy shop.

Noah is practically diving headfirst into a bin of lollipops when Harry says, “So, Gemma’s coming.”

Louis raises his eyebrows. “She is? I didn’t know that.”

Harry shakes his head, gently pulling Noah away from a display he’s almost knocked to the ground. “Yeah, me neither. Her and Mum have had a fight.”

“So she’s fled the country,” Louis laughs. “Can’t say I haven’t thought about it.”

Harry sighs and puts his phone back in his pocket. “I’m worried,” he admits. “She’s really upset about something, but she won’t tell me what.”

Louis shakes his head. “It’ll be alright, love. Whatever it is, she’ll work it out. Is she bringing Eva?”

That, of course, makes Harry smile. “Yeah, they left earlier this morning. I’m excited that Eva and Noah get to meet, finally. He likes babies, doesn’t he?”

Louis laughs. “You have no idea, love,” he teases. “The kid’s basically a premade big brother. Think that’s my fault, I’ve always wanted more kids. I’ve basically got him trained for it.”

Harry smiles and goes silent for a moment as they follow Noah around. The store is incredibly busy, but Noah doesn’t seem to mind. He cuts through everyone to get exactly what he wants, which apparently is a lollipop the size of his head.

“Five,” Harry says suddenly.

Louis frowns. “Five?” He asks, a bit concerned that he’s suggesting Noah get five of those disgusting things. No doubt it’ll end up in his hair about thirty seconds after he’s opened it.

“I want five kids,” Harry says, which shocks Louis more than the lollipop scenario he’s made up in his mind. “I’ve had this planned for awhile now, Lou, like, a long time.”

Louis barks out a laugh. “This is entirely because you only had one sibling growing up. Trust me love, you have no clue.”

“You want a lot of kids too, don’t lie,” Harry teases. “Noah would be a good big brother.”

“Course he would be, he’s my kid isn’t he?”

Harry smiles and turns to kiss him. It lasts only seconds before Noah runs at them, tugging on Louis’ coat.

“Daddy! Harry! Stop it, no one likes kissin’.”
Harry laughs and pulls away from Louis to pick the boy up. “Are we embarrassing you, love?”

Noah nods, tapping Harry on the shoulder with his giant lollipop. “Everyone’s lookin’, no one likes when you’re kissing.”

“I’m sorry love,” Harry sighs sadly. “I just love your dad so much, sometimes I lose my head a bit.”

Noah nods sagely, as if this is completely understandable. “I know it, my Harry. It’s okay, I love you guys even if you are embarrassing.”

“You’re both ridiculous,” Louis laughs. “Now come on boys, I think I see a gummy bear the size of Niall in that corner.”

Gemma is waiting in their hotel room when Louis and Noah finally make it back. Louis’ feet fell as though they’re going to fall off and Noah is babbling on and on about something to do with music he’s heard in the park.

“Hi!” Noah says as soon as he sees her, obviously not at all concerned by the stranger in their room.

Gemma smiles at both of them. “Hi,” she laughs.

Louis rolls his eyes and pulls Noah into the room so he can shut the door behind him. He walks over to her while Noah takes his shoes off and kisses Gemma’s cheek.

“Hi love,” he says, dropping down onto the couch beside her. “Alright?”

Gemma nods, but Louis can tell she’s lying. “Course. Who’s this little lad?”

Noah marches over to them, looking positively ridiculous wearing the overpriced *I Love New York* t-shirt Harry insisted on buying him and holding his giant lollipop in one hand. Still, he sounds incredibly formal when he says, “I’m Noah Tomlinson, and this is my Daddy. I know you’re my Harry’s sister and you’re comin’ to see us.”

To her credit, Gemma somehow contains her laughter. “Hello Noah Tomlinson,” she says with a smile. “I am Harry’s sister, but you can just call me Gemma.”


Noah points to the portable cot that’s set up in the middle of the room. Eva is sound asleep inside of it, spread out on her back with her hands up over her head. Louis smiles instantly.

“That’s my daughter, Eva,” Gemma explains. “She’s Harry’s niece.”

Noah nods. “My Harry tells me he’s gotta niece, I remember. I like your hair. Eva’s pretty, but she doesn’t got pink hair like you.”

Louis laughs. “Babies don’t have pink hair, love,” he teases.

“I want pink hair,” Noah decides.

Louis groans and shakes his head. “You Styles, you’re corrupting my child,” he says, ignoring Noah’s mischievous little grin.
“Well, we can’t help our hair is just so great,” Gemma shoots back.

Louis rolls his eyes and stands up. “Noah love, let’s leave Eva alone and have a nap.”

Noah makes a face. “Don’t even like naps on holiday, Daddy.”

“You don’t even like naps period, baby, so at least you’re consistent,” Louis says, reaching for his hand. “Your Harry has had us traipsing all across New York today, you need a nap. Say goodnight to Gemma.”

Noah sighs, quite obviously upset by Louis’ sound logic. He turns to look at Gemma and asks, “Are you staying here?”

Gemma smiles at him and nods. “I’m staying until you leave, love. We’ll have plenty of time to hang out before we all have to go, I promise.”

Noah smiles back and reluctantly goes with Louis, letting his father tuck him into bed for a short nap. Really, Louis wants to crawl right into bed beside him, but he knows he should talk to Gemma about what’s bothering her before Harry comes back.

When Louis walks back into the living room, Gemma is holding Eva in her arms and staring at the window.

“Gems,” Louis calls softly.

“Oh,” she says. “Sorry, I’m exhausted. It’s been sort of a last minute trip. Where’s Harry?”

Louis sits back down beside her and takes in how exhausted she looks. “He and the boys had to film some commercial thing last minute. Honestly, I was happy about it, my feet hurt so badly I’m debating sawing them off.”

Gemma smiles. “Harry’s really excited to be here with you both. It’s all he talked about over Christmas.”

Louis smiles at that. “Yeah, he’s ecstatic. Do you want to tell me what’s wrong?”

Gemma shrugs and rubs Eva’s back. “Just…everything is shitty.”

“Been there,” Louis replies. “Harry said you had a fight with Anne.”

Gemma nods and sighs. “If I tell you something you have to promise not to tell Harry,” she says suddenly. “Because he’ll freak out if he hears this.”

“Love, I don’t like lying to him-”

“I’m going to tell him,” Gemma interrupts. “I promise, really, it just has to be at the right time.”

Louis groans and leans back against the couch. “Okay babe, what is it then?”

Gemma looks down at Eva and gently runs her hands over the baby’s back. She’s still sleeping peacefully and doesn’t seem disturbed at all by her mother’s movements.

“Eva’s dad called me yesterday,” she says slowly. “Aidan’s his name. He’s having another kid, apparently, and he said it’s brought up shit. Feelings, I guess, for Eva. He wants to be back in her life.”
Louis frowns. “Has he ever been in it?”

Gemma shrugs. “I mean, technically no. Aidan isn’t a bad guy, I don’t want you to get that impression because everyone else always has. We were never together, we were mates at work, it was a one night stand and I ended up pregnant. I wanted to keep her and I told him I would do it alone if he didn’t want her, and he didn’t. He’s really busy, he travels a lot and spends most of his time out of the country. I send her pictures now and then when he asks, and he sends me money for things like clothes and diapers and all that. He was just saying that now that his fiancée is pregnant, he’s realizing all he’s missed out on.”

Louis nods along with what she’s saying. “What’s the problem, then?”

“My family doesn’t like him,” Gemma says with a small smile. “Harry especially, he might seem like a softie to you, but he can be pretty mean when he wants to be. Trust me, he and Aidan do not get along at all.”

Louis frowns. “Why?”

“I think a lot of it is the fact that Aidan was the reason why Harry and I finally stopped talking,” she explains. “But Louis, I can’t blame him for that at all. I was pregnant and Harry was out of control. I had my baby to think of, and Aidan did too, so we cut Harry out of our lives until he recovered. By that point, Aidan was gone and I was alone with Eva. Harry’s never forgiven him for leaving me alone, even though we agreed to it, and he’s never forgiven himself for not being there for me. Harry’s my little brother but he’s always been protective of me, and that goes about ten times for Eva. They’ve never actually been allowed to meet, but they’ve had plenty of screaming matches over the phone.”

Louis sighs and thinks it over for a moment before responding. “I can understand where Harry’s coming from,” he says carefully. “It was shit of Eva’s dad to leave you both behind, even if it was something you agreed to. You’re her mother, though, and it’s up to you to decide what’s best for your daughter, not Harry and not your mum. What are you thinking?”

Gemma’s response is immediate. “I want her to have a relationship with her father. She deserves that,” she says, before looking down at Eva warily. “I’m just worried that he’s going to spend time with her and he’s going to realize how much he loves her and want her too. That’s terrifying, Louis, and I know it makes me selfish, but it’s all I can think about. He’s going to be married, he’s far more well off than I am, who’s to say he won’t try and take her away from me?”

It’s slightly comforting hearing her say that, Louis thinks, because it makes him feel a little less alone. His biggest fear in life is that someday Luke is going to take Noah away from him, and he knows that’s ridiculous, but Gemma probably knows that as well.

Louis shakes his head and reaches out to drape his arm over Gemma’s shoulder. “Love, that would never happen,” he promises. “At most, he’ll get some holidays with her or maybe weekends when she gets older, but he isn’t going to take her away from you. You’re her mother, no one in their right mind would do something like that, and I know Aidan can see how great a parent you are. You’re right, though, Eva deserves the chance to get to know her father and have him in her life. I would give anything to have that for Noah.”

Gemma winces at his words. “God, I’m sorry,” she says quickly. “Here I am complaining to you, and you have it worse off than I do.”

Louis frowns. “Has Harry told you something?”
“Nothing super detailed or anything,” Gemma admits. “He just needs someone to talk to sometimes, that’s all. I know how much he loves Noah, it kills him knowing that his dad doesn’t want him. And it’s not like he’s trying to replace him or anything, but I know that he wants to be that for you. Someone that you rely on, someone Noah is always going to have.”

Of course Harry has told Louis this a million times, but it almost seems more serious coming from someone else.

“Can I tell you something you have to promise not to tell him?” Louis asks.

Gemma grins at his words. “Think that would make us about even,” she teases.

“I feel like I’m trapping him,” Louis admits. “Like one day he’s going to wake up and realize he wants to live his life and not be tied down by us. I mean, I know Harry loves me, I know he loves Noah, but there’s always this part of me that’s waiting for him to take it all back.”

Gemma reaches up and squeezes Louis’ hand on her shoulder. “Louis,” she sighs. “I know how that feels, trust me, but it isn’t going to happen. You aren’t trapping Harry into anything, he wants this. He loves both of you so much Louis, all you’ve done is given him exactly what he’s always wanted.”

That makes Louis think back to earlier, to Harry smiling at Noah in the candy store and saying, _Noah would be a good big brother_. And even though Louis has heard it and understood, he’s still shocked by the fact that this is what Harry wants. That Harry wants _them_.

Louis takes a deep breath and nods. “I know, and I want that too, but I can’t help but worry about it. It just…sometimes I forget that this is what Harry wants. I’m not used to it all just yet.”

“I know love,” Gemma sighs. “Someday I want what you and Harry have. I want someone who loves Eva just as much as they love me.”

Louis smiles. “Sometimes I think he loves Noah more than he loves me,” he teases.

“Of course he does,” Gemma scoffs. “You always love your kids more than you could ever love anyone else. It’s a different kind of love, though, isn’t it?”

Her words shock Louis more than they probably should, but they seem right.

“You look like you’ve had an epiphany,” Gemma teases him.

Louis shakes his head. “Hand me my baby,” he says, reaching out for Eva. “I need some quiet time.”

Gemma just smiles at him knowingly and hands Eva over.

Harry manages to strike a deal with Gemma. If she agrees to watch Noah for New Years Eve, he won’t mention why she’s here until they get back home. She agrees immediately, but Louis still feels bad when they’re leaving the next night.

“Are you sure you don’t mind?” he asks, one last time.

Eva and Noah are in the middle of the room, playing with Noah’s dinosaurs. After a brief moment where Eva seemed unsure if she should trust this boy, they became fast friends and bonded over dinosaurs and candy. They spent the entire day together while Harry dragged them all about New
York, determined that Louis and Noah see it all before they leave in the morning. Noah didn’t seem to mind at all, delighted by all of the sights and sounds, and of course food, to be found here. Louis found that he didn’t mind so much either, because seeing Harry with both Eva and Noah had him imagining those five kids Harry was teasing him about.

Well, that and the fact that he and Gemma have the same sense of humor which primarily consists of making fun of Harry and bad parenting jokes.

“Lou, don’t worry about it,” Gemma says for the hundredth time, waving her hands at them. “I don’t have anything else to do, I’ve basically crashed your party here anyway. You two deserve a night out alone.”

Harry nods and pulls Louis in by the waist. “She’s right, love, she has crashed our holiday.”

Gemma sputters out a laugh and flips him off from across the room.

“Okay,” Louis sighs. “Noah, come here please?”

Noah carefully leaves Eva with his dinosaurs and runs across the room to Louis. “Hi, Daddy!”

“Hi love,” Louis laughs, reaching down to pick him up. “Harry and I are leaving now, but you’ll be good for Gemma won’t you? You’ll go to bed right when she asks and clean up after yourself, no complaints yeah?”

Noah nods and leans forward to give Louis a kiss on the cheek. “Uh huh, Daddy. Gemma and Eva and me are gonna watch a movie together, and then we’re gonna have toast.”

Louis smiles. “I don’t think you’re thinking of the same kind of toast, love,” he teases. “Give me a cuddle.”

Noah obliges, wrapping his arms tight around Louis’ neck. “I love you, Daddy, Happy New Year.”

“Happy New Year, baby,” Louis whispers. “Do you want to say goodbye to Harry?”

Noah nods and reaches out for Harry next, giving him the same hug. “I love you too, my Harry,” he says. “It’s a good year cause of you.”

Harry beams and hugs Noah back just as tightly. “You and your dad made it the best year of my life, bean,” he whispers.

“Sap,” Louis mutters under his breath.

Gemma bursts into laughter and Harry just smiles. “You know it’s true,” he teases. “You love me, Louis.”

“Sadly, I do,” Louis replies.

Across the room, Eva bangs a dinosaur against the ground and says, “No! No!”

“I’m comin’,” Noah replies, scrambling out of Harry’s arms. “Bye Daddy, bye Harry!”

Louis smiles. “We’re so easily forgotten,” he laughs. “Gemma, thank you, seriously.”

Gemma shakes her head. “Don’t worry about it, go and have fun! Get out of here, you two, before I change my mind.”
At that, Harry practically pulls Louis out of the room and they make their way downstairs to meet the band.

Louis has never seen a crowd so big in his life, he thinks as they walk out. Times Square and all of the streets surrounding it are packed with people, but they’re ushered through it all somehow. They pass barricades of screaming people, stands where newscasters and comedians are counting down, and groups of celebrities that Louis hardly has time to recognize.

One Direction goes on stage almost as soon as they arrive. They’re only performing a couple of songs, nothing too long, and Harry has promised Louis multiple times that there will be just enough time for him to make it back for his New Year’s kiss.

The crowd of people clustered in to watch the boys is huge, but Louis always feels like Harry is singing just to him. He always manages to find him somehow, just a face lost in the crowd of others, and lock eyes. Harry smiles, and winks, and sings to Louis when he isn’t entertaining everyone else. It’s so far from private, Louis knows that, but it almost feels that way to him.

Louis loves him, he realizes, more than he ever thought he could.

As the band winds down and crowd passionately sings along, Harry makes eye contact with him and sings, Baby I’m perfect for you whilst shaking his hips.

And yeah, okay, it isn’t exactly a romantic song, but Harry still manages to make Louis smile.

“I hope you all have a happy New Year, New York!” Harry shouts into the microphone along with Niall and Liam shouting as well. He looks back over to Louis and smiles, and before Louis realizes what’s going on, the smile Harry saves just for him is being blown up on screens all around them.

“I know I will.” He says.

The crowd screams and cheers as the boys leave the stage, quickly replaced by another band that’s a bit more pop than they are. Louis doesn’t really pay them any mind, though, he’s too busy buzzing with excitement as he watches Harry being lead through the crowd over to him.

They’re practically thrown together by the people around them and Louis catches Harry around the waist before he can fall.

“Careful baby,” Louis teases. “You’ll fall and crack your head and I’ll have to find someone else for my New Year’s kiss.”

Harry pouts and wraps his arms around Louis’ waists. “You wouldn’t dare,” he says.

Louis smiles and shakes his head. “I never would, you know.”

“I know,” Harry replies happily. “Did you like the set?”

Louis nods and asks, “Did you like practically telling the entire world you’re in love with me?”

Harry laughs against Louis’ neck and nods back. “Of course I did. I love you so much Louis, so much. I want to spend the rest of my life with you, want to spend every New Year from here until forever with you.”

“Forever is an awful long time,” Louis says.

Harry smiles. “I’m going to marry you someday, Louis Tomlinson. You just watch, you’ll be mine
forever."

“I already am,” Louis promises.

Harry beams and the crowd around them starts cheering as the ball begins to drop. 12, 11, 10..

“Baby,” Louis whispers. “Look at me.”

He does, his pupils blown wide and cheeks ruddy from the cold and the adrenaline of performing. Harry Styles, Louis thinks has he runs a hand through Harry’s curls, is possibly the most beautiful creature to ever live. Everything Louis ever needed, all he could have ever asked for. He’s perfect, Louis realizes.

Fate, his mind whispers. It was just like Harry has been saying since the very beginning. It was fate when they met, fate that led them here. Fate has decided Louis could, and wants to, spend the rest of his life with this boy. Louis gets it now, he finally understands what Harry was saying to him all those months ago on their very first date.

“I love you,” Louis says, a promise. “You’ll never know just how much I love you, Harry.”

Harry grins, bright enough to light up Louis entire world. “I think I do,” he replies.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1!

“Happy New Year!” Harry and Louis shout at the top of their lungs, along with everyone else in the crowd. Confetti starts to fall from the sky, people’s hopes and dreams for the New Year landing at their feet as Louis pulls Harry in for a kiss.

“Happy New Year, darling,” he whispers.

Harry pushes against him, digging his fingertips into Louis’ sides. “Happy New Year.”
everyday, in every way, it's getting better and better

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Louis returns to work to find he’s the talk of the office.

Apparently, their little holiday to New York has basically cemented in everyone’s minds that he and Harry are going to be together for the rest of their lives. The tabloids have dubbed them Larry, which Louis immediately cringes at because it’s got nowhere near the coolness of something like Brangelina, or Posh and Becks. Obviously, Harry is Posh, they’ve discussed this in great detail.

“I’m pretty sure I had a janitor at school named Larry,” he tells Jade when she breaks the news to him. It took her all of five seconds to see he was back in the office and make a run for his desk, wanting all the dirty details of every second of Louis’ trip.

Jade laughs at him and takes a sip of her tea. Louis had come in early on purpose, mostly to get back into the swing of things, but someone had apparently let that slip to Jade who now sits on his desk with an entire breakfast laid out for them. She kicks her feet around a bit, slamming her heels into his cabinets a few times before speaking.

“It’s cute, Louis,” she says. “That picture of you two of New Year’s just about broke the internet, and then Harry and Noah, and you and his sister and niece—you’re so perfect together. Couple goals.”

Louis just about spits his tea out at that. “Couple goals?” He laughs. “We had a massive fight this morning over the way he takes his tea, love, I doubt very much that we’re couple goals.”

“You are, and you’re part of my couple goals snapchat story today, so don’t fight me on it,” she says, ignoring the way Louis’ laughs at her. “But seriously, Lou, Noah looks so happy. You look happy. I’m excited for you, honestly, you deserve it after all you’ve been through.”

Louis smiles. “Thanks love. I might make a snapchat just to watch your story, whatever that means.”

“You act like you’re about a hundred years old,” Jade teases.

“All I know about that is that Lottie likes it and so does Niall,” Louis says. “And I’m not really into anything those two like.”

Jade laughs and jumps off his desk, finally, as people begin pouring in for work. “Missed you, Lou. This office is boring without you.”

“I know,” Louis jokes. “Go on, get to work. You have important snapchat stories to make.”

Jade salutes him before skipping off to her desk just in time for Anna to show up and start filling Louis in on everything he’s been missing. While she talks, Louis goes through the massive amounts of emails he has. Harry didn’t let him check it obsessively during their trip like he normally would, arguing that it is technically work and you shouldn’t be working during a holiday.

One catches Louis’ eye. It’s only a day old or so, and the email address is from someone at one of those trashy tabloids he sees at the store sometimes. It’s an email warning him there’s some kind of article coming out about him.

“Anna,” Louis says, interrupting her tirade about one of her fellow interns. “Do you know who this
Anna frowns and looks at the email. “Oh, yeah. They’re the ones always talking about stuff like, *oh Justin Bieber is my baby daddy, or something.*”

Louis smiles. “‘Justin Bieber is my baby daddy’?”

“Yeah, you know what I mean,” Anna says, rolling her eyes. “Just shit like that that gets everyone all upset for a couple of days. They’re writing something about you?”

Louis nods, scrolling back through the email again. There’s nothing super informative in there, so he decides not to worry too much. “Well, Justin Bieber certainly isn’t my baby daddy. It’s probably just some bullshit.”

Anna agrees and continues on with her story about the drama with the other interns that he’s missed while Louis deletes the email and moves on with his day.

Except it isn’t just bullshit, as Louis soon finds out.

Sunday morning, almost a week later, he wakes up to messages from everyone from Natalie to his mum, and missed calls from Harry. He frowns and opens a message from his boyfriend that simply says, *Don’t freak out love, I’m handling it.*

Louis frowns and pushes himself up in bed, going to Natalie’s messages next.

*That fucking prick!* The first text says, followed by three others filled with profanity, and finally a link. Louis clicks on it and instantly swears. It’s that tabloid who emailed him, and the article is up.

Luke has spun some story about how great a father he is, how Harry has basically stolen Noah from him, that Louis doesn’t let him see the boy anymore. As the article goes on, Louis only gets angrier. The things he’s saying are absolutely ridiculous, claiming that he’s always shown interest in Noah, that it was Louis’ idea for him to give up his rights to the boy.

A knock at the door is the only thing that stops Louis from throwing his phone against the wall. Louis walks across his house and opens the door to immediately find himself in Harry’s arms.

“I know,” Harry mutters. “I know, love, I saw.”

Louis sighs and reaches out, burying his face in Harry's chest and squeezing him tightly. “I hate him,” he whispers. “He never loved me. He never loved Noah. He didn't-”


Louis shakes his head but says nothing else. Harry reaches out and gently pulls his hands through Louis’ hair. Louis stays stuck to him as long as he can stand before whispering.

“Need to get you a key,”

“Got the emergency one,” Harry points out.

Louis shakes his head. “No, a real one.”

“I don’t deserve you,” Louis whispers.

Harry makes a noise at that and carefully walks Louis over to the couch where he proceeds to pull the other man into his lap. Louis lays his head against Harry’s throat and closes his eyes.

“My Harry!” Noah calls, little feet slapping against the hardwood as he runs into the room. He jumps onto the couch and lands beside Harry.

“Hey, bean,” Harry whispers. “Did you have a good sleep, darling?”

“Mhm. Is Daddy sick?” Noah asks, and then Louis feels his son’s small hands patting his forehead. Louis opens his eyes and smiles at him. Noah smiles back and says, “it’s okay Daddy. If you feel bad, me and my Harry can take care of you!”


“No worries,” Noah says, leaning over to kiss Louis’ cheek. “Me and my Harry love you the most, Daddy.”

Louis starts to cry a bit and nods. “I love you too, baby. Love you both so much.”

“Daddy, don’t cry,” Noah says with a pout. “It’ll be ok, you won’t feel bad forever! Do you wanna have ice cream?”

“It’s a bit too early for ice cream, bub.”

Noah shakes his head. “Nu-uh Daddy, never is. When you’re sick you gotta have it.”

Harry laughs and pulls Noah in for a hug. “You’re the best, Noah, you know that? You’re the most amazing kid.”

“You’re the best too,” Noah says with a sigh. “What’re we gonna do today?”

Louis sighs. “I don’t know baby.”

“How about we stay in today,” Harry suggests. “Movie day, yeah? We can order pizza and cuddle all day.”

Noah beams. “Yes! Sounds best, my Harry.”

Louis closes his eyes for a bit while Harry and Noah decide which movie to start out with until his phone chirps. He reaches for it and frowns when he sees it’s Luke.

I can play this game too, it says. Louis wipes at his eyes and texts back, ignoring the way Harry is looking at him in concern.

What the fuck are you talking about Lucas?? You look pathetic I hope you know that.

You know what you’re doing, his next message says. You play house with that idiot and find a way to get a cut of whatever he has. I’m entitled too, yeah?

“Louis,” Harry says softly. “What’s wrong?”

Louis shoves the phone at Harry and gets out of his lap. He walks off to the kitchen and turns the
kettle on to boil, resting against the counter and staring at it.

“Baby,” Harry says as he walks in. “He’s full of shit, Louis, don’t listen to him.”

“I know,” Louis mutters. “Doesn’t mean I don’t still feel like shit about it.”

Harry shakes his head and wraps his arms around Louis’ waist. “He doesn’t know anything about us,” he whispers. “Doesn’t know how much I love you, how much I love Noah. You’re so important to me, Lou, I’m going to fight for you.”

Louis closes his eyes and rests against Harry’s chest for a moment. “I’m going to get a restraining order,” he says, suddenly. “I don’t like what he’s saying, how he’s talking about Noah. I don’t want him near my son.”


“I love you,” Louis whispers. “I’m not trying to get a cut of whatever you have.”

Harry laughs softly. “Baby,” he groans. “You know I'd give you everything I have, a cut is too low.”

“Shut up,” Louis laughs. “You're the worst, Harry Styles.”

“I know,” Harry teases. “I’m going to call my lawyers.”

Louis winces at the thought of Harry paying for this in anyway but pushes that thought away. Harry is trying to help. “Thank you,” he whispers.

“Anything to protect my boys,” Harry promises. “Noah's the sweetest, feeling your forehead and offering you ice cream. He loves you so much, baby, no one could ever take him away from you. I won't ever let that happen.”

On cue, Noah storms into the kitchen and hops up onto the counter with Harry’s help. “We can make breakfast for my Daddy,” he says to Harry. “Since he’s having a sick day.”

Harry laughs and kisses Noah’s forehead. “I think that’s a great idea, love. What do you think Louis, what do you want for breakfast?”

“Whatever my baby wants,” Louis says, turning to Noah. “What do you want, love?”

Noah beams. “I want french toast!”

“French toast it is,” Harry announces.

The two of them start moving together around the kitchen, bantering back and forth as they make the food. At one point, Harry stops and grabs him by the waist, leaning into to kiss his cheek from behind.

“When you’re getting married?”

Harry’s hands stutter where they’re still wrapped around Louis’ hips and Louis drops his spatula onto the counter. He turns to see Noah watching them with a giant grin on his face.

“What was that, baby?” Louis asks, hoping he heard Noah wrong somehow.

But of course, he didn’t. Noah smiles and points at them. “When are you gonna marry my Harry? I know you are in love, so now you gotta get married!”
Louis pulls away from Harry as subtly as he can and sighs. “Noah, sweetheart.”

Before Louis can think of how exactly to say this, Harry speaks. “I’d have to ask him first,” he says. “So once I ask him, and your Daddy says yes or no, then we can get married.”

Noah nods and then looks back to Harry. “But you’d say yes, wouldn’t you Daddy?”

Louis bites his lip and shrugs. “It depends, baby.”

“On what?” Noah asks. “If you’re in love, you get married.”

“It’s a lot more complicated than that Noah. Maybe we could talk about this later,” Louis suggests. But he’s Noah, so of course he isn’t going to allow that. “But you love Harry, don’t you Daddy?”

“Noah,” Louis snaps. “We will talk about it later.”

Instantly, Noah looks hurt. He looks down at his feet and then nods. “Sorry, Daddy.”

Louis feels awful. He moves away from Harry to hug the boy tightly. “It’s okay, baby,’ he says, moving to make eye contact with Noah. “I’m not angry with you, it’s just something we should talk about together. Okay?”

Noah nods and leans up to kiss Louis’ cheek. “Okay. Love you.”

“I love you too, baby,” Louis says, reaching out and tickling Noah’s sides gently to get him to smile again. “Why don’t you go make your bed while we finish up in here, okay?”

Louis helps Noah down off the counter and the boy gives both of them a smile before running off. As soon as he’s gone, Louis braces himself on the counter and closes his eyes.

“Fuck,” he sighs. “I shouldn’t have snapped at him like that, I feel terrible.”

Harry frowns and looks down at the pan. “Yeah,” is all he says, flipping a piece of french toast over and poking it so he doesn't have to meet Louis’ eyes.

“Harry,” Louis sighs. “Babe, I’m sorry—”

“No,” Harry says with a shrug, obviously forcing himself to seem nonchalant. “No, it's fine. I mean, obviously the very thought of marrying me is so appalling you had to snap at Noah for it.”

Louis groans. “Harry, seriously, that's not what this is. It's not that I don't want to marry you, it's that this isn't the sort of conversation I want to have with my son with no planning and with you around.”

“Oh, right. Should I just go then?”

“Stop,” Louis says. “That's not what I'm saying, stop jumping to conclusions. It's not that I don't want you here, Harry, and it isn't that I don't want to marry you. I want to talk to Noah about this alone so he can tell me exactly how he feels about it and we can talk about what comes next. I'm not going to marry anyone without Noah getting a say in it, Harry, that just isn't going to happen.”

Harry sighs and reaches out to turn the stove off. “I'm sorry,” he says softly. “But Louis, he's a kid.”

“He's my kid,” Louis says. “And this is his life too. Everything I do will affect him too, and he deserves a choice in what happens in his own life.”
They fall into silence, simply staring at one another, until Harry relents. “I'm sorry,” he whispers. “It's just...I know you're mine. You're my boys. I just...I don't think it's ridiculous to be scared that's all going to be taken away from me.”

Louis’ heart hurts. “Baby,” he whispers, taking a step forward and wrapping his arms around Harry. “No, love, never. Okay? We're yours, me and Noah, that's never going to change. I'm not saying I wouldn't say yes, I'm saying if Noah isn't really ready now then we should wait until he is and I need time to have that conversation with him.”

“I know,” Harry whispers. “I know, and I think so too. I'm just so worried-I've never gotten to keep anything this nice in my life before. All I've ever wanted is right here in this house, Louis, and losing that would kill me.”

Sighing, Louis squeezes his arms around Harry’s torso. “You won’t lose us, Harry, I promise. Never.”

“Oh kay,” Harry murmurs, pressing his lips to the top of Louis’ head. “I love you, you know that? Both of you. I would take such good care of you both, Lou, I promise I would.”

Louis closes his eyes and nods. “I know you would, darling,” he whispers. “You already do.”

Later that day, Harry finds himself alone with Noah. Louis had to rush off to Zayn’s, something about his suit measurements being all wrong, and Harry had happily offered to stay back with the boy. If there’s one thing Harry loves, it’s spending time with Noah.

They’re sitting in the living room, laughing over a cartoon, when Noah suddenly gasps and jumps to his feet.

“I got somethin’ to show you, I almost forget!” He yells.

Harry smiles. “Go get it, bean, I’ll wait,” he says.

With a big grin, Noah runs out of the room and down the hall. Harry watches him go. Sometimes he feels like he loves the boy more than he ever thought he could, and then that grows. It sits in the back of Harry’s mind, sometimes, just how much he loves this boy.

There’s a commotion from Louis’ bedroom, before Noah appears again. He’s holding a box that’s almost as big as he is, carefully carrying it down the hall and back to Harry. When he returns, he drops it on the floor with a big smile.

“Look!” Noah says, throwing the box open. “It’s a buncha stuff!”

Harry laughs and moves to the box, looking inside to find just that—a collection of stuff. Most of it is in pastels; a pale baby blue blanket, a stuffed dog with blue and green patches, little knitted shoes. Harry smiles.

“Oh love,” he says, reaching in to gently run his fingers over a little fabric picture book. “These are all of your baby things, yeah?”

Noah nods. “Uh-huh, my Daddy keeps it so he can remember when I was little. But that’s not it, I
wanna show you this.”

From the side of the box, Noah pulls out a big book. He sits down beside Harry and opens it up across their laps. The very first picture is of a sonogram with *It’s A Boy!* Written across the top of the page in cursive.

“What’s this, love?”

Noah smiles and turns the page to a picture of a baby shower. Natalie and Louis sit side by side, beaming at the camera. Someone has cut Lucas out of all of these pictures, Harry realizes.

“My Natalie makes it,” he says. “And she gave it to my Daddy for Christmas. It’s got all of me in it, that’s why Daddy likes it so much.”

Harry smiles and kisses the top of Noah’s head. “Well, you are his favorite person, baby.”

Noah nods and turns the page again. “Look, it’s me when I’m borned.” He says.

The picture immediately makes Harry smile. It’s of a very exhausted looking Natalie sitting together with Louis in a hospital bed. Louis is holding a little bundle in his arms, Noah’s grumpy wrinkled face poking out under a tuft of dark hair.

“You’re adorable, bean,” Harry says, and he means it.

“Yeah, well my Natalie, she has me,” Noah explains very carefully. “Only cause my Daddy can’t have babies, but he wants me really bad, so my Natalie had me for him because she loves us.”

The words sound like they’re right out of Louis’ mouth and it makes Harry smile. “You’re right bean, that’s exactly what happened,” he agrees, reaching out to ruffle the boy’s curls. “Your dad wanted you very badly, who wouldn’t want a little boy as wonderful as you?”

Noah giggles and nods. “Yeah, I’m pretty cool,” he agrees, which makes Harry snort. “Do you want a baby too, Harry?”

That makes Harry pause. “Well, I love babies,” he says slowly. “But it depends on a lot of different things, love.”

“Yeah,” Noah sighs, turning the page to a picture of him in his crib. “I don’t know ‘bout it. My other daddy didn’t want a baby, so he left.”

It hurts, hearing Noah say that. He should never have to deal with thoughts like that, Harry thinks, especially when he’s so young. It makes Harry so angry, knowing what Lucas has done to both of his boys—just how badly he’s hurt them.

“Love, listen to me,” Harry whispers. “You don’t need to worry about that, not even for a moment. You have a family that loves you, your dad loves you more than anything else in the world, sweetheart. He never, even for one moment, didn’t want you. You’re a wonderful boy, and anyone who wouldn’t want to be in your life is out of their minds.”

Noah’s lower lip wobbles and he pushes the book out of his lap carefully. Harry realizes that he’s about to cry, and his heart drops.

“Do you want me?” Noah whispers, so quietly that Harry almost doesn’t hear.

“Oh, Noah,” Harry murmurs.
Noah sniffs and shrugs, refusing to look at him. “You don’t have to,” he says.

The thought of Noah ever even considering that breaks Harry’s heart. “No, darling no. Come here.” Harry whispers, reaching over to pull Noah into his arms. The boy wraps himself around Harry tightly as he begins to cry.

“I do,” Harry promises, carefully rocking them side to side. “Of course I do, of course I want you. God, sweetheart, you can’t even imagine how much I want you and your Dad. Remember what I said? You’re just as important to me as he is, and I mean that. I love you so much, I could never stop loving you.”

Noah sniffs again, his little body shaking as he cries. “Just-” he starts, before hiccupping and starting again. “Just know you want a baby, doesn’t mean you want a Noah. Maybe you and Daddy want a brand new baby just for you.”

Despite himself, Harry smiles. “Bean, do you honestly think we could ever replace you? Do you think we’d ever want to? You’re the only little Noah bean in the world, you know, the only one that matters to me at least. You’re the most amazing little boy I’ve ever met in my life and I could never, ever replace you.”

Noah holds on tight to Harry’s jumper and closes his eyes. It’s a strange sort of feeling, Harry notices, holding Noah like this, knowing the boy is depending on him. Harry hugs him tightly and lets him cry it out until his hiccups calm down and his back stops heaving with sobs under Harry’s hand.

“Darling,” Harry whispers, reaching out to gently push his curls away from his eyes. “Are you okay?”


Harry smiles. “Good. I love you so much, you know that? Do you wanna look at more pictures?”

“Okay,” Noah says with a small giggle. Harry keeps a hold of him and pulls the book back into his lap. Noah leans his head against Harry’s chest and they go through the whole book together.

It’s amazing to Harry how Louis did all of this alone. They flip through pages and pages of Natalie’s painstaking work. Noah grows up right before his eyes and Harry smiles when they get to the last page. It’s a picture of the three of them, Harry, Louis, and Noah together.

“We’re all done babes,” Harry says. “Are you feeling a little better?”

Noah nods. “Can you sing me a song?”

“Sing you a song?” Harry teases, trying to make his voice as scandalized as possible to make Noah smile.


“He makes it up, ’cause he’s silly,” Noah says. “But sometimes he'll sing me songs he knows.”

“Okay, little one, give me a moment to think of my very best song for you,” Harry says, leaning down to kiss the boy’s nose. Noah giggles and closes his eyes, resting his head on Harry’s chest.
An idea hits Harry then, out of nowhere, and he starts singing very softly as he rocks the both of them back and forth. Noah smiles and puts his thumb in his mouth, sighing as Harry sings to him.

*Beautiful beautiful beautiful, beautiful boy,* Harry croons, growing quieter as Noah starts to fall asleep. He keeps singing, long after Noah’s breath has evened out and he’s letting out little snores. Harry drags his fingers through Noah’s curls, content just to watch him and gently hum to keep him asleep.

It just feels right, Harry thinks. That strange feeling he feels when Noah holds on tightly and needs him—it feels right. It feels like everything Harry’s ever wanted.

“H?”

Harry looks up to find Louis standing in the doorway, smiling at them. Harry smiles back, watching Louis slip out of his shoes and drop his coat at the door.

“Hi, Lou.”

“What’s going on?” Louis whispers, walking over and leaning down to kiss Harry. “Are we having a nap?”

Harry shrugs as Louis sits beside him on the carpet. “Noah had a bit of a meltdown,” he says. “Poor babe, just needed a good cry I think.”

Of course, Louis immediately looks panicked. “He was crying? Why was he crying, what happened?”

Trying to calm him down a bit, Harry reaches over with the arm he isn’t using to cradle Noah and grabs Louis’ hand. He tells him about everything that happened while Louis was gone, about Noah’s question for him. Louis’ face visibly crumples and he stares at Noah.

“I hate it,” he whispers, once Harry’s finished. “I always promised myself I would never let that happen to my kids, like it did to me. I failed.”

“You didn’t fail,” Harry says sternly. “Lucas failed, and it’s his loss. He doesn’t deserve Noah or you anyway, he never did with the way he treated you both. Cheating on you and ignoring Noah, what kind of person does that?”

Louis shrugs and squeezes Harry’s hand. “He blamed me for it,” he says.

Harry frowns. “What?”

Louis nods, reaching over the gently pull Noah’s thumb out of his mouth. “Luke said that I was so busy with Noah I never paid him any attention anymore, so he had to go out and cheat on me, yeah? I drove him to it—never mind the fact that Noah was a baby who needed us more than anything. It still should’ve been all about Luke, just like it always was.”

“Prick,” Harry growls. “He’s disgusting. I don’t think I’ve ever really hated someone until now.”

“Strong words from Harry Styles, the human embodiment of sunshine,” Louis teases.

Harry frowns and shakes his head. “I don’t like anyone who treats my boys badly,” he says. “And he was awful to both of you. Neither of you deserved that—you deserve the world. Noah shouldn’t have to cry over someone like that. Fuck, Lou, I’m sorry. I just get so angry thinking about it.”
Smiling, Louis leans in to kiss Harry’s cheek. “You’re the sweetest, did you know that?” he asks. “We’ll be okay, H, Noah’s going to be okay. It’s hard now, and he’s going through a lot, but those feelings won’t be forever.”

“But I’m gonna be here,” Harry says, incredibly sure of every word he’s saying. “I’ll be here, for both of you, no matter what happens. I love you both so much, Louis, I can’t imagine my life without you.”

Louis leans over on his shoulder and the two of them watch Noah gently snuffling in his sleep. Louis squeezes Harry’s hand again and sighs. “We love you too, H. Forever.”

Harry sighs and drifts his hand through Noah’s hair once more. “Hey, Mum invited us to hers next weekend.”

“Did she?” Louis muses.

“All of us,” Harry confirms. “Me, you, and Noah. I’m not going to be here at all next week for work, and I’m in London the week after for the Brits, so I thought maybe a weekend away would be good for us. Plus, Mum really wants to meet Noah.”

Louis smiles. “Well, I’ll have to clear my busy schedule, but I think that’s a great idea.”

“Yeah?” Harry asks. “I think it’ll be great.”

“It will be babe,” Louis agrees.

Harry grins and pulls Louis in closer so can hold both of his boys.

“Your disguise is shit,” is the first thing out of Zayn’s mouth the moment he sees Harry.

Looking down at himself, Harry frowns. “I thought I did well,” he whines.

Zayn rolls his eyes, but he’s smiling. “It’s just a beanie and sunglasses, Harry, do you really think no one is going to see you?”

“I’ve got a big coat as well,” Harry defends himself. “But I dunno, like, hopefully. I mean, Louis cannot know this is happening. I don’t even know if this is happening. Fuck, what am I doing? It’s too soon isn’t it?”

Zayn smiles and reaches out to wrap his arm around Harry’s shoulders. “Relax,” he says. “You don’t have to actually buy anything, and even if you do, it’s not like you have to propose straight off. It’ll be fine, H.”

With that, Zayn steers Harry into the jewelry shop and Harry immediately feels overwhelmed. What is he doing?

“Louis is going to hate me,” Harry decides as they start looking the rings over. “He’ll think it’s too soon and leave me because I’m out of my mind.”

Zayn snorts. “Y’know, Louis always says you’re a little slow on the uptake, but he never said it was this bad.”
Harry pouts. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Means that Louis has been my best man for almost a year and he’s been more interested in wedding shit in the past week than he’s ever been,” Zayn says, running his fingers over a few of the rings laid out for them. “He’s even been talking to Perrie about the venue and stuff like that, things he doesn’t care about at all, trust me.”

Humming thoughtfully, Harry reaches out to pick up a black ring before carefully putting it back. “Really?” he asks, trying to sound nonchalant.

“Really,” Zayn confirms. “You’re coming to the wedding, aren’t you?”

Harry smiles. “Of course I am, wouldn’t miss it for the world. Noah’s excited, it’s all he’s been talking about ever since he went to get fitted for his suit.”

Zayn grins. “I love that kid. Here, look at these ones.”

The two of them go over every ring in the store, but Harry just keeps frowning. They’re beautiful, of course they are, but none of them feel right. None of them feel like Louis to him. Zayn obviously senses this and reaches out to squeeze his forearm.

“If you buy him something too expensive you know he’ll lose his mind.”

Harry nods. “It’s not that, not really. None of them feel right, y’know? They don’t feel perfect, it has to feel perfect. Maybe I should go to a small shop or something, I’m going to need something for Noah as well.”

Zayn raises an eyebrow. “For Noah?” he asks.

“Yeah, of course. Not a ring, obviously, but I was thinking maybe a bracelet. If we do get married, I want to have something to give him. It’s not just about Louis and I, it’s about all three of us.”

“You’re a really good guy, you know that Harry?” Zayn says. “I’m glad Louis found you.”

Harry smiles back and shrugs. “I try to be the best I can be for them.”

“Lou told me you’re going to your mum’s next weekend,” Zayn points out. “Are you going to propose then?”

Harry barks out a laugh and shakes his head. “No,” he says. “No, I think I’m going to wait a little while. When it feels right, then I’ll do it.”

“Good man,” Zayn laughs, slapping him on the back. “Come on, I think I see some bracelets over there.”

The drive to Anne’s house is nerve wracking, to say the least. Louis drums his fingers on the steering wheel the entire time, running over every possible thing that could go wrong. Both Anne and Harry have told him dozens of times in the past week that it’s going to be okay, but Louis still worries.

Noah, on the other hand, is buzzing with excitement. He sits in the back of the car, kicking his feet against the passenger seat, and babbling. “Meeting my Harry’s mummy,” he says, dancing Hank
across his lap. “Seeing my Harry’s house.”

Louis smiles. “Are you excited, darling?” He asks, glancing back at him in the rear view mirror.

Noah nods and pushes his stuffed dinosaur over so it’s staring Louis right in the face. “So excited Daddy, my Harry says his mummy’s got birds and cats!”

“She does, love, you’re right,” Louis agrees. “But what about meeting Harry’s mum, are you okay with that?”

Noah looks out the window at the trees passing by and nods. “Uh-huh, I’m excited. Hey Daddy…”

With that, Noah launches into another solid hour of babbling. Louis tries his best to keep up, but he’s exhausted. Between Harry being gone in a completely different time zone, work, Noah, and trying to navigate a restraining order, Louis needs a break. He can’t wait to get to Anne’s house and finally sit down for more than a moment now that there’s someone else around to entertain his son.

When they pull up to the house, Harry is already outside waiting for them. Noah squeals and after some help from Louis, scrambles out of the car and up to Harry. You would’ve thought Harry had been gone for months instead of just the week with the way Noah yells his name.

Harry beams and lifts Noah up onto his hip. “Hello bean,” he says. “It’s so nice to see you not pixelated by Daddy’s phone screen, huh?”

Noah smiles and reaches up to pull the sunglasses out of Harry’s hair. He puts them on and Louis laughs. “Those are absolutely ridiculous,” Louis teases. “What on earth were you thinking, Harold?”

“They look nice, excuse you,” Harry says, helping Noah put the too-big sunglasses on.


Louis nods. “That’s because Harry’s secretly been an alien all this time,” he says to his son, ignoring Harry’s indignant squawk. “Soon they’ll be back to take him to his home planet.”

Noah gasps. “Can I come too?”

“Your father is a lunatic,” Harry says quite seriously. “If anyone’s an alien, then it’s him.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “You’re getting dangerously close to being a single alien, if you keep it up, Styles.”

Harry laughs and shakes his head. “You’d never leave me, would you?”

“Daddy wouldn’t ever,” Noah agrees. “My Harry, guess what?”

“What, bean?” Harry asks. Louis smiles at the both of them while he gets their bags out of the car. Harry is so clucky, carefully fixing Noah’s shirt and pushing his curls out of his eyes. Sometimes, Louis thinks Harry might just defy science and find a way to have a million kids himself.

“I’m meeting your mummy today,” Noah says. “Don’t forget, I’m on my best behavior.”

“You’re always on your best behavior, bean,” Harry says.

Louis rolls his eyes. “Yeah, right. Where is everyone, Harold?”

Harry shrugs and takes Louis’ bag from him so he’s left carrying Noah’s. “Robin went out shopping
for mum, Gems isn’t coming to visit until tomorrow, but Mum is inside. Are you ready, bean?”

Noah bites his lip as they slowly approach the front door and sighs. “Kinda nervous,” he admits.

“You don’t need to be nervous, darling,” Louis says, even though he’s nervous too.

“Daddy’s right,” Harry agrees. “She’ll love you, bean, because I love you.”

That makes Noah smile again and he nods. “Okay. It’ll be good.”

As soon as they walk inside, Anne seems to appear out of nowhere to envelop Louis in a big hug.

“Louis,” she sighs. “How are you, darling?”

Louis smiles and hugs her back. “I’m good, love, how are you?”

“Perfect,” Anne says, leaning over to kiss him on the cheek. “Well, where’s Noah?”

“Right here,” Harry says, setting Louis’ bag down and walking over to his mum. Noah is staring at her nervously, one little hand playing with the collar of Harry’s shirt.

Anne beams as soon as she spots him and Noah quickly takes the sunglasses off as if he’s just remembered he’s wearing them. “Hi, my Harry’s mummy,” he says. “I’m Noah, and I’m on my best behavior for the weekend.”

Louis groans but Anne and Harry both laugh. “Hello Noah, you can just call me Anne sweetheart. You don’t have to worry about being on your best behavior, okay?”

“Okay,” Noah giggles. “Daddy says I gotta, but my Harry thinks I’m always good.”

“I bet you are,” Anne says quite seriously. “How would you like to help me in the kitchen? I’m making biscuits for everyone.”

At that, Noah’s eyes go wide. “You can bake just like my Harry?”

“She bakes loads better than I do,” Harry laughs. “Go and help her, bean.”

Noah scrambles out of Harry’s arms and puts the sunglasses back on, looking ridiculous as he reaches up to grab Anne’s hand. “At my house my Harry bakes all the time for me and my Daddy.”

Anne laughs and leads him to the kitchen. Their voices fade off as they walk away and Harry smiles.

“That’s it,” he says. “You’re never getting him back, she’s stolen him.”

“She can have him,” Louis sighs. “I’m so tired.”

Harry frowns. “I’m sorry, Lou.”

“Baby, it isn’t your fault,” Louis laughs.

Harry shakes his head and steps forward to pull Louis into his arms. “I hate not being here,” he murmurs. “Hate not being able to help you.”

“I’ve been doing it alone for years,” Louis reminds him, but he lets himself be held. It’s almost sad how badly he misses Harry after only a week. It’s going to be almost unbearable, he thinks, once their album comes out and Harry has to go on tour again.
“But you don’t have to anymore,” Harry says. “Come on love, you need a nap.”

Louis rolls his eyes. “I do not need a nap.”

“You need a nap,” Harry confirms, tugging Louis towards the stairs. “Nap time, c’mon.”

Louis groans, trying to be dramatic as possible just to make Harry smile. “But Noah-”

“I’ve got him,” Harry says, and Louis is surprised at how easily he accepts that. There are very few people in this world that Louis turns with his son, and Harry is one of them. On top of that, Louis is so tired he feels like he’s about to pass out.

They walk upstairs together and Harry leads Louis to his room. Louis sits down on the bed and Harry reaches out to pull Louis’ shirt off.

“Oh, is that what’s happening?” Louis laughs tiredly. “Pawn my kid off to your mother so you can have your way with me, Styles?”

Harry rolls his eyes and reaches down into his suitcase for a jumper. He pulls it over Louis’ head and follows it up with a kiss. “Go to sleep, baby, okay?”

Louis wiggles out of his jeans and crawls into Harry’s bed. “Missed you a lot, H,” he mumbles as he crushes a pillow to his chest.

“I missed you too, darling,” Harry whispers.

“Make sure he isn’t rude,” Louis mumbles as his eyes start to fall closed on their own accord, content to be wrapped up in Harry’s jumper and Harry’s sheets. “He has to be polite and listen to you. He has stuff in his bag if he gets bored, and he needs to take his nap soon or he’ll be grumpy.”

“I’ve got it handled baby, go to sleep,” Harry murmurs, leaning down to kiss Louis’ forehead. “I love you.”

Louis smiles and sighs. “I love you too.” He whispers, and then everything goes blissfully dark and quiet.

Harry walks into the kitchen to find his mother and Noah talking to each other animatedly over a bowl of dough.

“Hi, my Harry,” Noah says when he spots Harry watching them from the doorway. “Where’s Daddy?”

Harry smiles. “He’s taking a nap, bean, you’ve tired him out.”

Anne looks back at him and frowns. “Poor love, he works so hard. Let him sleep as long as he likes.”

“I know, Mum,” Harry says, walking over to them.

Sitting on the counter, Noah has the sunglasses pushed up into his hair to keep it out of his eyes, and he’s dutifully stirring the dough that’s already done. Harry’s only been gone a week, but Noah seems
to have gotten bigger somehow. His hair is drifting down to his chin and Harry could swear he’s
gotten taller.

“Who let you grow up, hm?” Harry asks, gently tweaking Noah’s ear.

The boy grins and shrugs his shoulder. “Daddy says I gotta, that’s why I eat all my broccoli.”

Harry laughs and leans over to kiss his cheek. “Well, if Daddy says,” he teases. “Are you almost
done baking, love?”

Noah nods and smacks his hand down on a biscuit. “Make it flat, makes them better,” he explains.

Anne nods as if that holds any truth. “Noah is a great help, Harry. I think we have a little baker on
our hands.”

“My Harry was a baker,” Noah says, which makes Harry grin with pride. “’Cept Daddy says he
can’t used to be anything cause he’s not that big.”

Anne laughs. “You know, I think I agree with you there darling.”

“Mum,” Harry whines.

The two of them laugh together like they’re conspiring, and Anne takes Noah’s smacked flat biscuits
from him to put on the sheet. Harry watches the two of them finish their baking, loving how much
his mum seems to be enjoying Noah. Granted, his mother loves kids, but Harry wants her to love
Noah because he’s Noah-in Harry’s eyes he’s perfect.

“There we go, now we just have to wait for them to bake,” Anne says, carefully putting the biscuits
in the oven. “Why don’t you go play with Harry for a bit, love, I can handle this part.”

“Okay,” Noah says, reaching his arms out for Harry who picks him up without a word. “What now,
my Harry?”

Harry smiles. “Well, Daddy said you need to have a nap soon.”


“Well, you’ll be sleepy soon,” Harry points out. “Why do we go see what presents I’ve bought for
you, huh?”

Noah’s eyes go wide. “Presents?” He gasps.

“Presents,” Harry agrees.

Noah seems to think it over before nodding. “Okay, but my Daddy says I can’t be greedy, and I
gotta say please and thank you’s.”

Anne covers her laughter with her hand and Harry smiles and carries him out of the room. “You
don’t need to worry about that, sweetheart,” Harry says as he carries the boy to the living room.
“You’re always good for me.”

“Well, I don’t gotta make a good ’pression on you,” Noah says, like that’s obvious. “You like me
already.”

The two of them sit down on the couch together and Harry reaches over for the box on the table. He
hands them to Noah who opens them with a big smile.
“Whoa,” Noah breathes, pulling the dinosaur plush out of the box. “So cool, my Harry.”

Harry smiles. “I got it in Tokyo, love, do you know where that is?”

“No-u-h, but you were far away Daddy says,” Noah tells him, dancing the dinosaur across Harry’s lap. “I missed you a lot.”

“I missed you too,” Harry says. “I miss you and your Daddy every time I leave.”

Noah and Harry carefully go through the other things Harry’s bought him, mostly souvenirs and different types of candy. It makes Harry so happy, making Noah happy.

“Thank you my Harry,” Noah says, reaching over to hug him. “But you don’t have to buy me stuff. I already like you.”

Laughing, Harrysqueeze the boy back. “I know that love,” he says. “I just think about you and your Daddy all the time when I’m gone, so I like to pick up little things for you now and then.”

“Okay,” Noah relents. “But I love you even if you don’t buy me presents.”

“I know you do, bean.”

“Good,” Noah sighs, holding the dinosaur to his chest. “Do you think your mummy likes me, Harry? Was kinda nervous for it.”

“I think she likes you, darling,” Harry confirms. “It’s very hard not to like you.”

As much as he protested, Noah’s eyes are starting to droop and he yawns. Harry smiles and carefully moves the boy so he’s laying across his chest, head pillowed on Harry’s shoulder. The boy sighs and gently moves the dinosaur so it’s squished between them.

“She’s nice,” Noah yawns. “I told her that you’re my best friend and she saw our bracelets.”

Harry smiles. “We are best friends, love,” he whispers. “Are you about ready for that nap now?”

Noah shrugs and closes his eyes. “Maybe,” he relents. “Can probably take a nap here, I missed you.”

“Of course you can,” Harry says, carefully moving them around a bit so they’re both more comfortable. “Go to sleep, bean, I’ve got you.”

In one last sleepy move, Noah reaches out to take a handful of Harry’s shirt and holds on tight. “Love you,” he mumbles.

No matter how many times he hears it, the words still make Harry beam with pride. “I love you too, baby,” he whispers back.

It’s the most peaceful Harry has felt in days, holding Noah as he sleeps and listening to the sounds of his mum finishing up in the kitchen. She returns a few minutes later to find the two of them on the couch, Noah passed out, and Harry half asleep as well.

“He’s lovely, Harry,” Anne whispers, moving across the room to grab a blanket which she drapes over Noah’s sleeping form.

Harry smiles proudly and nods. “Yeah, he really is.”

Anne takes a seat across from Harry, watching the two of them thoughtfully for a moment. “I’m so
happy for you,” she says, finally. “They’re amazing boys, Louis and Noah, and I’m so happy to see you finally getting what you deserve. I’m proud of you, Harry, for stepping up like this.”

“You never told me it that this is what it feels like,” Harry says softly, looking down at Noah’s sleeping face. “I never thought I could love anyone as much as I love them.”

Anne laughs softly. “Well, I didn’t want to give you any more reason to have kids early on, did I? If you had your way you’d be settled in with four kids by now.”

Harry shrugs. “Maybe, but maybe not. I tell Louis that all the time—I think it’s fate. I was meant to be with them, it was always supposed to be the three of us together.”

“How’s the ring search going, then?” Anne teases.

“Ugh, don’t remind me,” Harry groans. “I swear, nothing is perfect. I even looked when we were in Japan, but nothing. I think I’m going to look at some other places with the boys or Nick when we get to London for the Brits this week. I know I have time, but I want them now. I don’t want to spend a moment longer than I have to not being married to Louis.”

“You’re in love,” Anne points out, smiling at him knowingly.

“Hopelessly,” Harry agrees.

It really shouldn’t surprise Louis, how easily his son manages to charm Harry’s entire family. This is Noah after all, the boy who had Harry Styles wrapped around his little finger the moment they met, and Harry’s family is just as easy. Gemma and Eva are both thrilled to see him Saturday when they arrive, and Noah is just as hilariously gentle with Eva as he was in New York, playing with her as if she might break at any moment. Anne takes to Noah immediately, and the two of them are thick as thieves come Monday morning. Even Robin loves him, going on and on about how surrounded he is by girls and how fun it is to have Noah around.

By Monday, Louis has this awful voice in his head that sounds suspiciously like Harry, whispering that this is it. Harry’s family is his family too, and they love Noah, and that confirmation is so reassuring.

“I don’t wanna go home,” Noah whines from where he’s sitting on the couch beside Anne, watching Louis and Harry gather their things.

Anne frowns right along with him. “I don’t want you to go,” she tells him. “I think you should stay here with me and Robin forever, what do you think?”

Noah gasps. “Yes!” He shouts, quickly turning to look at Louis. “Can I Daddy, please?”

Louis laughs and shakes his head. “I’m afraid not, love, you need to get back to school and Daddy needs to get back to work. Plus, I’m sure Anne would miss her quiet house.”

“School is yucky,” Noah groans. “It’s way more fun here.”

“You need to go to school, bean,” Harry reminds him. “How are you going to be a big rockstar if you can’t read your own lyrics?”
Louis laughs, and teases, “You’re the worst role model, dropout.”

“Oi, I finished college eventually,” Harry says, grabbing Louis around the waist and pulling him close. “You think you’re so smart, just because you went to uni and grew up to be a smart and responsible adult with a real job.”

Louis rolls his eyes, but breaks his fake teasing when Harry pulls him in for a kiss. “You know I’m only joking, darling. You’re brilliant,” he whispers, making Harry’s eyes light up. “Smarter than me, even.”

“Gross,” Noah whines. “Anne, don’t make me go! They’re always kissin’ each other!”

Both Anne and Robin laugh and share a knowing look. “You should feel lucky, Noah,” Anne says. “You have parents that love each other very much.”

Louis can feel Harry freeze, but Noah hardly seems to care about the gravity of what Anne’s just said. Instead, he shrugs and says, “Well yeah, but that doesn’t mean they gotta be so gross!”

“Alright love,” Louis laughs, pulling away from Harry and promptly stopping that train of thought. “We have to get going, say goodbye to Anne and Robin.”

Noah does as he’s told, giving both Anne and Robin long hugs and thanking them for letting him stay for the weekend. Louis then moves to do the same, though Anne keeps hold of him for much longer than she normally would.

“Thank you, Louis,” she whispers in his ear, and Louis doesn’t have to ask what for.

Leaving and watching as Anne’s peaceful house disappears from view makes Louis terribly sad. Harry lets out a loud sigh in the passenger seat and Louis instinctively reaches out for his hand. He can’t imagine being so far from his mum, especially for long periods of time like Harry is. Hell, Louis can’t imagine what he’s going to do someday when Noah leaves home.

“I love you,” Louis reminds Harry.

Harry smiles sadly and squeezes his hand back. “I love you too, Lou.”

They spend the rest of their day together before Harry has to leave for London for the rest of the week. Louis thinks it’s a bit stupid, considering the Brits aren’t until the weekend, but Harry and the boys are lined up for days of press and rehearsals beforehand. Noah doesn’t seem to like the thought of it either, and spends the majority of the day wrapped up between the two of them while they watch films and eat pizza, the candy Harry’s brought from Japan, and the biscuits Anne insisted they bring home.

It’s just before his bedtime when Noah starts complaining that his stomach hurts. At first, Louis thinks it’s just from all the sweets, but he’s soon proved wrong when Noah starts running a fever. Louis gives him some medicine that will hopefully bring his fever down and tucks the boy into his bed, all while Harry watches in a mild state of panic.

“Do you think it’s the candy I got him?” Harry asks, once Louis has successfully gotten the boy to fall asleep.

Louis smiles at his worry and shakes his head. “No, love. He’s a kid, kids get sick now and then. He’ll be okay.”

Harry bites his lip, looking past Louis into the dark room where Noah is snoring. “I don’t feel right
leaving,” he says. “Are you sure you don’t want me to stay?”

To Louis, it’s enough that Harry would even suggest that. “Baby,” he laughs softly, reaching out to run his arms over Harry’s shoulders. “You can’t skip the Brits just because Noah has a stomach bug.”

Harry sighs. “Okay,” he mutters, though he doesn’t sound happy about the decision at all. “But you’ll call me, right? If anything changes or if you need me to come home-”

If there was ever a doubt in Louis’ mind that Harry doesn’t care, they would all be silenced now. Harry is genuinely concerned, albeit a bit too concerned considering it’s only a stomachache and a low fever, and Louis can’t help but find it endearing.

Louis stops Harry’s babbling by leaning forward to kiss him. “Noah’s going to be fine,” he says, looking Harry in the eyes so the other man will know he’s serious. “Go make me proud, popstar, bring us back a shiny little statue. We’ll be watching.”

As Louis pulls away, there’s a honk from outside; Harry’s car. The man grimaces and reaches out to squeeze Louis in a hug. “Tell him I love him, yeah? And I love you.”

“We love you too, baby,” Louis sighs. “That’s your car, you have to go.”

Looking reluctant, Harry grabs his bags and leaves Louis with one last kiss. “Bye, Lou,” he sighs. “Give Noah a kiss for me when he wakes up.”

“I will,” Louis promises. “Bye, H.”

With one last pensive look back, Harry leaves. Louis watches him go from the window, watches him climb into the car with Alberto and drive away until he can’t see the taillights anymore.

“Daddy!” Noah shouts from down the hall, his voice thick with tears.

Louis sighs and shuts the curtains. It’s going to be a long night.

Chapter End Notes

(My love of The Beatles transcends all of my works apparently)

I hope you enjoyed all of that emotion and drama. Sorry about the cliffhanger-ish ending, but I promise it'll be worth it ;) I have updated the chapter count the 20, though it might be closer to 19 depending on what I fit into the next chapter. Sadly, our two year journey is coming to an end-but don't worry too much, because with me nothing is ever truly over!

As usual, thank you for your comments, your kudos, for not giving up on me or this massive story, and most of all your patience with me and my long breaks between updates. Thank you for everything, always. xx
By the next night, Louis is beyond worried. No matter what he does, nothing seems to be able to fix what's wrong with Noah. His fever won't go down and he's started throwing up and Louis has run out of options. He doesn't like feeling like he's overreacting, but even Jay seems worried when he calls her for the third time that day.

“You need to go to the hospital, love,” she says, obviously trying to keep her voice in check to calm him down as well. “Take him in now, Louis, tell them everything okay?”

Louis hangs up after calling to tell Zayn, who was already on his way to help, to meet him at the hospital.


Louis reaches over and picks him up, holding him close. “I know baby,” he says. “I know, but it'll be okay. Daddy's going to fix it, yeah? I'm gonna make it better.”

“M'cold,” Noah whispers.

He's running a fever that refuses to break, but he's shaking so Louis still wraps him up in a blanket. “Come on baby,” Louis whispers, picking the boy up and carrying him out to the car. He doesn't even think to grab anything besides his shoes which he quickly throws on before running the boy out.


“I'm here, love, Daddy's right here,” Louis promises, reaching out to squeeze the boy's little fingers. “We're gonna go to the hospital, the doctor will make it all better I promise.”

Noah whimpers. “My tummy,” he mumbles, his limbs loose as Louis carefully straps him into his car seat. As soon as he shuts the door, he pulls his phone from his pocket and looks down at it.

Harry has been rehearsing and doing press nonstop since he got to London yesterday, but he still picks up after the first ring.

“Lou?” he mumbles into the phone, and it’s obvious Louis’s just woken him up. “Babes, it's late.”

Louis cringes, because it is late. God, maybe he shouldn't have even called at all-


Louis shake shakes head. “Harry,” he breathes. “I'm taking Noah to the hospital. He's not getting any better, just worse, and he's in so much pain, and I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do, H.”

On the other line, Louis can hear shuffling and then Harry saying, “I'm coming,” he says, sounding a bit breathless. “I'm on my way, I'm leaving right now.”

“Harry-”
“Don’t,” Harry says. “I'm coming. He'll be okay, Lou, I know he will. Go now, I promise I'll be there as fast as I can, three hours tops.”


“I love you too,” Harry says. “Tell Noah I love him so much, it’s going to be fine Louis. I promise, he’ll be fine.”

Part of Louis knows that there’s no possible way Harry can be sure that things will be fine, but he sounds so sure of himself that Louis starts nodding. They hang up and Louis gets into the car, looking back to find Noah crying but mostly out of it.

“Love,” Louis calls, his voice shaking as he carefully pulls out onto the street. “Can you stay awake for me, please? Let’s try to stay awake until we get to the hospital, my love, okay?”

Noah opens his eyes a bit and nods. “M’tired,” he mumbles, and Louis knows he is. He hardly slept last night between throwing up, running a fever, and crying, and he didn’t take his nap today for the same reason. It’s nearing the middle of the night now, far past his bedtime, but Louis doesn’t want him to fall asleep not knowing what could be wrong with him.

Louis is so worried his fingers shake as he tries to keep calm and drive himself to the hospital. When they finally pull up, he parks his car in a place he’s sure is illegal and picks Noah up blanket and all. As promised, Zayn is waiting for them there, looking just as scared as Louis is when the doctors take Noah away.

It feels like losing a piece of himself, as dramatic as that may be. The nurses look alarmed at whatever it is they see in Noah and rush him off for a scan of his stomach. They tell Louis to sit, wait, and try to calm down until someone goes back to get him, like that’s at all possible. They’re taking his baby from him, and where his baby goes Louis goes too, that’s just how it works.

“I’ve got you,” Zayn whispers, pulling Louis into his arms. “He’s okay, Lou, they’re going to take care of him.”

Zayn wraps Louis up in his arms and they sit together in the little waiting room in A&E while nurses and patients buzz around. It feels like hours later when a nurse finally calls his name and Louis goes with her, Zayn following closely behind. In a little room, she asks Louis a million questions about Noah’s medical history, before finally telling him what’s wrong.

“His appendix?” Louis croaks out when she tells him, voice hoarse from crying. “But you can’t… he’s-he’s too little, he’s just a baby-”

“Lou, hey,” Zayn murmurs, rubbing Louis’ back. “They have to do it, babes, they can’t risk him getting hurt any more than he already is.”

And he is hurt, Louis realizes. The nurse says his appendix has burst already, god knows how long ago that may have happened. Louis should’ve brought him in sooner, he should’ve made Harry stay when he offered and taken Noah in.

“Okay,” Louis says, finally. “Okay, um, what do I have to sign?”

The nurse gives Louis a sympathetic look and assures him that their best doctor will be performing the operation. Louis is sure she tells everyone that. She gently coaxes him to sign off on a bunch of forms, check a million little boxes, and recite Noah’s name and date of birth before leading them into a smaller waiting room near where they’ll be operating.
Louis collapses into a chair, the weight of everything that’s happened in the short few hours hitting him. He can’t move, or think, or even breathe, he’s simply numb. Noah is somewhere in that room, all alone, probably scared and wondering where his dad is, and Louis can’t be there. It’s like torture.

Beside him, Zayn starts calling everyone, telling Louis’ mum and then Lottie and Perrie what’s going on, assuring them that everything is going okay so far. Louis, on the other hand, can do nothing but sit in his stupid little chair and shake.

“Babe?” Zayn asks gently, reaching out to put his hand on Louis’ knee. “Should I call Harry?”

Louis shakes his head and wipes at his eyes. “No, no he’s on his way. He’s coming.”


“Yeah, he’s driving up,” Louis whispers. “Can you just text him, please? Let him know what’s happening-I promised I would but I…”

Louis trails off and Zayn lifts his arm up to pull Louis into his side and hugs him. “Don’t worry,” he says. “I’ve got it love.”

They stay in that room for god knows how long, Louis can’t keep track anymore. The only sign of time passing is the tv in the corner of the room flipping from show to show and people scurrying in and out. Zayn takes charge of handling all the worried family members blowing up Louis’ phone, and Louis leans on him and stares at the floor.

It feels like an eternity later when a smiling doctor finally emerges and calls out Louis’ name. Zayn and Louis are standing up to go talk to him when the door to the waiting room crashes open.

Harry looks awful, which is saying something considering how bad Louis looks right now. He’s wearing sweatpants and a hoodie that looks like it came right out of his dirty laundry basket. His hair is a mess and sticking up in odd places, just like it always is when he’s only just woken up. His eyes are red, most likely from crying and lack of sleep, and he barrels towards Louis as soon as he spots him.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” Harry whispers, pulling Louis into his arms and hugging him so tightly it’s almost hard to breathe. Louis welcomes it, breathing a sigh of relief as Harry pulls back to kiss him quickly. “I came as fast as I could, and they didn’t want to let me in, and I had to-where’s Noah? Is he okay?”

The doctor smiles at the two of them and nods to the chart in his hands. “I was just about to tell your husband, your son is doing fine. His appendix burst probably sometime this afternoon, which does complicate things a bit, but the medicine should take care of any infection. He’ll be waking up soon, but we’ll need to keep him for until the end of the week just to monitor him and make sure everything’s going smoothly.”

Harry nods, squeezing Louis’ hand and not denying he isn’t Louis’ husband for even a moment. “Okay,” he says softly, turning to Louis to gently hug him again. “Have you seen him? When can we see him? He’ll be scared if he has to wake up alone.”

“He’s being transferred to our pediatric floor,” the doctor explains. “You’re more than welcome to meet him there, but I’m afraid it’s immediate family only after hours.”

Zayn nods. “I get it,” he says softly. “I’ll run home and get some things for you and Noah, Lou. Do you need anything specifically?”
“Hank,” Louis says, stepping forward to hug Zayn tightly. “It'll make Noah feel so much better. Thank you so much, I love you Z.”

Zayn nods and squeezes him back. “I love you too. I'll be here in the morning, I promise.”

They break apart and Zayn is immediately swept up into Harry's arms. Harry whispers something to him and Zayn squeezes him back and nods.

“Of course,” he whispers.

Louis doesn't have the energy to ask what the two of them are whispering about, so he lets it be. As soon as they're alone in the lift though, Louis raises his eyebrows and asks, “How did you get them to let you in?”

“I might have lied and said you were my husband and Noah was my son,” Harry says carefully. Louis smiles and Harry gently bumps into his side. “Listen, I wear enough rings I only had to slide one over and I can be pretty convincing when I want to be. Should've been an actor.”

Louis laughs and turns to rest his head on Harry's chest. “You're ridiculous,” he giggles. “God, H.”

“I was so worried,” Harry reveals. “I swear I almost went off the road a few times, it's a miracle I wasn't pulled over. I've never driven so fast in my life.”

Louis wraps his arms around Harry's waist and sighs. “I love you. Thank you.”

“Don't thank me,” Harry whispers. “I'd do anything for you and Noah.”

The lift doors slide open and Louis pulls himself away from Harry long enough to find where Noah's room is. They walk through the floor together, Louis trying not to look into the rooms and see all of the other children who are hurt or sick.

Louis pushes the door open to Noah's room and gasps when he spots him. He looks so little, laying in the middle of the bed like a sea of white around him, tubes and wires attached to his body. They've only just brought him in, but Louis feels like Noah's been waiting ages for him.

“Oh god,” he breathes softly, rushing towards the bed. “Baby, my baby.”

Apparently Harry's lie about being married to Louis has spread, because a nurse informs him of anything he wants to know as soon as he asks. Louis is hardly paying attention anymore, he collapses into the chair beside his son and reaches out for his hands. He looks so pale and Louis hates seeing him this way. He hates feeling like he's failed his son.

“Baby,” Harry whispers, walking across the room and gently laying a hand on Louis' back. “Stand up, darling.”

Without questioning him, Louis does, only to fall back into Harry's lap. Harry wraps an arm around his waist and they're both holding onto Noah's hand. Harry is crying, Louis notices.

“He's okay,” Louis whispers, trying to convince himself as well as Harry. “Love, he'll be fine.”

“I know,” Harry whispers. “I'm just so worried about him, Lou. God, he's just a baby. I don't know what I would do if anything happened to him, I don't.”

Louis shakes his head and leans back on Harry's chest. “He was asking for you,” he whispers softly. “Asking for his Harry. He loves you too, baby, and he's going to be fine now.”
Harry nods and takes a deep breath. “I don't ever want to leave you again,” he whispers.

As sad as he is, Louis smiles just a bit. “Yeah?” he asks softly. “You going to tie yourself to us?”

“Mhm,” Harry yawns before tucking his head into the juncture of Louis’ neck. “Never leaving you again, ever. Bad things happen when I leave.”

Leaning back on him, Louis can feel Harry start to drift off. Of course, Harry never lets go of Noah’s hand. Their fingers overlap and Louis can only stare at them as his vision begins going a bit fuzzy. He hasn’t slept in two days, he realizes, but he can’t bring himself to fall asleep until Noah wakes up and Louis can be certain he’s okay.

And he does, probably twenty minutes later even though it feels like an eternity. Noah snuffles and moans and Louis snaps awake, as does Harry. In an instant, Louis is standing over him, running his fingertips over Noah’s cheeks.

“Oh,” Louis whispers as Noah blinks his eyes open. “Oh, darling, oh my god.”

Noah’s eyes flit around the room, from the ceiling, to his bed, to Harry and Louis holding his hand. “What’s happenin’, Daddy?” he whispers, voice sounding scratchy.

The sound of his voice makes Louis smile. “You were sick darling,” Louis reminds him. “Do you remember? Your tummy was hurting and I brought you to the hospital so the doctors could fix it.”

Noah nods a little bit and his hand drifts down to his stomach where his stitches are. Louis carefully picks his hand up and moves it away and Noah frowns. “My tummy aches.”

“Well, they had to take out your appendix sweetheart.”

“What’s my appendix?” Noah asks, trying to reach for his stomach again only to be stopped by Harry this time.

“It’s just something in your body that made you sick,” Harry explains, moving closer to the bed and wrapping an arm around Louis’ waist. “You don’t need it so they took it out and now you’re all better, love.”

At the sight of him, Noah’s eyes light up. “My Harry, you’re here too?”

“Of course I am darling,” Harry says. “I came as soon as your dad called me.”

Noah smiles. “Good,” he mutters. “I’m sleepy some more.”

“Go to sleep then baby, it’s really late,” Louis whispers. “We’ll be right here when you wake up, I promise.”

Noah nods and lets his eyes fall closed again. “Love you,” he mumbles.

“We love you too,” Harry whispers back.

In an instant, Noah is sleeping again and Louis finds himself back in Harry’s lap on the chair beside him. Harry pushes a button on the side of the couch that makes it recline and Louis tries to get as comfortable as he can be without hurting the other man.

“Go to sleep, love,” Harry whispers, kissing Louis’ temple. “You’re exhausted.”

“Okay,” Louis mumbles, closing his eyes. “I love you, H.”
He can feel Harry’s lips against his skin curling into a smile and Harry sighs. “I love you too. Goodnight, baby.”

Harry wakes up to a kink in his neck and the rising sun shining on his face. A quick check of his phone tells him it’s just barely seven in the morning. He’s hardly slept at all, between showing up here only hours ago and waking up every few minutes to make sure Noah and Louis are okay, Harry’s eyes feel heavier than they ever have before.

Still partially laying on top of him, Louis lets out a soft snore and moves a bit. Harry gently pushes his hair away from his forehead and kisses him there. He feels awful, feels like he’s failed Louis somehow by leaving even when he knew something was wrong. He knew something didn’t feel right about Noah, and yet Harry left anyway. Like a stupid awards show is anywhere near as important to him as Louis and Noah.

“Harry?”

Harry snaps his attention back to Noah immediately and finds the boy smiling at him. “Hey, bean,” Harry whispers. “Are you feeling okay?”

Noah nods and reaches out to grab Harry’s hand again and squeeze it as hard as he can. “I’m okay,” he confirms. “I love you a ton.”

“I love you even more than a ton bean,” Harry teases. “You know that, don’t you?”

Noah nods and yawns. “I know it. I wanna go home, my Harry.”

Harry sighs. “I want you to come home too, darling, but we have to stay here until you’re all better. You’ll come home very soon, won’t you? And I’ll make you whatever you like for tea and you, me, and Daddy can cuddle for as long as you want.”

“You’re not gonna be on my telly?” Noah asks.

“No, love,” Harry replies. “I’m staying here until you feel better, no work for me.”

That makes Noah beam. “Good. I like seein’ you on telly, but I like when you’re here with me and my Daddy even better.”

Harry smiles and leans over to kiss Noah’s cheek and make the boy giggle. “You want to know a secret?” he whispers. “I feel the same way.”

Noah keeps giggling, but his eyes are starting to fall closed again. Harry isn’t sure exactly what sort of medicine they have him on, but he seems completely out of it. He’s been waking up every couple of hours just to mumble something and fall asleep again.

“Why don’t you go back to sleep?” Harry suggests. “Try to get some rest, bean, I’ll be right here when you wake up.”

Sighing, Noah closes his eyes and squeezes Harry’s fingers before mumbling, “I love you, Papa.”

Harry’s breath hitches and his heart starts beating double time. Noah doesn’t seem to care about what he’s just said, if the way he quickly falls asleep again is any indicator. Maybe he’s too drugged up to
know what he’s said, maybe it was a mistake—Harry stops thinking about it. It doesn’t matter, really, what Noah calls him. It could never change how Harry feels about him.

But if Harry’s being honest, hearing Noah call him that almost made him want to cry. It just feels right, like how all of this has felt right. If Harry ever needed a reason to believe that he’s doing the right thing, this would be it.

While both of his boys sleep, Harry takes to his phone to update everyone on Noah. Both of their mums have been texting him nonstop, worried and wanting updates on how he is until Jay will finally be allowed in when visiting hours start. He does the same for Zayn, and for Liam and Niall who are just as worried after watching him run out of their hotel practically half naked with no explanation.

But apparently it wasn’t just Niall and Liam who saw him leave. Harry’s management team have emailed, asking how he’d like to proceed from here. There are pictures of him frantically leaving the hotel and he looks god awful. It’s been turned into every awful thing imaginable, with some people claiming he’s left the band after some massive fight, or that he’s back on drugs—all of it’s ridiculous of course. Harry is right where he’s supposed to be.

In an email back to his team, Harry lets them know he won’t be back in time for the Brits or anything else this week or the next because of Noah. Minutes later, their official twitter has said something about a family emergency that will hopefully get people to stop spreading lies, though Harry knows even that won’t stop the speculating.

Instead of focusing on that, Harry decides to try to find something on television to watch muted. Or, at least, something to focus his eyes on instead of worrying over Louis at his side and Noah in his bed. He settles on a cooking show, pretty much falling asleep with his eyes open as he watches a woman prepare scrambled eggs.

The sun has fully risen when the door to their room opens and Zayn appears. Harry smiles and Zayn walks in, holding Hank in one hand and a bag in the other.

“Hey,” Harry whispers.

Zayn smiles back. “Hey, H. You alright?”

Harry nods. “You’ve brought Hank?”

“Yeah,” Zayn says, holding the stuffed dinosaur up and shaking it side to side a bit. “I bought this here, you know. Five years ago, Jesus, it doesn’t feel like that long.”

Harry smiles, looking back over to Noah who is still sleeping and holding Harry hand. “I bet he was the sweetest baby,” he murmurs.

“He was,” Zayn says, gently placing the dinosaur next to Noah on the bed. “God, I was so worried. I was trying hard not to say anything because Louis was an absolute wreck but I was so scared.”

“I was too,” Harry admits. “I meant what I said, Z, thank you for taking care of Louis.”

Zayn nods and pulls up a chair on the other side Noah’s bed. Harry fills him in on everything the nurses and doctors have said so far, about Noah and when he might be able to go home. As far as Harry knows they’ll be stuck here at least another couple of days, if not longer, until they’re sure there’s no infection spreading.

“You haven’t slept at all have you?” Zayn asks, watching Harry try desperately to keep his eyes
Harry shakes his head. “No, not really. I’ve been too worried, really.”

Zayn nods. “You should try,” he says. “I’ll watch him and wake you up when the doctor comes, yeah?”

As much as Harry wants to refuse that, he can’t. So, he nods and listens to Zayn drone on about wedding details while he closes his eyes and falls asleep again.

Louis is very, very sick of being in this hospital.

It’s officially been three days, but he’s completely over it. Louis hasn’t been home since he ran out that night, and though Harry did leave once last night and promised the house hadn’t burnt down or anything, Louis doesn’t want to be here anymore. And the only thing that’s worse than him being restless is Noah being restless.

“I’m bored,” Noah groans.

Louis puts on his most convincing smile and says, “Love, it’s a hospital, it’s not supposed to be fun.”

“When is my grandma coming back?” Noah asks. “She’s fun for me, brings me toys.”

Harry smiles at Louis from across Noah’s bed. “Your collection is getting a bit out of hand, Noah, don’t you think?”

The three of them look over to the pile of ever growing gifts by Noah’s bed. There are toys from Jay, flowers from the girls at Louis’ work, a bouquet sent along from Liam and Niall made out of candy, and more stuffed animals bought by harry and Zayn at the gift shop. Louis is a bit concerned they won’t have room at home for all of the things Noah’s collecting.

“Maybe,” Noah decides. “But it’s just ’cause everyone loves me.”

Louis snorts. “You’re entirely right, there, darling. We’ll find a place for it at home, promise.”

“Good,” Noah says. “Can I play games, my Daddy?”

That’s all Noah’s really been doing since the surgery. They have to keep monitoring him at least until Friday, just to ensure the infection hasn’t spread from his appendix bursting, and he’s run out of things to do. It feels like they’ve watched every show imaginable, played every game they could make up, Harry even brought in Noah’s guitar one day and let him play with it. It’s starting to get monotonous, Louis thinks as he hands over Noah’s tablet to play on.

“Lou,” Harry says. “I’m going to get coffee, do you want something?”

Louis nods but doesn’t have to elaborate. Harry leaves with a kiss to Noah’s cheek and one for Louis. Noah watches him go, a small frown on his lips.

“My Daddy, can I ask you somethin’?” Noah says, as soon as he’s gone.

Louis nods. “Of course you can, my love, anything.”

The words shock Louis a bit. “You…you called him that?”

Noah nods. “Only cause he’s like my dad,” he explains carefully “But since I got another dad I can't call him Daddy too it'll be confusing’. So I call him Papa because I read a book at school about a boy and he has two dads and he calls them Daddy and Papa so it isn't confusing, and I love my Harry like he's my other daddy, and I just wanna know if it's okay, cause I don't know if it's okay to say it but I did say it on accident cause I think it-”

“Love,” Louis says, reaching out for his hand to stop the babbling. “Baby, slow down.”

Noah takes a deep breath and nods. “I just wanna know if it's okay.”

“Well it's really up to Harry there, darling,” Louis says softly. “But do you want to tell me why you see Harry that way? As your other dad?”

Noah nods. “Well, I know he always loves me because he tells me all the time,” he starts, already making Louis smile. “And he is always here when I need him, and he loves you the most too. He takes care of me, like you do, and he always knows everything. And I love him like I love you, Daddy, I can't say it all. He's just my Papa, that's all.”

“Oh love,” Louis sighs, reaching out to gently push Noah's curls out of his eyes. “You're a very sweet boy, did you know that? I love you so much.”


“Well darling, it's a bit complicated,” Louis says slowly. “It's something you, me, and Harry should probably talk about together. I think it's a very sweet thing though, my love, for you to think of Harry that way.”

“Well I know he does love me,” Noah explains. “And he tells me that he's gonna be here forever with me and you and that I'm important like you. And I love him too, my Daddy, I love him a lot. I'm glad he's your love, because then he gets to belong to me too.”

Louis smiles. “I wanted to talk to you about that, actually,” he says. “About what you said to me and Harry about us getting married.”

“Well I like it,” Noah says. “Would like my Daddies to be married, very nice. Everyone comes to see that you're in love. Plus I can wear a nice tie.”

“I see,” Louis says, trying to stop his laughter.

“I'm glad my Harry came for me,” Noah says. “He says it's cause he loves me very much. He says he loves me even more than the music.”

Louis smiles. “That sounds about right, baby. He loves you very much, he'll always love you no matter what happens.”

“And I'll always love my Harry and my Daddy,” He replies. “No matter what happens.”

Louis kisses his forehead and nods. “No matter what happens, my love.”

Noah smiles and goes back to playing his games until a nurse comes in to look him over and puts something in his IV to make him more comfortable before they run a few more tests on him. Louis
watches on, anxious as he always is when they wheel Noah away somewhere he can’t follow. They let Noah bring Hank, though, which makes him smile happily as they take him away.

Harry arrives back soon after, stopping in the doorway and staring at the empty bed. “Where is he?” he asks.

“They took him for more ultrasounds and shit,” Louis sighs. “Come here?”

He does, walking to Louis and handing him his coffee. There’s a bag in Harry’s other hand along with his own coffee. Louis smiles.

“What’s that?” he asks, though he knows already.

“Cupcake for my boy,” Harry laughs. “He needs cheering up, he’s getting restless the poor thing. I got you a muffin, though.”

Louis pouts. “That’s just a sad cupcake, really,” he moans. “Why does only Noah get the best?”

“So sorry,” Harry says, leaning over to kiss him. “What’s wrong? You’ve got that look on your face.”

Before Louis can ask what exactly that look is, Harry is leaving him with the bag and the coffee and dragging his chair across the room to sit beside Louis. Sure enough, when Louis peeks into the bag there is a chocolate cupcake with sprinkles in between two muffins. Louis rolls his eyes but takes one out while Harry lifts his legs into his lap.

“I haven’t got a look,” Louis says, letting Harry hold onto his ankles.

Harry smiles. “You’ve got a look, what’s wrong?”

Part of Louis doesn’t want to say anything, but he knows he has to. “Noah told me what he said,” he says, focusing on his muffin instead of the way Harry’s hands tense up. “Calling you Papa, I mean.”

“Yeah,” Harry sighs. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you just…with everything it kind of got lost.”

Louis nods. “When did he say it?” he asks softly.

“The first night,” Harry says, not meeting Louis’ eyes. “He was half asleep and still on so much medication from the surgery. I wouldn’t think so much of it, really.”

“Noah thinks a lot of it,” Louis says. “He asked me if it was okay, to call you that. He said he can’t call you Daddy otherwise it’d be confusing, so he thought of Papa instead.”

Harry smiles softly at that and shrugs. “Well, he isn’t wrong.”

“He isn’t,” Louis laughs. “I told him it was probably a conversation the three of us should have together. I didn’t want to tell him anything without talking about it with you first.”

“You’re surprisingly calm about this,” Harry says, finally looking over at Louis. “I thought you’d freak out a bit more.”

Louis kicks him gently. “Excuse you,” he laughs, letting Harry catch his legs again and hold them down. “Okay, I might’ve been a bit freaked out, but Noah…he’s so genuine, Harry, he’d never say something he didn’t entirely mean. He told me why he thinks of you as his other dad and I agreed with everything he said. There’s no doubt in my mind about how much you love him, I’m only concerned about how this makes you feel. You’re so young, H, I don’t want you to feel like you
have to want this.”

“But I do,” Harry says. “Of course I want this, Lou, what have I ever done to make you think I don’t?”

“You haven’t done anything, baby, that isn’t what I’m saying.”

Harry shakes his head. “It sounds like that’s what you’re saying,” he mutters. “But it’s not how I feel. I love you, and I love Noah, and I don’t care what he wants to call me because it could never change how I feel. I’m not going to lie and say that it didn’t feel great, Noah calling me that, but it doesn’t change anything. I’m always going to love him, no matter what. I’m only worried that I’m replacing someone.”

“You aren’t replacing anyone,” Louis is quick to point out. “Noah’s only ever had me, Harry, there’s no one to replace. He loves you, babe, he thinks of you as his other dad and you deserve that. After everything you’ve done for him, you deserve it.”

Louis sighs and leans forward to kiss him. “I love you,” he says. “You’re everything, Harry, you know that? Everything to me.”

“I love you too,” Harry whispers. “We can talk with him about it at home, yeah? When everything calms down a bit.”

Louis nods and leans his head on Harry’s shoulder. “I want to go home,” he whispers. “Want to be home with you and Noah, just let everything go back to normal. I’m sick of this place, and I think the nurses are probably sick of me too.”

“Who could ever be sick of you?” Harry teases. “Eat something, baby, please, you’ve hardly eaten in days.”

“I’ll eat my sad cupcake, but I’m not going to like it as much as I would a real one,” Louis says, watching Harry laugh out of the corner of his eye.

Harry wraps his arm around Louis’ shoulder and kisses him once more. “That’s all I ask,” he teases.

Noah’s doctor shows up the next morning, bright eyed and happy though the sun is hardly up. He looks over Noah’s chart before letting them know that the infection has cleared up and the boy is now free to go. Harry beams with happiness and helps Noah finally change into something other than a hospital gown while Louis signs the release papers.

“I’m so happy,” Noah says. “Thought I was gonna live here forever!”

Harry laughs and shakes his head. “No way darling,” he replies. “We have to get home, don’t we? Niall and Liam are on television tonight.”

Noah’s eyes light up. “You're not leavin?” He asks.

“You're not leavin?” Harry replies, carefully pulling a shirt over Noah's head. His scar is still bandaged up, which makes Harry a bit nervous, but Noah loves it. He says it makes him look cool, the scar.
“Well we can probably watch then, Noah says, standing up on the bed so Harry can help him into a pair of joggers. “What are you going to win?”

Harry shrugs. “I'm not sure yet, love, we won't know until tonight. We might not win, there are lots of very talented people.”

“Well you're the best,” Noah declares, wrapping his arms around Harry's neck. It's the first proper hug they've had where Noah isn't held back by tubes and Harry relishes in it.

“Thank you love,” Harry sighs, carefully holding the boy in his arms. “I won't mind so much if we don't win, or doesn't matter as long as you think I'm the best.”

Noah giggles and kisses Harry's cheek. “I love you,” he says.

“I love you too,” Harry replies.

There's a short knock at the door and someone appears with a wheelchair. She spots Harry and doesn't say anything, but her eyes go wide before she must remember she's working.

“Someone should be in soon to see you out,” she says, nodding towards the wheelchair.

Noah smiles. “Thank you!” He calls after her.

The woman smiles at him and leaves, but not before shooting Harry a look over her shoulder. Harry sighs. It's going to get out soon enough, him being here with Louis and Noah. Really, he's surprised it hasn't yet. Most of the world thinks he's pulled a disappearing act, save for their family and friends. Despite his team trying to quell the rumors, Harry seems to have fallen right back to the drug addicted flake he was two years ago, not to be trusted according to everyone with half a brain and access to the internet.

Louis walks in and smiles at the two of them.

“Are you ready to leave?” He asks Noah, who is very excited to tell him that he is. Louis smiles and Noah sits back down while the two of them collect all of the things they have laying around the room. The two of them have practically been living here with him. Harry can't wait to get home and fall into bed and have Louis in his arms again.

“You okay?” Louis asks as they're zipping up bags and gathering flowers.

Harry sighs and nods. “Yeah,” he mutters. “I just know what people are going to say when I don't show up tonight. And I know I can handle it, it's not that, it's just...what I'm doing here is more important than anything else. Anything. I don't want people thinking I've gone off the rails or something.”

“There's still time to get to London,” Louis points out. “You'd probably be a little late but-”

“No,” Harry says, reaching for Louis’ hand to pull him into a hug. Louis goes willingly, resting his head on Harry's chest and closing his eyes with a sigh. “I'm not going anywhere. I'm staying right here with my family, right where I belong.”

Louis nods and sighs. “Okay,” he relents. “Come on, my love, before they kick us out.”

Noah has to leave in a wheelchair, which he loves. Harry leaves before them to bring his car up. Zayn took Louis’ home days ago, with a few tickets stuck to the windshield from where Louis parked. Harry paid them off but hasn't said anything yet. He's sure Louis will soon find out and be
upset, but he doesn't want to bring that up now.

Louis carefully helps Noah into his seat, worrying over the way the seatbelt goes over his scar. Noah just smiles, though, obviously excited to leave.

“Well,” Harry says, once they're finally driving away. “What shall we do now that you're free?”

Noah smiles. “Ice cream!” He says quite loudly.

Harry looks to Louis to nods. “Ice cream,” he agrees. “Even though it's the middle of winter.”

It takes Harry awhile to find somewhere selling ice cream this time of year, but they finally end up in a small diner where Noah gets a sundae with everything on it. Louis and Harry sit across from him, Harry watching Noah.

“What are you thinking about, pretty,” Louis whispers to him.

“Life,” Harry says, which makes Louis laugh. “I'm serious, Lou, this week has put a lot into perspective.”

Louis raises his eyebrows. “Has it warned you off ever having children officially,” he teases. “Because I wouldn’t blame you, after that. Hell, I’m starting to think maybe he’s too much trouble.”

Noah looks up with a little pout. “Hey!” he whines. “That’s mean, s’not my fault my tummy is broken.”

“I’m only joking love, I’m stuck with you forever, aren’t I?” Louis says, reaching out to squeeze Noah’s hand.

The boy smiles at both of them and nods. “Forever, Daddy. We’re a team, but now Harry can be on our team too.”

“I’m honored,” Harry laughs.

Beside him, Louis reaches out and wraps his arm around Harry’s waist. He leans his head on Harry’s shoulder and nods.

“I think Noah’s right,” he says. “I think you get to be on our team now, too. You, me, and Noah.”


Noah smiles at the two of them and finishes his ice cream while Harry holds onto Louis. They leave soon after, finally heading home. Louis carries Noah inside carefully while Harry takes charge of all of Noah’s things.

As soon as Louis opens the door, he laughs. “What did you do?” he demands.

Harry shrugs. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he lies.

So, yes, maybe Harry left the hospital for more than just clothes for himself and Louis the other day. Maybe he cleaned Louis’ entire house with a little help from Jay, but it’s not like he has to admit it. It’s one less thing Louis doesn’t have to worry about.

“When can we see Niall and Liam on telly?” Noah asks, who seems not at all concerned about their spotless house.
“Soon, love,” Louis says. “But right now what I need is a shower, so why don’t you hang out with Harry for a bit, okay? And then you need your hair washed too.”

Noah sticks out his tongue, raising a hand to his curls. “I don’t even like baths,” he mutters.

Harry smiles. “You got out of taking them for a while there, darling, I think you owe your dad just this one without a fight.”

Noah sighs and walks over to the couch where he sits down heavily. “Fine,” he says. “But me and my Harry can watch cartoons still.”

“Deal,” Louis decides, before practically running off to the bathroom. Harry sits down with Noah and the boy immediately moves to lay on him.

“Missed hugs,” he explains. “You and my Daddy give the best hugs.”

Harry smiles. “I think you give the best hugs,” he says. “Are you happy to be home, bean?”

“Uh huh,” Noah says. “I don’t ever, ever, ever wanna do that again.”

Harry laughs and shakes his head. “Me neither, darling, you scared me and your dad quite a bit.”

“Was kinda scared too,” Noah admits. “But it’s better with my Harry and my Daddy. Then it’s not so scary, ’cause I know you won’t let bad things happen to me.”

“Of course I wouldn’t,” Harry promises. “Never, bean, I promise. I love you, you know that? So much Noah, more than you’ll ever know.”


“Forever and ever,” Harry promises.

After Louis is done showering, he leads Noah off for a bath while Harry orders a pizza for dinner. Really, he should probably make something, seeing as how they’ve been living off hospital food and take out for a week now, but he’s too tired and Louis shot that idea down right away.

Hours later, they find themselves in front of the tv watching the Brits while Noah practically shakes with excitement. He claps his hands anytime they’re mentioned and the camera pans to Niall and Liam at their table, smiling for the camera.

When they win best artist, Noah yells loudly and claps even louder.

“My Harry, you did it!” he shouts, jumping up and down. “You won!”

“Careful, you’ll rip your stitches out like that,” Harry teases.

Louis reaches over and gently kisses Harry. “Congratulations, love, you boys deserved it,” he whispers.

Harry just smiles.

Niall and Liam take the stage to accept the award and begin listing all the usual people before Niall suddenly takes the microphone and says, “And big thanks to Noah as well, this one’s for you kid!”

The music plays them off and Noah’s eyes are as wide as Harry’s ever seen them. He seems speechless, for a moment, but is quickly yelling again. “Daddy, Niall says my name on the telly!” he
shouts, back to jumping up and down. “I’m famous! Daddy, my Harry, I’m famous!”

Louis laughs. “You are famous, aren’t you love?”

“So cool,” Noah whispers mostly to himself. “Niall’s so cool.”

Harry smiles. “You know, I’m starting to think he might like Niall more than he likes me,” he whispers to Louis.

“Of course he does,” Louis teases. “Who wouldn’t?”

Noah gasps and shakes his head. “Daddy, that’s not nice,” he warns. “Papa loves us a lot, he tells me all the time.”

It surprises Harry a bit, and Louis freezes, but Noah hardly notices. Louis meets Harry’s eyes over his head as if to say I told you so, and Harry doesn’t know what to do. Sure, Noah said it at the hospital once, but he was so tired and out of it he probably had no idea what he was saying. Of course Louis had told him about what Noah said, but for some reason Harry didn’t really believe it.

“Oh,” Noah says, and that’s when Harry realizes the boy is staring at him nervously. “M’sorry-”

“No, no love you don’t have to be sorry,” Harry says quickly. “You just…you surprised me, that’s all.”

Noah looks down at his hands. “It’s okay if I can’t say it,” he says softly.

“Bean, no,” Harry says, reaching out so Noah will crawl into his lap. “That’s not what I’m saying, love, not at all. You can call me whatever you like, okay? It doesn’t change how much I love you.”

Noah looks up at him, blue eyes that reminds Harry so much of Louis. “Really?”

“Really,” Harry promises. “Besides, I think it sounds perfect.”

Noah beams and wraps his arms around Harry’s neck, hugging him tightly. “Okay,” he sighs. “I love you, Papa.”

“I love you too, darling,” Harry whispers. “I love you so much.”

As he promised, Louis doesn’t look too worried, although Harry is sure he is. Louis moves closer to them and wraps his arm around Harry’s shoulder so the three of them are crushed together. Noah looks from Harry to Louis, a big smile on his face. He looks so happy, Harry realizes, and that crushes any worries Harry might have. If Noah is happy, that’s all that really matters.

“You can kiss now,” Noah says, turning back to the tv. “I know you wanna.”

Louis laughs. “Thanks for the permission, babe, I don’t know what we’d do without you.”

“You’re welcome,” Noah says, entirely serious.

Harry smiles and turns to Louis to do as he’s told and kiss him.

Chapter End Notes
I just wanted to really quickly say thank you for 1000 kudos!!! I'm so, so grateful for everyone that has read and enjoyed this story as much as I enjoy writing it. Thank you so much <3

I hope you liked this chapter, we're nearing the end sadly but I'm excited for what's next :) 

Also p.s. sorry for the inevitable medical inaccuracies. Unfortunately I'm a writer, not a doctor, and google only knows so much.

p.p.s. I totally forgot to mention but the book Noah is talking about is called "Daddy, Papa, and Me" and it's absolutely adorable!!! Go check it out if you love children's picture books ;)
Noah starts out calling Harry Papa now and then, but after awhile it seems to catch on. At first, it seems to just slip out. He can say my Harry and Papa in the same sentence and not even notice it. Within a few weeks, it’s turned into Papa more often than anything else.

Louis has successfully convinced himself this isn’t an awful idea. Noah hasn’t been forced into saying it by anyone, he hasn’t been led to it, he just wants to. Besides, the sweet smile it puts on Harry’s face every time Noah says it makes Louis happy, and it makes him even happier to see Noah smile back.

As much as Louis dreaded it, his mum doesn’t react as badly as he thought she might. In fact, she doesn’t react badly at all.

“Louis,” she says to him one afternoon, three weeks now since Noah said it the first time. “How long has Noah been calling Harry Papa?”

Louis stops where he’s barely gotten inside the door to take his shoes off. Noah only had half a day of nursery today, and spent the rest of his day at Jay’s house playing with her and the twins. Louis is just here to pick up his son and head home to meet Harry.

“Oh,” Louis starts, focusing very hard on unwrapping his scarf. “At the hospital. He said it for the first time and after we talked about it, it’s just sort of stuck.”


“I know it’s okay,” Louis says, though his voice wavers a bit. “I know it is.”

“Louis I know what you’re thinking, but Luke did absolutely nothing to deserve that from him,” she says, walking to him and wrapping a hand around his wrist. “Baby, Harry deserves that. After all he’s done for you, everything you’ve been through together, he deserves this.”

Louis takes a deep breath. “I know,” he says, and he sounds confident about it even to himself. “I know that, it’s just taking some getting used to being with someone that isn’t leaving. And it’s not even that much to do with Luke, really. He didn’t even stick around long enough for us to think of what Noah should call him— it’s just the fact that this is permanent. Him calling Harry that makes it seem so much more permanent.”

“Harry isn’t leaving,” Jay agrees. “You’re perfect together, you belong together. You see it now, don’t you?”

Despite himself, Louis laughs. “I can’t imagine anything else,” he agrees. “It’s just like everyone else saw it before I ever did.”

“Of course we did, it was obvious from the moment I saw you two together,” she laughs. “Anne thinks so as well.”

Louis looks up at her, eyes going wide. “What? Anne?”

“Yes, she’s absolutely lovely,” Jay continues, like this turn in the conversation is even remotely
normal. “We’re meeting for tea soon.”

“How has this happened?” Louis asks.

Jay shrugs. “We met when she came down to visit Noah after his surgery, and we’ve been taking ever since. You should be happy, Louis, aren’t in laws supposed to be awful? You’ve both been blessed.”

“You’re complimenting yourself here, you realize,” Louis points out with a smile.

Looking quite proud of herself, Jay nods. “Harry thinks so too,” she says, sounding very confident of that fact.

“You know he probably does,” Louis admits. “He loves you, I can’t imagine why.”

Laughing, Jay pulls him into a hug. Louis sinks into it, letting his eyes fall closed as he does. No matter what’s happening in his life, he always feels so much better when Jay hugs him.

“I’m proud of you,” she whispers. “For taking this chance, for letting yourself love again. I know how hard it’s been, and I’m so proud.”

Louis smiles and squeezes her back. “I love you,” he sighs. “Now, where’s my child?”

As usual, Noah is sitting in Jay’s living room working very hard on his dinosaur coloring book. He jumps up as soon as he sees Louis and runs to hug him.

“My Daddy,” he yells, throwing his arms around Louis’ legs. “Grandma says we can stay for dinner, and even bring my Papa too.”

Louis smiles and lifts Noah up into his arms. “Alright love,” he agrees, kissing Noah’s nose to make him giggle. “Why don’t we call up Harry and ask him to come, okay?”

Noah nods and reaches out with grabby hands for Louis’ phone. They sit on the couch together and Louis helps him call Harry, who answers right away.

“Hello, my love,” he greets.

“It’s me, Noah,” Noah giggles. “Not Daddy.”

Harry laughs softly. “Well then, hello my other love. What are you boys up to?”

Noah smiles. “My grandma says you can come over for dinner with me, my Daddy, and everyone else and I want you to come, so will you?”

“Of course I will,” Harry replies. “I’ll meet you there, how about that?”

“Are you in my house?” Noah asks.

“I am, love,” Harry replies. “Hand the phone to Daddy so we can talk, okay? I love you.”

Noah nods. “I love you too, Papa.”

From across the room, Jay shoots Louis a knowing look. He ignores it and reaches for the phone instead and picks up with a, “Harold.”

“Lewis,” Harry laughs. “Noah says I’m to come over for dinner, no discussion.”
“He’s right, you have absolutely no choice in the matter,” Louis says. “You aren’t busy, are you?”

Harry has been mostly lying low lately at Louis’ home and his flat. He’s been writing quite a lot and the boys’ album has come out to be a success. He gets strangely quiet, though, whenever Louis asks him what’s coming next for the famous One Direction.

“No, love, just writing. It’s so quiet here without the two of you. I could’ve watched Noah today, you know I wouldn’t mind.”

Louis shakes his head. “You need a break to work, love, it’s been all me and Noah all the time lately.”

“I could never be sick of you,” Harry sighs. “I did get a lot done, though. Two new songs, one for Noah.”

Hearing his name, Noah turns to smile at Louis. Louis smiles back and hugs him tightly. “One for Noah,” he muses. “He’ll love that, H.”

“I hope so,” Harry sighs. “I’ll be there soon, baby, just let me get a shower and find something to wear that isn’t yours.”

Jumping out of his father’s lap, Noah runs to tell his grandma that Harry is coming and greet his aunts who are filing in the door from school.

“You have a drawer for this reason,” Louis points out with a smile.

“I know, but your clothes are so much nicer. They smell nice-like you, I mean,” Harry murmurs, obviously embarrassing himself with his own words.

Louis smiles. “You’re more than welcome to wear my old jumpers if you like, darling,” he teases. “I have to go and help Mum start dinner, though. I’ll see you soon.”

“I’ll see you soon,” Harry promises.

The two of them hang up and Louis finds his mother back in the doorway of the room. She’s positively beaming at him and for once, Louis lets himself smile back.

Dinner is a loud affair, though Harry expected nothing less. After being cooped up all day with no one but himself for company, it’s refreshing. Harry loves being in Jay’s house, loves all of the children running about, loves listening to Louis bicker with his sisters.

Lottie is in town and the two of them have a long conversation about how ridiculous rent is in London and how she likes working for Lou. Jay passes pictures around that Fizzy has sent from her travels, Noah and Ernest create mayhem as they always do together, and Doris spends most of the night on Harry’s lap and playing with his hair while yelling for her twin to Behave, Ernest!

Louis is completely in his element through all of it, handling chaos is second nature to him. Harry loves to watch and finds himself imagining their lives ten years down the line. By then Noah will be a teenager, and Harry desperately hopes they’ll have more kids. He’s serious when he tells Louis he wants five, but he’s growing fond of the idea of more than five. Six is a nice even number, then
everyone would have a friend. Maybe they could adopt twins, Harry’s always wanted twins-

“Papa!” Noah shouts, startling Harry out of his thoughts.

He turns and smiles down at the boy who is sitting beside him and has apparently been calling for him. “What, love?”

“I said I need help for my chicken, please,” Noah replies, gesturing to his plate.

Harry nods and cuts it up for him. The table has fallen into a lull that’s broken a soon as Lottie says, “Well, that’s new.”

“Why do you call him that?” Ernest demands from across the table.

From Harry’s lap, Doris lets out a gasp. “That’s rude!” She says, pointing to her brother while everyone else laughs.

“It’s only cause he’s my other dad,” Noah says, rolling his eyes and earning an admonishment from Louis for it. “Not a big deal.”

With that explanation, everyone starts talking again and things quickly return to normal. Harry smiles and finishes cutting up Noah’s chicken for him. Noah grins at him once he’s done.

“Thank you, Papa,” he says, promptly shoving a forkful into his mouth.

“You’re welcome, love,” Harry replies.

Dinner finishes in a flurry of chaos, as usual, as Louis demands all of the children follow him outside to play footie. Even Lottie goes after Harry promises he’ll help Jay do the dishes, whining that she’s too old to play, but smiling nonetheless.

That’s how they find themselves as the sun is setting, Dan quietly putting away the leftovers, Harry elbows deep in suds. Jay stands at his side, drying dishes as they both look out the window over the sink. Louis leads all of the kids in a game that could maybe pass for football, if Noah stopped picking the ball up every few seconds and running with it while everyone else chases him.

Dan soon excuses himself to join them and they’re alone. It’s now or never, Harry knows, but he feels as though his heart is going to beat out of his chest.

“Jay,” he says softly. “I was wondering if I could talk to you about something?”

Jay smiles at him and nods. “Of course love, anything.”

Harry takes a deep breath. He didn’t really imagine doing this whilst washing dishes, but the timing feels right. Plus, there’s no going back now. Jay has put down the dish she was drying and is staring at him expectantly.

“I want to ask Louis to marry me,” he says, pretending to be very focused on the plate he’s washing. “I know it’s quick, and I know you might think I’m rushing into things but I really just-”

Harry doesn’t get to finish his sentence. Jay rushes towards him and throws her arms around him, suds and all. Harry is too shocked for a moment to do anything other than stand there like an idiot and let her hug him.

“Oh love,” she breathes.
The words shock Harry to his sense and he hugs her back. “I love him so much,” he tells her, because she needs to know. “I love Louis and Noah so much, Jay, and I promise I’ll take care of them no matter what—”

“Harry, darling, you don’t need to ask permission,” Jay whispers, finally pulling back. She’s crying, Harry notices.

“But I want it,” he says. “It’s important to me that you’re okay with this, that you approve of this.”

Jay smiles and shakes her head. “You’re so wonderful,” she whispers, which makes Harry blush. “I’m so happy Louis found you, Harry, and I would be absolutely honored to call you my son in law.”

The words make Harry beam. “Thank you,” he sighs, hugging her once more. Jay kisses his forehead and Harry smiles. “I promise, I’ll take care of them. They’re my world.”

“I know, love,” she sighs.

The back door slams open and Harry pulls away to find Louis standing in the doorway. He has his eyebrows raised, watching as the two of them separate.

“Has washing the dishes turned emotional?” he asks.

Jay tries to discreetly wipe at her eyes. “No, love, everything’s fine,” she lies. “Did you need something?”

“Wanted to help,” Louis says, carefully walking to them and standing at Harry’s side. “Felt bad, leaving the two of you alone in here to clean up.”

Harry shakes his head. “It’s alright love,” he says, his body curving towards Louis’ as Louis wraps an arm around his waist. “Did the kids beat you at footie?”

“Excuse you,” Louis laughs. “Never. Still disappointed Noah isn’t into it like I was. Kid’s got no hand-eye coordination, bless him.”

The two of them look up just in time to see Noah running after Dan who has the ball and tripping over his own toes.

“You could always try with the next one,” Jay laughs.

Louis rolls his eyes, but still smiles. “You’ll get plenty more grandkids, Mum, it isn’t all relying on me you know.”

“I know,” Jay sing-songs. “But you can never have too many grandkids.”

Shaking his head, Louis kisses Harry’s cheek. “Are you hearing this?” he asks. “This is why she’s had so many of us, she just wants grandkids! She thinks I’m some sort of grandchild making machine.”

“Well in her defense, Noah is adorable,” Harry says with a smile. “Who wouldn’t want more?”

Louis smiles and rests his head on Harry’s shoulder. “You’re in on it as well,” he sighs. “I knew it, you’re conspiring in here.”

“We’re conspiring,” Harry agrees. “Do you still want to help, my love?”
“‘Course,” Louis declares, rolling his sleeves up. “Go sit, Mum, I’m going to show Harry how it’s done.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “Washing dishes is your specialty now?” He asks as Louis nudges him over to dry.

“Yes of course,” Louis says, quite haughtily. “Don’t look so conspicuous of me, baby, I’m quite capable.”

Jay sits down at the kitchen island, her eyes soft as she watches them, smiling wide as they wash the dishes together, blow bubbles at each other’s faces, and trade kisses every now and then. It’s a look of complete approval and love, Harry realizes, and he’s never been so grateful.

All the lights are off in Louis’ house when he finally gets home. The girl group he interviewed earlier in the evening were great-Louis has always had a soft spot for girl groups-but then Zayn dragged him out to finalize wedding preparations and pick up his tux. The wedding is now officially six days away and has completely taken over their lives.

Louis’ legs hurt, his eyes hurt, and his brain hurts. All he wants to do is go to bed and cuddle with Harry, who will surely be warm and snuggled up this time of night. First, though, he has to check on Noah.

But when Louis opens the door to his son’s room, Noah is nowhere to be found. All of the lights are out, including his nightlight, and his bed hasn’t been slept in. Barely concealed panic rises in Louis’ chest and he quickly heads for his room, only to find Harry curled up in bed, Hank tucked in next to him, and Noah asleep on his chest.

Louis lets out a sigh of relief and rolls his eyes. He was about to lose his mind and here Noah is, happily cuddling with Harry, fast asleep.

They’ve gotten closer somehow, though Louis almost thought that was impossible. Harry hasn’t really left them for longer than a couple of days in weeks, and as far as Louis knows he doesn’t plan on going anytime soon. As much as Louis worries about Harry putting his life on hold for them, he can’t lie and say he doesn’t love the way Noah and Harry are bonding and how much time the three of them are spending together.

After changing into one of Harry’s jumpers and tugging off his skinny jeans, Louis pads across his room and reaches to pick Noah up.

The instant Louis moves him, Harry’s eyes snap open and his arms tighten around the boy. He squints into the dark, frown on his face when he whispers, “Lou?”


Harry shakes his head, still half asleep, and closes his eyes once more. “Scared me,” he mumbles.

“Baby, give me Noah so I can put him to bed,” Louis whispers.

Louis sighs. Noah’s been having a lot of those lately, and they’re mostly about the hospital and his surgery. According to his doctor it’s completely normal, but Louis hates seeing his baby so upset.

Letting go of Noah, Louis gets into bed and spoons in behind Harry. Louis smiles at the two of them and leans over to kiss each of them on the forehead.

“Did you have a good day?” Harry asks, his voice still raspy but somewhat more alert.

“Yes, it was nice,” Louis yawns. “We have to take Noah in tomorrow to try on his suit, make sure everything fits okay. I swear, the kid’s growing like a weed. How was your day?”

Harry opens his eyes just to turn and smile at him. “S’good. Noah and I drew you pictures and he gave me a tattoo.”

“Did he?” Louis laughs.

With a nod, Harry stretches out his right arm to show Louis. Sure enough, there on his bicep squashed between a few other tattoos is NOAH written in sloppy capital letters, each one a different color marker. Louis grins and reaches out to swipe his thumb over it.

“A real artist, that boy.”

Harry laughs softly and shrugs. “I dunno, I kinda like it. Might keep it.”

Louis pauses while the words process. “Harry Styles, don’t you dare.”

“But it’s cute,” Harry whines.

Louis shakes his head. “I’m so tired, Harold, and I swear to god if you tell me you’re getting that tattooed, I’ll cry.”

“Alright baby, I won’t tell you,” Harry laughs. “But if it doesn’t wash away in a few days, you can’t blame me for not saying anything.”

“Ridiculous,” he murmurs, resting his hand on the curve of Harry’s hip. “You absolutely ridiculous boy.”

Harry smiles and closes his eyes again. “I have to go to London tomorrow,” he says. “Meeting came up out of nowhere.”

“I’ll miss you,” Louis sighs.

“Last one for awhile,” Harry whispers.

Louis frowns. “What does that mean?” he asks.

But Harry doesn’t answer, because he’s asleep. Louis sighs and wraps his arm around Harry’s waist, lays his head on Harry’s shoulder, and closes his eyes. He falls asleep to the sound of Harry’s heartbeat and Noah breathing in his ear. It’s perfect.

“What?” Gemma sputters, practically spitting her drink all over Harry. “You’re breaking up?”
Harry’s eyes go wide. “Not so loud,” he hisses. “God, Gems, do you want everyone to find out?”

Across the table, Gemma shakes her head, looking completely shocked. “Oh my god,” she whispers back. “I can’t believe this. Why? You’re doing so well, your album was a huge hit.”

“I know,” Harry sighs, basically repeating the same argument the three boys made this morning. “But it’s just time for a break. I want to spend more time at home with Louis and Noah, Liam wants to start a family, and Niall got offered a spot judging X-Factor next season if he wants it. It isn’t going to be forever, they’re my brothers, but we just need some time. I think I might want to try releasing an album on my own. My sound is still so different from what it is we’re doing, and I’d love that freedom.”

Gemma stirs her drink with her straw and gives Eva a few more pieces of breadstick to munch on while they wait for their lunches. Harry had to leave Louis’ house early this morning to be able to make it to the meeting. The boys and their team had been throwing around the idea of a hiatus for a few weeks now, and they all agreed this morning that it’s the right time.

“Well,” Gemma sighs. “I mean, I’m not happy about it, but I’ll live.”

Harry laughs and rolls his eyes at her dramatics. “I promise, you’ll be the first one to hear any new music I make.”

“I better be,” she threatens.

The two siblings fall into silence, both watching Eva happily babble about nothing and eat her breadstick. He can tell there’s something Gemma wants to say to him, but won’t. She’s had that look on her face ever since they met up this afternoon and Harry has just been waiting for her to get up enough courage to say it.

She does, finally, after the waitress comes by with their food and a bowl of macaroni and cheese for Eva to make a mess of.

“Eva’s been seeing her father,” Gemma blurts out.

Harry frowns. “Has she?”

“Yes,” his sister replies, giving him a look. “And before you say anything snarky or stupid, just know that Louis thought it was a good idea too. Aidan is trying to build a relationship with her, and I want that. Don’t you want that, Harry? Don’t you think Eva should have her father in her life?”

Harry lets out a groan and shakes his head. “Gemma, don’t put that on me. I’m not happy he left you alone-”

“But it was a mutual decision,” she shoots back. “A decision Aidan and I made together as her parents, and this is another one. She’s going to have a little brother, you know. Aidan’s wife is pregnant. I don’t want her to grow up not knowing that, not knowing who her dad is.”

The words hit Harry hard and he knows Gemma expected that. He looks over to Eva, who looks so much like her mother, and tries to imagine what his life would’ve been like without Gemma. It would have been so boring growing up alone, he would have been so lost without her. Maybe Eva will be that for her little brother, maybe not, but doesn’t she deserve that chance? And who is Harry to discourage that?

“I agree with you,” Harry admits, and the words seem to surprise Gemma just as much as they surprise him. “I hope it all works out, I really mean that.”
His sister lets out a sigh of relief and she nods. “Thanks, Harry. That really means a lot to me.”

Eva, apparently fed up with not being in the conversation, reaches out and tugs on Harry’s sleeve with her cheese covered hand. “Hey,” she giggles. “Where No?”

Harry smiles. “Noah’s at home, lovely, with Louis. You’ll see him soon, I promise.”

Eva nods, as though she’s understood every word. “Funny. Love No,” she says.

“She’s a bit obsessed with Noah,” Gemma reveals. “We’ll have to plan a visit soon, she’s starting to miss him.”

“Soon,” Harry promises.

Shooting him a knowing look, Gemma reaches out and gently kicks his foot with her own under the table. “When are you going to ask him? I feel like any call you make to me could be it.”

Of course she doesn’t have to elaborate. Harry reaches for his bag and comes out with a small black box. Gemma gasps and immediately takes it from his hands to open it. Inside sits the ring Harry picked out weeks back, the day before Noah’s surgery, actually. It’s platinum with black sapphires arranged in a line around the center, complete with five diamonds along the front. Harry picked it up from the shop this morning and hasn’t stopped thinking about it since.

“Oh,” Gemma breathes, his lips curving up in a smile. “It’s perfect, Harry, he’ll love it.”

Harry grins, basking in the approval. “I really hope so.”

“When are you asking?” she presses once more.

“Soon,” Harry promises. “There’s just a few more things I need to take care of first.”

One of those things is scheduled for right after their meeting. He and Gemma part with a big hug and a kiss for Eva, and Harry soon finds himself back in his car on the way to Manchester. It’s been a whirlwind of a day-between his meeting, picking up Louis’ ring, taking a short trip to his favorite tattoo artist, and meeting Gemma-and Harry wants nothing more than to go home to his boys.

Unfortunately, he isn’t going to see them until tomorrow, and this has to happen first.

They agreed to meet at a coffee shop near Harry’s flat at six, but Harry gets there first. He claims a table in the back and orders himself a tea, trying to look inconspicuous while he waits.

It took Harry some digging, convincing, and calling on a few favors to find Luke’s number. It took even more convincing to get Luke to agree to meet with him. Harry hates that he’s kept it a secret from Louis, but he feels like has to do this. This has to end now.

The restraining order has been in place, but that hasn’t stopped Luke. He hasn’t contacted Louis, as far as Harry knows at least, but he’s still gone to the press for more exclusives. He likes to pretend he’s very concerned about Harry helping to raise Noah, he likes to pretend he knows anything about Noah, or that Noah knows anything about him-and Harry is sick of it. He’s sick of having to watch Louis’ face fall every time that asshole spreads more lies and drags Louis’ name through the mud.

“Harry Styles,” a voice laughs.

Harry looks up from his tea to find a man standing there-Luke. He looks older than the pictures Harry’s seen of him. His head is shaved now, though Harry knows his hair is curly like Noah’s, and his eyes are cold-nowhere near as warm and beautiful as Noah’s. Luckily, Harry thinks with a bit of
menace, Noah seems to have gotten Natalie's nose.


Luke does, sliding into the seat across from Harry and giving him a once over that makes Harry feel like he should shower. There are so many questions Harry wants to ask, so many things he wants to say, but he doesn’t know where to start.

Fortunately, Luke seems to have an idea.

“So,” he drawls, sinking lower in his chair. “You’re really still with Louis, huh?”

Harry raises his eyebrows. “Does that surprise you?” he asks.

“Yes,” Luke replies, no hesitation. “I mean, we both know how Louis can be.”

That immediately makes Harry scowl. “No, I don’t think I do know how Louis can be. Why don’t you tell me?”

Luke rolls his eyes, pretending to be completely disinterested. “Dramatic, emotional, a handful, great in bed though, which almost makes it worth it. Thing is, he’s always putting that stupid kid before everything else. Doesn’t it get tiring?”

Hatred burns like a flame in Harry’s stomach and he swears he could launch himself across the table right now and punch this asshole in the face. He controls himself somehow and instead growls out, “That kid is my son, so I suggest you think before you say anything else about him.”

“Your son?” Luke laughs. “Wow, he’s got you bad hasn’t he? You’ll see, Louis will leave you high and dry soon enough. He’s only in it for the money, he doesn’t really love you. Soon he and the kid will be long gone, right after they take you for everything you have.”

“His name is Noah.”


“Well it doesn’t really matter what you think,” Harry says. “And Louis isn’t going anywhere, neither am I. The two of them are absolutely none of your concern anymore, and I highly suggest you stay the fuck away from us and out of our lives before I have to do something about it.”

It’s obvious Luke wasn’t expecting this at all. “You threatening me?” he asks, sounding shocked.

“No, I’m promising you,” Harry growls, practically leaning over the table now as the months of pent up anger are finally let out. “Do you know who I am, Lucas? Do you have any idea what I could do to you? You saw how easy it was for me to find you, it would be twice as easy for me to completely ruin your life. Don’t think for even a moment that I wouldn’t.

“You hurt my son, you hurt Louis, and you refuse to quit. You have no idea how much I would enjoy destroying you for that. I would love coming after you for every fucking thing that you have and letting the world know what a disgustingly pathetic person you are. Now, I don’t want to have to do that Luke, I really don’t. I’m not that kind of person, but it seems like you’re forcing my hand here.”

It’s probably wrong how much Harry loves seeing Luke so terrified. The man’s eyes are wide and he’s staring Harry like he’s crazy. “I-I didn’t-”
“Noah is a child, he doesn’t understand why you would hurt someone like this, but I do,” Harry continues. “[Your life is so fucking sad, Luke. You have nothing, and you’ll never understand what you gave up when you left them. You will never know what it feels like having Louis and Noah the way I do, how it feels to fall asleep at night knowing you have people who love you as much as they do. You won’t get to see Noah grow up, you won’t get to spend your life with Louis—and do you know what? I don’t even feel bad for you.]

“Only a complete fucking idiot would give up the chance to love Louis and the chance to watch that absolutely wonderful boy grow up. Only an idiot would give up that family, my family, and I think it’s pretty clear that you’re a fucking idiot Luke.”

Harry stands up and Luke flinches, like Harry would hit him. Of course he wouldn’t, but Harry finds himself smiling at the thought. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a few bills which he slams to the table before leaning in close to Luke.

“The next time I hear you’re spreading lies about my boys to some trashy rag, you’ll be hearing from me and my lawyers. That should cover the tea,” Harry growls. “Keep the change, you obviously need it.”

With that, Harry storms out. Luke is in complete shock, mouth hanging open a bit and eyes wide as he watches Harry walk away. Once outside, Harry takes a few deep breaths of cold air and wills his heart to stop beating so quickly before heading for his car.

The doorman smiles at Harry as he heads for the lift, not stopping him even though he’s hardly ever here, and they really shouldn’t recognize he lives here. Harry smiles back and spends the lift ride up letting his team know what he’s just done, just in case. Harry had picked a public place to meet, specifically so Luke couldn’t try to spin the conversation anyway he wanted, but he’s sure other people probably heard bits and pieces of the argument.

When he opens the door to his flat to find all the lights on, Harry is immediately concerned. That is until he hears a loud, “Surprise!” and turns to find Louis and Noah on his couch.

“Babe,” Harry laughs, trying to catch his breath. “Christ, you scared me. What are you doing here?”

Noah grins and yells, “We’re surprisin’ you!”

Louis smiles down at the boy in his lap and nods. “We knew you had a big day,” he adds, having no clue how true that statement is. “We didn’t want you to have to spend the night without us. We’re obviously the best part of your life.”

The words make Harry smile, because Louis is completely right. Neither of them have any idea how badly Harry needs this right now. After kicking his shoes off and leaving his bag at the door, Harry makes a beeline for the two of them and practically collapses on the couch next to Louis.

“Boys,” he sighs. “Thank you. I really needed this tonight.”

“Yay,” Noah giggles, reaching out to hug Harry. “Daddy let me pick a movie for us, and we got all the blankets and pillows.”

A quick look around the couch has Harry laughing. “You certainly have.”

“Noah was in charge of that,” Louis whispers in his ear. Sure enough, practically every blanket in Harry’s flat is now laying on his couch, including his duvet.

The three of them get to work making a little nest for Noah out of blankets and pillows on one half of
the couch, while Harry and Louis claim the chaise end of the sofa for themselves. Soon they’re all cuddled together, watching The Lion King and eating a pizza Louis’ ordered, and Harry feels a thousand times better than he did only an hour ago.

It only takes one movie for Noah to nod off in his nest of pillows, but Harry and Louis decide to keep going. There’s a nagging sense of wrong in Harry’s stomach as Louis holds him, though, and he knows it’s because he hasn’t told him about Luke. He has to, he knows this, but he doesn’t know where to begin.

Halfway through Love, Actually Harry blurts out; “We’re taking a hiatus.”

Louis looks down to where Harry is laying on his chest and frowns. “You’re what?”

“Me, Niall, and Liam decided to take a hiatus,” he repeats. “Niall’s going to judge for X-Factor, Liam wants a baby, and I want to spend more time with you two and maybe do a solo album. That’s what that meeting was for today, that’s why I’ve been dodging all your questions about what the band’s doing next, and that’s why I’ve been writing so much.”

“Jesus popstar,” Louis breathes. “Well, if that’s what the three of you want then I’m happy for you. I think it’ll be great for each of you to do your own thing, on good terms this time.”

Harry nods and then says, “There’s more.”

Louis laughs, curling and uncurling a piece of Harry’s hair around his index finger. “More than a hiatus? What a busy day you had, darling. What else, then?”

Before Harry can lose courage, he says it. “I met Luke today.”

The room goes terribly silent, the words hanging between them, and Harry knows he’s messed up. He knew while he was planning it, but even that couldn’t stop him. There’s only so much Harry can take, only so many times he can watch that awful sad expression wash over Louis’ face before he has to do something about it.

“Are you mad?” Harry murmurs when Louis still hasn’t said anything.

That seems to break him from his trance. Louis pulls his hand out of Harry’s curls and says, “I don’t understand.”

Louis reaches out for the remote to pause the movie and sits up, which means Harry has to sit up as well. Now they’re making eye contact, and Harry feels ten times less confident than he did before. Louis looks confused, eyebrows pinched in and a frown on his lips.

“I met Luke at a coffee shop before coming home today,” Harry explains, looking down at his hands as he talks. “I got his number and we met up to talk.”

“And you didn’t think to tell me?” Louis demands, and he’s upset. Harry didn’t want him to be upset.

“Because you would’ve just told me not to-”

“Because there’s no point, Harry,” Louis interrupts, obviously trying to keep his voice in check so they don’t wake Noah. “There’s no point in you going to see him, I really don’t understand why you would do this.”

This is not at all where Harry wanted the conversation to go. He doesn’t want Louis to feel like he’s
done something behind his back, or tried to hurt him. “I did it because I can only stand so much, Louis,” he explains. “I can’t just sit back and watch him hurt you and do nothing anymore.”

“You don’t do nothing, you just being there is enough for me,” Louis murmurs.

Harry shakes his head. “Maybe for you it is, but it isn’t for me. This is my family, and I’m going to stand up for my family—especially to some prick who thinks he can constantly talk shit about you and get away with it. It wasn’t a long talk, but Luke got the idea.”

“What happened?”

And Harry tells Louis everything, down to the exact words he said. His boyfriend’s eyes grow wider and wider at every detail, and if Harry isn’t wrong, he thinks maybe Louis isn’t as angry now as he was before. When he finishes talking, Louis just seems shocked.

“You did that?” he asks. “You said all of that?”

Harry nods. “And I meant it, Lou, every word. The next time I see something he’s said about the two of you, I’ll do something about it myself. You should’ve seen his face, he was terrified.”

That makes Louis smile, finally, and it feels like a weight has been lifted from Harry’s shoulders. Louis leans on Harry’s shoulder and laughs a bit. “Did you really tell him to keep the change?”

“I can be pretty witty and intimidating when I want to be,” Harry says, trying not to laugh as well. Louis shakes his head. “I’m sorry, I just can’t imagine you being mean like that. Christ, I wish I could’ve seen his face, it must’ve been brilliant.”

“So you aren’t mad,” Harry declares with a smile.

“I’m still upset,” Louis corrects him, but he’s back to holding Harry’s hand again so he probably isn’t too angry. “You should’ve told me, H, we don’t keep secrets like that from each other. I appreciate you standing up for us love, really, but I wish you would’ve told me about it first.”

Harry nods. “I’m sorry,” he says, and he means it. “He just makes me so irrationally angry, it’s ridiculous. He thinks he can do whatever he likes and get away with it, but he can’t. He isn’t going to bother you again.”

Louis grins and then says, “That’s kinda hot, actually.”

“Is it?” Harry asks, leaning down to kiss him.

“Don’t start,” Louis breathes as soon as Harry’s hand starts inching it’s way up his thigh. “Unless you want to explain to me why you have cling film in your pants.”

God, in all that happened today, Harry almost forgot that. But, sure enough, when he moves his leg he can hear it crinkling. Harry laughs, smothering the noise against Louis’ shoulder. He soon picks his head up again and grabs Louis’ hand to pull him to his feet.

“Come on, I’ll show you.”

They leave Noah on the sofa, safe in his nest of pillows. Harry leads Louis into his bedroom and makes sure the door is shut before he starts unbuttoning his shirt. Louis knocks his hands away and does it for him, slowly slipping the silk off his shoulders. Though he’d never admit it, Harry knows that Louis loves undressing him more than anything.
“Harry,” Louis breathes, reaching out for his arm.

Harry beams with pride. “Do you like it?” he asks, angling his arm just right so Louis can see it better. “I had to get it done today, I didn’t want it to fade too badly before they could trace it.

There’s complete silence save for some crinkling as Louis carefully traces over Noah’s name on Harry’s bicep. It hurts, but Harry doesn’t stop him. He’s proud of it, and it’s his first really colorful tattoo. He loves the way it stands out against all the dark ink surrounding it, a rainbow in between it all.

“God, baby,” Louis breathes. “It’s-wow. I love it, of course I do. I can’t believe you actually did that.”

Harry smiles and pulls away slightly to unbutton his jeans and pull them off. The second tattoo is hidden by his boxers, which he pulls down just enough to show it.

Louis lets out a noise halfway between a gasp and a moan. It’s a small tattoo just along the inside of Harry’s thigh, a cursive letter L that won’t be visible unless he takes his pants off. It was a bit awkward getting it, but it’s completely worth it for the way Louis is staring at him right now. He reaches out and presses his thumb to it, making Harry wince and moan.

“I wanted it to be special,” he reveals, breath catching when Louis presses down again. “Just for you and I to see, no one else.”

“No one else,” Louis confirms, pupils blown wide. “You’re all mine, aren’t you? Say it.”

Harry nods. “M’yours, always yours. Please, Lou.”

Louis smiles that awful devious smile and tugs Harry down for a kiss by his hair. “Don’t worry baby, I’ll take care of you,” Louis coos, shoving his hand down Harry’s pants and making the younger man moan. He bites at Harry’s lip and laughs. “I always take care of what’s mine.”

Louis runs his hands over Zayn’s shoulders one last time, smiling at his friend’s nervous face. “You ready mate?”

“Yeah, think so,” Zayn mutters, fussing with his sleeves once more.

Standing at their feet, Noah announces, “I’m ready! I’m doing a very good job.”

Louis smiles and crouches down to fix the boy’s tie. “You are love, just don’t lose those rings.”

“They’re tied on, Daddy,” Noah points out, waving the pillow around a bit too harshly for Louis’ liking. He takes the pillow from Noah and double checks the knots for the third time this morning.

The last thing he needs is the rings skittering across the floor to start the wedding off with. They had thrown around the idea of fixing fake rings to the pillow and letting Louis keep hold of the real ones, but Perrie shut that down. She wanted the real thing, for Noah and for herself.

“You know what you’re doing, right love? Just like we practiced last night,” Louis reminds him.

Noah nods and then recites, “I walk down the aisle slow and nice, and then I get to the front, and
then I give them the rings, and then I go sit with Papa and be on my best behavior, even if my tummy gets hungry.”

Behind him, Louis can hear Zayn and the other groomsmen trying not to laugh. “You got it babes,” Louis says, kissing Noah’s forehead. “You’ll do great, don’t be nervous okay?”

“I’m not gonna be,” Noah declares, voice full of confidence. “My Harry can sing in front of tons of people, I can be okay.”

The logic is a bit flawed, but Louis smiles nonetheless. “You’re right darling, what was I thinking? Come on, it’s time to get lined up.”

The ceremony starts soon after. Zayn walks out first, Louis following with his arm wrapped in Perrie’s sister’s. Harry is sitting in the second row, at the very end so that Noah won’t have trouble finding him, watching out for Louis to walk in.

He looks lovely, Louis thinks, wearing a floral suit and a big smile. You would never know Louis had to practically force him into coming today.

“I don’t want it to end up being about me,” he had murmured early that morning while Louis was idly braiding his hair in bed. “The minute someone finds out I’m there it’s not going to be about how in love Zayn and Perrie are, it’ll be about hopping a fence to get a picture of me.”

“We’re full of ourselves today, aren’t we?” Louis had teased.

Harry had just frowned and shook his head. “It happened at Mum’s wedding, it was awful.”

“No one is going to know you’re there,” Louis had soothed him. “Zayn’s not big on social media, neither is Perrie, so I doubt anyone would post any pictures until after it’s over. Besides, no one is going to be allowed in if they don’t have an invitation. Harry, I want you there-Zayn and Perrie want you there too. Don’t you want to watch Noah be the ring bearer? He’s been psyching himself up for it for months now.”

It was obvious Louis had won as soon as Harry sighed and pressed his face to Louis’ shoulder. “Fine,” he’d grumbled. “But I wanna wear my red suit, and you’re not allowed to make fun of it.”

And so here they are, Harry sticking out in a sea of pastels and dark blues. He’s beautiful, Louis thinks as he finally looks away, lest he spend the whole ceremony staring.

Zayn takes a deep breath as he comes to stand at the altar. Louis smiles and pats him on the back.

“It’s going to be great,” he whispers.

Finally, Zayn smiles. “Yeah,” he whispers back. “It will be.”

Noah walks out next, smiling wide at everyone and walking just as they practiced over and over the night before. Aww’s and soft laughter run through the crowd as he makes his way up, shortly followed by the flower girl.

Nothing is lost, no one trips, and Noah passes the rings off without a hitch. He looks extremely proud of himself as he walks over to sit with Harry. Harry leans down to whisper something in his ear and Noah’s smile widens.

The wedding is wonderful, Perrie is beautiful, and Louis might tear up a bit when they finally kiss, but he doesn’t have to admit to it. They’re his best friends, after all, and he’s been waiting and
helping them plan this day for ages.

Afterward, they’re all quickly whisked away to take pictures outside in the cold and freshly fallen snow. Louis never truly understood why Perrie wanted a winter wedding until he sees how beautiful the grounds of the venue look in a blanket of pure white.

“It’s beautiful,” Harry whispers in Louis’ ear while they watch Noah ham it up for the camera with Zayn, Perrie, and the flower girl. “I can’t wait to get married someday, I hope it’ll be this beautiful.”

Louis smiles and reaches for Harry’s hand. “It will be,” he promises.

Zayn, Louis, and the rest of the wedding party line up for more pictures while Harry and the flower girl’s mum talk and keep the kids from throwing snowballs at one another. After the photographer tells them she has all the shots, they all start making their way back to the venue.

“Wait!” Perrie yells suddenly. “Harry, come take one.”

Harry looks up from where he and Jade are talking and frowns. “I’m not in the wedding,” he points out.

“I know, but I want one of the three of you!” Perrie says, waving the photographer back over.

Noah gasps and claps his hands together. “Yes! That’ll be so cool, my Perrie.”

“I think so too,” she replies, giving the boy a wink before pushing Harry into Louis’ arms.

The photographer positions the three of them just under a tree, Noah standing in front while Harry and Louis stand side by side behind him. Harry reaches out at the last moment and wraps his arm around Louis’ waist. There’s a few clicks as the photographer shoots, and then Harry turns and pulls Louis in for a kiss.

“That’s brilliant,” the photographer laughs.

She walks up and flips through the pictures to show them. There are a few normal ones, shortly followed by the moment Harry kissed Louis, Noah whipping his head around to look, and finally the best picture of them all. Harry and Louis are still kissing, Louis smiling ever so slightly against Harry’s lips, and Noah is facing the camera again, sticking his tongue out and making the worst face imaginable.

“Oh my god,” Louis laughs as they all gather around to look. “I need that framed, Pez, consider that my next Christmas present.”

Perrie grins like she knows something he doesn’t and says, “Don’t worry, I have the perfect idea for what to do with it.”

Beside her, Zayn groans and shakes his head. “Babe,” he mutters.

“Hush, Zayn,” she replies.

Louis raises his eyebrows at the two of them, but no one explains any further. Harry takes Louis’ hand and they all start the trek through the snow back to the venue where the reception is waiting.

They’re sitting at the table beside Zayn and Perrie and their families, with Jade, Leigh-Anne, and Jesy sitting with them. The five of them eat, gossip about who’s wearing what, and bet on how long it’ll take Perrie to get pregnant, while Noah sits in the middle of it all soaking up praise. People stop
by their table just to tell him how cute he is and what a great job he did, and as usual, Noah loves to be the center of attention.

After Perrie and Zayn make their entrance and have their first dance, the floor is free reign.

“I wanna dance!” Noah shouts, reaching out for Harry’s hand. “Come on, Papa, you gotta dance with me.”

The girls all coo as Harry agrees and leads Noah out into the middle of the growing crowd. Jade sighs and says, “They’re absolutely adorable together, Lou.”

Louis looks out to the dance floor and watches Noah carefully step up onto Harry’s feet. Harry takes Noah’s hands in his own and starts moving, the little boy letting out a loud laugh when he swings around right along with Harry.

“Yeah,” Louis agrees. “They really are.”

The night is a blur of too much champagne, too much dancing, and not enough kissing Harry, in Louis’ humble opinion. He might be a bit tipsy when he gives his best man speech halfway through, but no one seems to mind. It doesn’t change the fact that Louis worked hard on it, finding it so incredibly difficult to put into words just how much Zayn means to him and what he’s done for them.

Noah takes a turn dancing with everyone from Harry and Louis to Perrie before finally falling asleep in a chair at their table, hours past his bedtime, half leaning on Jesy’s side.

“You two should go dance together before it’s over,” she says when Louis moves to pick him up. “You deserve a few minutes alone.”

Louis doesn’t argue for a moment, which he surely would if he was sober, just grabs Harry’s hand and drags him out. Most of the guests seem to have left and the dance floor is practically empty which is probably why the DJ has started playing slower songs. Harry catches him around the waist and slowly starts swaying Louis around, humming in his ear. Harry is nowhere near as drunk as Louis is, having only had one glass of champagne, but that doesn’t stop Louis from declaring his love for him over and over.

“You’re so beautiful,” Louis slurs, because Harry needs to know this right this second. “You know? Do you know how perfect you are?”

Harry chuckles, the noise resonating in Louis’ chest where they’re pressed together. “Thank you baby,” he whispers back. “But I think you’re the beautiful one, especially today.”

“Me hair’s wilted and I can’t walk straight,” Louis points out, picking his head up from Harry’s shoulder to stare him down.

That only makes Harry laugh harder. He reaches out and gently plucks a stray hair off of Louis’ sweaty forehead, pushing it back into order with a sweep of his hand. “You have absolutely no idea,” he sighs.

Louis doesn’t really understand what that means, but he doesn’t ask. He’s too busy staring into Harry’s green, green eyes, wondering how he got so lucky. Out of the corner of his eye, Louis can see Zayn and Perrie spinning around the floor. The couple presses their foreheads together and laugh, their rings glinting in the dim light.

“That’s going to be us someday,” Louis blurs out.
Harry’s hands tighten on Louis’ waist and he looks completely shocked when Louis drags his eyes back up to meet his. “You think so?” Harry asks.

Louis nods. “Yeah, but I wanna get married in the summer,” he declares, letting his head fall to Harry’s shoulder once more. He takes a deep breath in, letting the scent of Harry’s cologne fill his senses and smiles. “There’ll be fairy lights, and champagne, you’ll look so beautiful. So beautiful, and you’ll be mine.”

“I am yours,” Harry promises, pressing his lips to Louis’ forehead.

Louis closes his eyes and he thinks he could probably fall asleep like this; drunk and laying on Harry’s shoulder while Harry sways them around and hums in his ear to Ed Sheeran. “I know,” Louis sighs. “I love you.”

Instead of answering, Harry presses his lips to Louis’ ear and sings along with the music, “I’ll be taking my time, spending my life, falling deeper in love with you. So tell me that you love me too.”

Everything is ready, relatively speaking. Harry has Louis’ ring hidden in his drawer, he’s planned out exactly what he’s going to say, how he wants to ask—but he can’t just yet. Sure, he’s gotten Jay’s blessing, had Zayn and Louis’ sisters approve the ring, but he’s yet to ask the most important person of all for his opinion.

“Noah,” Harry calls out from Louis’ study. “Darling, you know I love when you play for me, but can we please have less banging?”

Popping his head in the doorway, Noah shoots Harry a big grin. “I’m gettin’ real good,” he says.

“You certainly are,” Harry confirms.

To demonstrate this, Noah takes a seat in the chair beside Louis’ desk that Harry has taken over for the afternoon. He sets his guitar in his lap and carefully starts plucking out *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*. Harry stops what he’s doing to watch, loving the little v that appears between Noah’s eyebrows when he’s concentrating. He’s been practicing this song for days now, a perfectionist just like his father. Once he finishes without a single mistake, and no banging on the side to imitate drums, Harry starts clapping.

“Thank you, thank you!” Noah shouts, hopping back to his feet so he can bow for his imaginary audience.

Harry laughs and pulls the boy into his lap, blowing a raspberry into the side of his neck. “You’re wonderful, little bean,” he declares while Noah laughs.

“Thanks, Papa,” Noah says, his giggles fading away. “What’re you doing in here? Writing more music?”

Harry nods and swivels the chair back around to show Noah what he’s been working on. Even though he can barely read, Noah is absolutely enthralled by the pages of lyrics in Harry’s notebook. He doesn’t really understand what Harry is working on, but he knows it’s important, and he loves to sit in Harry’s lap and hum along with him while Harry tries out new verses.
“So cool,” Noah says. “It’s gonna be real good, Papa. Maybe I can even play guitar for you.”

“Maybe you can,” Harry agrees, meaning every word. He thinks it’d be lovely, having Noah maybe just sing a couple of lines for his album, or even just play *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*—because it’s Harry’s album. He can do what he likes with it, and that freedom is thrilling.

Noah smiles and looks up at Harry, blue eyes sparkling with mischief as usual. Harry smiles back and brushes a hand through his unruly curls. He understands it now, why Louis always seems so content to just sit with Noah in his arms. It’s a wonderful feeling, Harry thinks, looking down at Noah and letting how much he loves this boy wash over him.

“Hey, bean,” Harry says, because now is as good a time as any. “Could we talk a bit? Just me and you.”

Noah sits up straight and turns to face Harry. “A big kid talk?” he asks.

Harry laughs. “Yeah, love, a big kid talk.”

With that, Noah moves Harry’s notes away and sits on the desk, making himself comfortable. “Okay,” he says. “I’m ready.”

Harry reaches out and takes Noah’s hand in his, each of their friendship bracelets a bit frayed but still holding on tight. “Well,” he starts. “I know you talked to Daddy a bit about how you would feel if Daddy and I got married.”

“Yeah, it would be best,” Noah replies, kicking his feet around.

“Well, I was wondering if I could have your blessing love,” Harry explains carefully. “I want to know if it would be okay with you if I asked your dad to marry me. What do you think?”

Noah’s eyes go terribly wide and he gasps. “You’re gonna ask right now?”

“No, bean, not right now,” Harry laughs. “But if you’re okay with it, I think I want to ask him very soon.”

The words make Noah frown, and Harry panics a bit until the boy whines, “But I want you to ask Daddy right now and we can get married tomorrow.”

Harry laughs even harder than that. “Is this a yes, then?” he teases.

“Yes,” Noah replies, sounding completely certain. “Because you always make my Daddy smile, and you love me just the same as him, so that means you have to get married.”

Of course, Noah has no idea how much Harry needed to hear that. He has no idea how hard Harry has been working so Noah would one day say those exact words and believe them, because they’re completely true.

“I do love you just the same,” he promises. “And I want to be with you and your Daddy forever, you know that? I want to watch you grow up, Noah, I want to be there for you always. You are so important to me, darling, I need you to know that.”

Noah giggles and nods. “I know that you love me, Papa, you’re bein’ silly! You and my Daddy can get married please, it’ll be so nice. You make my Daddy and me the happiest.”

“You’d really want me to?” Harry asks, once more, just to convince himself he hasn’t dreamed this
Sighing, Noah crosses his arms over his chest and stares at Harry. He looks so much like his father when he does it that it shocks Harry a bit. “Papa,” Noah says, quite sternly. “Please marry my Daddy, okay?”

Harry grins and leans over to hug the boy tightly. “Okay,” he says. “Okay, baby. Do you think you can keep this a secret from Daddy? Just for a few days?”


Harry tugs on Noah’s pinky with his own. “Good,” he says, pulling Noah back into his lap and standing up. “Now, let’s go show Daddy how great you are at *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.*”

Noah is practically shaking by Harry’s side with excitement, and Harry isn’t doing much better. It’s a Sunday morning and they each woke up early to make breakfast for Louis, though it was a bit of a disaster because Harry’s hands would not stop shaking and they had to remake the pancakes twice. He just can’t believe he’s really doing this. Finally.

“We have to be sneaky,” Noah whispers, though there’s no way Louis could hear them from the kitchen. “Right?”

Harry smiles and carefully sets the ring box on the tray. “Very sneaky, bean. Don’t forget the flower.”

Noah nods and carefully places the daisy he picked out for his dad on the tray. Between that, the mug of tea, and the food, it should take Louis a moment or two to realize the ring is hiding in the corner. At least, Harry hopes so. He wants to remember the look on Louis’ face the moment he sees it forever.

“Daddy’s gonna cry, I think,” Noah says to him. “He loves you a whole lot.”

Harry smiles and leans over to kiss the boy’s cheek. “I’ll probably cry too, bean, it’ll be up to you to hold us both together.”

Noah looks ready for this task, jumping off his chair and onto the floor. He puts his hands on his hips and makes his most serious face. It’s been torture for him keeping this secret, Harry knows. Granted, it’s only been three days, but secrets are quite hard to keep when they’re this exciting and you’re five years old.

“Thank you, love,” Harry says to him. “For helping me with this. I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Noah beams with pride and gives Harry a quick hug. “You’re welcome, Papa. Now c’mon, or he’s gonna wake up!”

Harry holds the tray as carefully as he can while Noah leads the way down the hall. They pause outside of Louis’ door just long enough to hear him snore once, before Noah pushes it open.

It hits Harry out of nowhere just then. Sun filters in through the tree outside the window, shadows
playing across Louis’ bare back as he softly snuffles in his sleep. The blankets are still mussed from where Harry slept in his arms last night, and Louis has Harry’s pillow pressed to his chest. Noah runs out ahead of Harry and climbs up onto the bed to start yelling for his dad to wake up.

This is what Harry wants. He’s never been so sure of anything in his life.

“Daddy, wake up!” Noah calls, shaking his father’s shoulder.

Harry winces. “Bean, don’t yell at him.”

But it’s too late, Louis is already groaning and rolling over onto his back. He peeks one eye open and promptly shuts it. “Christ, boys,” he grumbles. “It’s a weekend.”

“Daddy, c’mon, get up,” Noah says, softer this time. “It’s an important surprise.”

Harry sits down carefully on his side of the bed while Noah crawls across the sheets and pokes at Louis’ nose. Louis snatches Noah’s hand up and pretends to gnaw on his fingers, sending the boy into a fit of hysterical giggles. Louis looks so beautiful, still half asleep, hair soft and sticking up in a million different places, eyes bright and voice raspy when he speaks.

“Oh, loves,” he says once he sees the breakfast Harry is still holding. “What have I done to deserve this?”

Finally coming to his senses, Harry moves to set the tray up in Louis’ lap. “Just because we love you,” he says. “Try some.”

Louis props himself up against the headboard, Noah under his arm and Harry sitting in front of them. “Who made this smiley face out of my pancakes, I wonder,” Louis teases, digging his fingers into Noah’s sides. “Thank you boys, it’s lovely.”

Noah grins at Harry and they both watch as Louis reaches for his tea. His hand stutters at the last moment and he whips his head up to stare at Harry, tears already gathering in his eyes.

“Harry, what is that?” he asks, his voice shaking.

It took days for Harry to think of the right way to ask. There were a million ideas floating around in his mind, a million more thrown at him by family and friends, but this is just what seemed right. Louis has never been one for grand romantic gestures, and their relationship has never been about proving to anyone else how much they love each other besides themselves. It’s always been about the three of them, Harry, Louis, and Noah, and this should be too.

Harry reaches for the box, surprised that his hands aren’t shaking anymore as he carefully shuffles closer to the stunned man on his knees. Noah is watching it all, eyes flicking between the two of them while he bites down on a smile.

“Louis,” Harry whispers, gently popping the box open.

“Oh my god,” Louis gasps, the breakfast now pushed to the side and forgotten. “Harry-”

All of the long nights Harry spent awake trying to think of the right thing to say go out the window. “Louis, marry me,” he says, not at all eloquently. “From the moment I met you, I knew that it was fate, that you and I were meant to find each other. And as much as you tease me for it, you know that it’s true. Baby, you’re the family I chose, and I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I don’t ever want to be without you, not for a moment, I want to share my life with you. Both of you, Louis. Always.”
Louis is full on crying now, just as Noah predicted. He shakes his head, but Harry only gets to panic about the worst possible scenario for a moment before Louis is saying, “Of course, god, of course you idiot. Yes, please, yes.”

Whether it’s the adrenaline, the tears forming in his own eyes, or the pure happiness coursing through his veins, Harry isn’t sure. All he knows is that his fingers are shaking once more as he slips the ring onto Louis’ finger. It fits perfectly and the three of them just stare down at it for a moment, taking it in.

“It’s perfect,” Louis whispers, and then he’s throwing his arms around Harry’s neck and pulling him in for a kiss.

Noah gets squished between them, but for once he doesn’t seem to mind. In fact he’s cheering for them, and Louis has to pull away because it’s making Harry laugh so hard.

“Come here, kiss me properly,” Louis demands, tugging Harry to his other side and pressing their lips together once more. His ring is cold against Harry’s skin where Louis is cradling his face. It’s the most wonderful sensation Harry’s ever felt.

They finally separate only to find Noah staring at them, his own eyes glassy now as well. Louis laughs, his voice still thick with tears. “Darling, what’s the matter?”

“Nothin’,” Noah hiccups. “M’just really, really happy my Daddies are getting married.”

Harry laughs and picks the boy up so he can sit between them once more. Noah takes Louis’ hand in his own, his little fingers running over the ring. Louis kisses his son’s forehead and sighs.

“How long did you know about this?”

“Only a few days,” Harry answers for him. “I had to get his permission, right?”

Noah nods, slipping his fingers between Louis’. “Papa got my blessin’,” he says, which makes Louis laugh. “But I know we only need him, Daddy, because he makes us both happy.”

Louis smiles and looks over Noah’s head to Harry. “Yeah,” he sighs, never once breaking eye contact. “He really does, doesn’t he?”

Harry goes red and quickly pulls both of his boys closer. He kisses Noah on the forehead and Louis on the lips before whispering, “My boys. I can’t wait for forever with you.”

They stay that way for how long, Harry isn’t really sure. They pick at Louis’ breakfast while calling their respective family members. Their mum’s both cry, which they expected, and Zayn smugly tells Louis he knew ages ago before excusing himself to get back to his honeymoon. Louis’ work friends practically scream at him over the phone and Harry swears he can hear Niall getting choked up as well. All the while, Harry steals glances at the ring on Louis’ finger and his now fiancé’s beautiful eyes.

He wants to memorize this moment. He wants to memorize how this feels; their hands pressed together, Noah absentmindedly kicking their legs while he rambles on about their future wedding, and Louis staring into Harry’s eyes as though he could see his soul through them.

“I love you,” Harry whispers.

Louis smiles and Harry is suddenly brought back to a year ago now, to watching Louis from across the room. Harry can still remember how Louis took his breath away the moment he walked in that
door. He still takes Harry’s breath away, every day, with every little thing he does.

Fate, Harry’s mind sings. This is fate. This is what it feels like to finally have what you’ve always wanted.

“I love you too,” Louis replies, squeezing their hands together, and Harry knows it’s a promise. “Always.”

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue (with a twist!!) to follow in a few minutes, complete with my very sappy last author's note :)

epilogue: Noah

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Noah Tomlinson is six years old and he is very smart.

Or, at least everyone in his family tells him so. He likes to think that he is very smart and could fix any problem that arose today, because it’s a very special day. Probably the most special day, actually. His Daddies are finally getting married today, they’re finally going to show everyone how much they love each other.

Only the thing is, his Daddy won’t stop crying.

“Daddy,” Noah says nervously, reaching out to shake his father’s shoulder. “Daddy, it’s time to calm down!”

His dad shakes his head and moans. “God, this was an awful idea. What was I thinking? What am I doing?” he mumbles into his hands.

Noah sighs and stands up straight, trying to make himself taller. He can handle this, he’s a big boy. He thinks very hard about it for a moment; what would he do if Daddy was in trouble?

The answer hits him and Noah feels a little dumb for not thinking of it right away.

“Okay, I can fix it. I’ll be right back Daddy, stay here!” Noah says, reaching out to pat his dad on the back one last time.

With that, Noah skids across the room and out the door which he promptly slams shut behind himself. The hall is full of people wandering around, including his Lottie who looks very pretty in her purple dress.

“My Lottie!” Noah shouts, running towards her. Everyone else stops and watches him and smiles. Noah notices everyone’s been smiling at him a lot today, but he thinks it’s probably because he looks so nice. His Daddy let him pick out his very own bow tie to wear.

Lottie catches him before he can fall into her legs and laughs. “Noah, darling, what are you doing out here? The ceremony is about to start.”

“No, I need to find my Papa,” Noah says, putting his hands on his hips so she knows he’s serious. And then, worried that maybe she won’t understand, he says, “It’s a serious mission.”

Lottie smiles and moves her flowers to her other hand so she can reach for his hand. “Well, I happen to know exactly where he is,” she says. “Come on love, he’s just through here.”

Noah’s only been here once before, so he doesn’t know his way around that well. It’s a big giant house that Noah thinks is maybe a castle. Maybe princes used to live here, and maybe that’s why his Papa cried when they walked in for the first time and kissed his Daddy so hard.

They end up just down the hall from where his Daddy is getting dressed. Lottie knocks on the door and yells, “Harry, you have a visitor!”

Moments later, the door swings open to reveal Niall. “Little man!” he shouts.
Noah grins. “Hello, Niall,” he says, trying to be very serious. “I need my Papa right now, it’s an emergency.”

From the back of the room, Noah hears a chair scrape across the floor, and the next thing he knows, there’s his Papa.

Papa always seems a lot taller than everyone else, but Noah thinks it maybe that he’s just very small. Papa’s wearing his very nicest suit with a tie, shiny shoes, and a flower just like Noah. His hair is very extra curly today, and Noah thinks he looks very nice. Someday, Noah wants to be big and tall, like his Papa, so he can protect everyone and his Daddy too.

“Bean,” Papa says, looking worried. “Darling, what’s going on? What are you doing over here?”

Noah takes a deep breath and reaches out for Papa’s hand. “It’s an emergency!” he shouts, which makes Lottie jump beside him. “You gotta help me, Papa, hurry!”

With that, Noah holds on tight to Papa’s hand and starts running. His Papa makes a noise but still follows, not letting go of Noah’s hand until they get down the hall to his Daddy’s room.

“Noah, baby what’s going on?” His Papa asks once they’re standing at the door. “You’re scaring me.”

Noah pushes the door open and points to where Daddy is still sitting in his chair, slumped over and crying. “You need to fix my Daddy,” he says. “He needs to be calm so you can get married.”

It always makes Noah happy, watching the way Papa looks at his Daddy. His eyes always go all soft and he smiles, and it’s all very mushy and gross, but Noah likes it. He likes it because he knows it’s only cause his Daddies are very in love that they look like that at each other.

Papa shuts the door behind them and walks across the room in a few big steps. He gets down on his knees next to Noah’s dad and reaches out to rub his back.

“Oh, Lou,” he whispers. “Baby, what’s wrong?”

“You aren’t supposed to see me like this, it’s bad luck,” Daddy says, looking up finally. He’s got tears all on his face and stuff, probably because he’s been crying a lot. Noah doesn’t know why he started crying, it just happened. His Zayn had to leave them and check to make sure everything was okay with Noah’s new baby cousin before the wedding, and he told his Daddy not to have cold feet, and then Daddy started to cry.

Only, he’s not supposed to cry, Noah knows this. His Daddy is getting married today, which is very special, and he should only be happy. Something is definitely wrong with his Daddy-maybe his feet are cold, Noah doesn’t like it when he’s cold either, except it’s summer so no one should have cold feet-but he knows his Papa will be able to fix it. He fixes everything.

“I think we’ll be okay,” Papa laughs, reaching out to wipe tears away from Daddy’s cheeks. “Noah’s very worried about you, my love, what happened? Why are you crying?”

Noah knows his Papa does that a lot, calls his Daddy different names except Louis. He likes to call him my love and baby and sweetheart and a million trillion others. Daddy calls his Papa my love and pretty and darling a lot too. But his Daddy also calls him Harold and popstar when he's teasin’, like his Papa calls him Lewis. Noah didn't know people could have so many nice names for each other when they're in love. Sometimes it's hard to keep up.
“What are we doing?” Daddy whispers. “What am I doing, I messed this all up the first time round and now-?”

“Hey, hey,” Papa whispers. “Look at me.”

Noah watches as his Daddy does. Sometimes his grandmas tell him that he’s very lucky because his Daddies love each other so much. Noah knows that they’re right, though, because his Daddies love each other the most out of everyone-except him, of course.

When his Daddy is worried, he always looks at Papa and his face gets nicer, and he remembers that Papa will always take care of them. Sometimes Noah thinks maybe his Daddy forgets that when he’s sad. Sometimes he thinks maybe his Daddy thinks they’re alone still, but they aren’t, and Papa promises they never will be again. They’re gonna be a family forever and ever now, and his Papa loves him and his Daddy a lot.

“I love you,” Papa whispers. “I love you, and I’m never leaving okay? You’re mine, baby, all mine always. You and Noah are all I want, I can’t wait to spend my life with you. You mean absolutely everything to me, Louis, baby, you’re everything.”

That seems to make his Daddy a lot calmer. He takes a few breaths and reaches out to put his hands on Papa’s cheeks. “I love you too,” he replies, as he always does. “I’m sorry, it’s just-I never thought this would happen. I never thought you’d want to keep me.”

Papa laughs softly. “Of course I want to keep you, where would I be without you?”

They lean their foreheads on each other and Noah watches from his place by the door. His Daddy seems to calm down after his Papa whispers to him a few times and rubs his hands on Daddy’s shoulders. They can’t kiss yet, Noah knows, but he thinks they want to.

“This is definitely bad luck,” Daddy whispers.

Papa laughs and shakes his head. “The only bad luck would be if both the grooms and your best man missed the wedding,” he says. “I have to go now, but you’ll be okay right?”

“I’ll be okay,” Daddy promises.

Papa nods. “I’ll be waiting for you,” he says as he stands up and turns around. He smiles at Noah, his big smile that Daddy says makes him look goofy, and hugs him tight. “I’ll be waiting for you too, bean. Take care of your Daddy for me, don’t let him run off.”

Noah giggles and kisses his Papa’s cheek. “I won’t, promise.”

Harry winks at him and leaves the room, calling out for Gemma who’s been yelling his name a lot since Noah took him. Noah looks over to where his Daddy is wiping at his cheeks and looking at himself in the mirror and walks over.

He has to get up on tiptoes, but Noah can soon see his face in the mirror right along with Daddy’s. Papa always says that Daddy is the very most beautiful person in the world, and Noah thinks so too, even when he’s been crying. Noah wants to be just like his Daddy when he grows up, strong, funny, and nice like him. Sometimes he thinks he looks like his Daddy a little bit with his eyes, and people tell him that, and it makes Noah very happy because there’s no one else in the world like his Daddy.

Daddy looks down at him and smiles.

“What do you think, baby?” he asks, putting his hand on top of Noah’s curls. “Good idea or bad
idea?"

There are some things Noah doesn’t understand. He doesn’t understand why his other dad left him and his Daddy alone. He doesn’t understand why his Daddy used to stay up at night and cry when he thought Noah was sleeping. He doesn’t understand why Daddy gets scared sometimes that Papa would ever leave them. He doesn’t understand why his Daddy gets really sad for no reason.

But there are some things Noah is absolutely sure of. He is sure that dinosaurs are his favorite animals, next to penguins, that chocolates are his favorite candy, and that he and his Daddy are a team. He’s sure that Eva is his very best friend and Niall is the best at playing guitar. He’s sure that the sea is blue and green and gray, like Daddy’s eyes. He’s sure that even when it rains sometimes and makes him very sad, the sun always, always comes back.

Noah is sure that his Papa and Daddy love him more than anything in the world. He’s certain that his Daddies love each other more than he could ever know. He knows that his Papa would never leave Daddy sad someday, and he knows that his Daddy is always going to take care of them. No matter what happens, Noah knows that he’ll away have his Papa and Daddy forever, and he knows that he wants them to spend forever together-like Papa said.

So Noah meets his Daddy’s eyes in the mirror, which are blue like his and beautiful like the sea, his Papa told him once, and smiles his biggest smile.

“Good idea,” he says, absolutely sure of every word. His Daddy smiles big and wide when he hears it and reaches out for his hand. Noah grins and nods his head one last time before saying, “The best idea you’ve ever had.”

Chapter End Notes

It's over!! We did it!! Finally!!!! Well, I did it, and you guys (somehow!!) were patient enough to stick around. I don't think I'll ever really understand how some of you managed to wait two years for this moment, I've given up on fics for much less. Thank you to everyone who has been reading, leaving kudos, and writing comments that have motivated me when I was so sure I would just give up and abandon this. It's really because of you that I never did.

A lot can happen in two years, and a lot has happened in two years. Somehow, though, this little story that turned out to be a huge story started and ended. It's just sort of insane to think about how much has changed, and it's insane to think that I'm actually done. (Well, mostly) Thank you, so much. I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I've loved writing it.

The rebloggable post for this story is here if you wish. I promise I'll see you soon, their story is nowhere near finished ;)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!