Outwit, Outplay, Outlast

by dancesongsoul, lookatyourchoices

Summary

“Tommo and Harry are gonna do it. I don’t know when, but they’re gonna do it. They’ve got the mattress, the pillows, everything’s in place, and they’re gonna do it. I really wish those two the best of luck.” –Taylor Swift, "Chapera"

Or a Survivor All-Stars AU in which Harry and Louis are just in this game to win the million dollars, but they end up with something better.

Featuring Harry's yellow swim shorts, Louis in snapbacks, and OT5 shenanigans.

Notes

First, a huge thank you to the Big Bang mods for doing such a wonderful job!

We had the great fortune to work with Brigid as our artist, so thank you to her for the graphics. We love them lots!

And last but not least, a massive thank you to our Beta Squad! (Shout out to Lisa and Nadia! We love a good debate.)
This fic is our Magnum Opus (and also the first time we've dared write smut...), so we hope you enjoy it!

There is a prize at the end if you can catch all of our 1D song references throughout the fic. There are a lot of them...

Additional note: This fic is inspired by Survivor Season 8. Harry and Louis are based on Amber and Rob, and some of the talking heads are lifted directly from the show. We don't own anything Survivor-related!
Survivors Ready?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

DAY 1

Reality TV is weird.

It’s one of Louis’s first real thoughts beyond the excitement fizzing in his brain as he rides a speed boat headed to some beach in Panama along with five relative strangers. His mom thinks he’s crazy, but this is just the kind of challenge that Louis lives for, which is probably why he agreed to do it twice.

It doesn’t hurt that he’s getting a second chance at a million dollars; and this time, Louis is going to win it all.

When he had been approached by the producers of Survivor to be a part of their first ever All-Stars season, Louis hadn’t hesitated even a full second before accepting. His last outing had been a bit of a disappointment — he’d been painted as a villain and voted out shortly after the merge — so this is his shot at redemption.

He’d watched and rewatched his previous season, identifying his shortcomings and creating a series of strategies to compensate. He’d put himself through physical training, which included — but was not limited to — increasing his weekly trips to the gym, learning how to tie and untie knots, and practicing making fire. Sitting on the speed boat now, he is as prepared as anyone could be for thirty-nine days with little food and water and a whole bunch of strangers.

Louis adjusts his signature snapback and surreptitiously assesses his competition. Louis from St. Louis in his Cardinals cap had been an enduring image his season, so much so that the hat had become associated with ‘season villain.’ When Louis accepted a role on this season, the producers insisted that he keep the same one so that fans would be able to recognize him. Louis knew they were trying to set him up to be a villain again, but he honestly hadn’t cared. He likes his snapback.

His eyes skim over the others in the boat, sizing each of them up because for this intro they’d already been split up into their tribes, which means the losers he’s sitting next to now are the five people he’ll be stuck with for the first half of the game. And his game relies on one of them being a strong ally.

As Louis looks at the people around him, he inwardly sighs. The pickings are slim.

Part of the twist of this season is that all the contestants have seen each other play. Louis knows this is going to be a huge detriment to him; all the goody two-shoes players won’t want to deal with him, and the smarter players will be wary of him. He needs an ally who will make him seem more approachable.

Initially, the plan had been to align with a girl early on in the game, but looking at the women on his tribe, he doesn’t think a single one of them would fit his strategy.

Taylor is infamous for playing the innocent girl who let the big men of her alliance ‘carry’ her to the final five and then demolished them in the final vote. She already had a million dollars to her name. Why she had chosen to come out again is beyond Louis, but he does know that aligning with her would be a mistake. Everyone will be gunning for previous winners from the get-go. She’ll be an easy vote before the merge.
Caroline Flack is a slightly older woman whose only real memorable game play was her big mouth. She’d spilled the beans on one of her secret alliances and it had cost her the game. Maybe she’s learned from that mistake, but Louis isn’t willing to bet his game on it.

Jesy could a competitive choice choice for an ally, but Louis’s a bit scared of her. She’d been a total beast in challenges, but her temper had been her eventual downfall. If Louis’s honest with himself, the real issue he has with Jesy is that they’re just too similar. The last thing he needs in an alliance is another personality like his. It’d be a disaster waiting to happen.

So that leaves the two other men.

Niall is a viable option. He’d played his season in Africa and was known as the ‘likeable’ one. He had been easygoing if not particularly brilliant in challenges, but Louis could compensate for that. He can see them getting along well enough.

And then there’s the last member of his tribe. Louis darts a glance at Harry and has to suppress his urge to laugh.

Harry Styles. His name is about the extent of what Louis knows about this particular member of his tribe. He casts his memory back through all the seasons of Survivor he’d watched to prepare himself, and he thinks Harry might’ve been in the second season. Beyond that, Harry hadn’t been particularly memorable, except for being pretty and having an odd taste in survival clothing.

Harry hadn’t disappointed his legacy. He’s clad in a pair of bright yellow swim trunks that show off his absurdly long legs and an almost completely unbuttoned, sheer(?!?) pink floral shirt. His brown curls are longer than Louis remembers them being, and tied up on his head with an olive green scarf.

He looks like someone headed for a luxury poolside vacation, not a deserted beach. It’s utterly ridiculous, especially since they’re only allowed to bring two sets of clothes with them. Louis doesn’t even want to know what else Harry has in his bag.

Fashion choices aside, aligning with Harry might be dangerous since Louis can hardly remember him. But that might work in his favor: If Louis can’t remember Harry, then the rest of the players won’t either. Harry’s an unknown element, and that could be a valuable asset. If this giraffe-like flower child can make it past Day 4, of course.

Harry suddenly turns his head and catches Louis watching him. Oh, Louis thinks. He doesn’t look away like Louis expects him to, but instead raises his eyebrows challengingly, almost like he heard Louis’s entire inner-monologue and is daring Louis to say it to his face. Louis is surprised when his first instinct is to break eye contact, which is just not on. He’s the alpha male around here.

To prove it, he stares right back while his lips quirk upward, unbidden. And suddenly, like watching one of those sped-up motion capture videos of a flower opening its petals, a full-blown dimpled smile blooms on Harry’s face. Fuck.

Louis forces himself to look away — doesn’t want to reveal too much. They may be forbidden to talk while they’re on the speedboat, but that doesn’t mean people aren’t already forming opinions of each other. He can already feel Taylor’s eyes like laser beams in between his shoulder blades.

So Harry might be a good choice for his ally. Maybe.

Louis needs to make these kinds of decisions logically. Sure, it’d be nice to compete with someone interesting — someone he could be friends with — even if he knows it’ll only be a temporary thing. But there’s one thing Louis knows for sure: no one has ever won Survivor by making friends.
“All-Star Survivor is gonna be so cut throat it’s not even funny. Nobody trusts anybody. Nobody. Nobody trusts anybody. Do you understand?” - Tommo, Chapera

Harry is going to make so many friends.

They’ve just landed on their beach and Harry’s already initiated a hug with Taylor and a weirdly macho high-five with a confused Louis.

For Harry, being on *Survivor* again is more about the experience than anything else. This season his competitors are people who’ve played the game before and have a second chance to win, which means it’s going to be more cutthroat than ever. He knows he’s not likely to win, and he’s not going to lose his mind or sense of self trying. He just wants to get as far as he can playing the game on his terms.

Worst comes to worst, he’ll meet some interesting people, get voted off, and spend the remainder of the show on an all-expenses-paid cruise. It’s win-win really, regardless of whether or not he manages to leave with a million dollars in his pocket.

He won’t lie, though. Leaving with a million dollars would be really, really nice.

As they make their way up the beach, Niall bumps shoulders with him. “So what’s with the get-up, bro?”

Harry glances over at Niall, who looks like he walked straight out of a frat house barbecue with his cargo shorts, white muscle tank, and black wayfarers, and shrugs. “Wanna get a nice tan.”

He doesn’t know what he’s expecting, but Niall just nods slowly, like tanning is a reasonable thing to prioritize right after being dumped on a deserted beach with no food or shelter to speak of. “Fair enough.”

Harry beams at him. They’re going to get along swimmingly.

“Tanning’s great and all, but you could’ve added a little bit of red to this trophy husband ensemble you’ve got goin’ on. Where’s your tribe spirit?” A reedy voice says from behind them.
Harry looks over his shoulder and sees that the voice belongs to Louis ‘Tommo’ Tomlinson, probably the most well-known *Survivor* player on their tribe other than Taylor. Certainly the most controversial.

Louis is scruffier than Harry remembers — his hair is longer, curling a bit around his ears, and there’s stubble lining his jaw that hadn’t been there until several days into his season — but his trademark smirk is crooked as always.

He’s dressed in mesh shorts and a black tank, shoulders somehow already bronzing from the sun that’s been beating down on them since the speedboat. The only red in his outfit is on the writing and bill of his infamous snapback, which as fate (or the producers — probably the producers) would have it, is their tribe color.

“Well, Lewis, some of us didn’t get our color preferences factored into our tribe placement.”

Louis is quiet for a beat, blinking at him once before letting out some sort of delighted cackle, eyes crinkling up with it. “They couldn’t have put me on any other tribe, honestly.”

Harry doesn’t have time to reply because they’ve reached their tribe flag, which declares them CHAPERA. He has no idea how to pronounce that. He’ll have to wait until he hears Jeff say it so he doesn’t make a fool of himself.

Jesy comes up beside them and picks up the hollow tube that’s tied to the flagpole. “Looks like they left us a present.”

Harry hopes it’s flint or a clue to help them find water. He’s already started sweating and it’s not even midday, so it’s only going to get hotter. Every hour without clean drinking water is an hour closer to dehydration.

Taylor reads over Jesy’s shoulder as she unrolls the parchment. “It’s a map to water.”

“Thank god!” Caroline says. “We can bring it back to camp with this.” She nudges her foot against a black pot that’s resting against the foot of the flagpole before stretching out on the sand.

“And hack down some firewood while we’re at it.” Louis reaches to take the machete that’s sticking out of the pot like some sort of ungainly flower from a vase, but Taylor beats him to it, swiping it away before he can get a hand on it.

Harry expects him to say something, but Louis just snorts derisively, rolling his eyes heavenward as he crouches to pick up the pot. Taylor’s too busy consulting the map with Jesy to notice.

“We need to go this way,” she says firmly, turning to the left and starting toward the jungle.

Most of the others follow her in an unspoken agreement that they should all stick together for their first task in the game, but Harry stays to wait for Caroline.

She groans but allows him to pull her onto her feet. “Ugh, I hate hiking,” she says, brushing sand off herself primly.

Harry loops an arm with hers despite the heat. “Shouldn’t be too much of a hike, I think,” he says. “But we can be hiking buddies, it’ll be fun. I love your bathing suit cover up, where’d you get it?”

Of course, he’d spoken too soon. An hour later they’re wandering aimlessly.

Taylor had successfully led them to the second marker, but for the last three-quarters of an hour she’s
been changing her mind about which way they need to go every few minutes, shutting down anyone who reads the map differently than her.

Harry had spent the first half-hour chatting happily with Caroline, but it’s getting increasingly difficult to keep up small talk when it looks like they might not find water anytime soon. He’s dripping with sweat, and had to shed his scarf only a few minutes into their trek in favor of pulling his hair into a bun. The tribe has lapsed into a tense silence, interrupted only by Taylor muttering to herself and barking directions.

Finally, Niall heaves out a sigh and turns down a completely different trail. “That’s it. I’m just gonna go this way. Maybe we’ll have better luck if we split up.”

The group has come to a halt. Caroline looks completely uninterested, Taylor murderous, and Jesy skeptical, but Louis has already moved to follow Niall.

Harry sighs. “Guys, we need to stick together. Taylor’s the only one with a map. What if you can’t find your way back to the beach?”

“I think it makes more sense,” Niall says calmly. His body language isn’t aggressive, but he’s standing his ground and addressing Taylor unflinchingly. “Following the map hasn’t helped us, so we should try a different strategy. There’s a camera crew following us, it’s not like they’re gonna let us get stuck out here forever.” Niall casually breaks the unspoken rule of never addressing the camera crew without a second thought. Harry doesn’t know if he’s brave or he just doesn’t care.

Taylor growls in frustration. “We need to follow the map.”

Harry glances around to gauge Louis and Jesy’s reactions, since from what he knows they’re the two most likely to start a fight. They’re both visibly frustrated: Louis’s knuckles are white where he’s clutching the pot, and Jesy looks like she’s holding back a gravity-defying eye roll, but neither of them seem like they’re going to say anything.

Since they’re at a stand-off, Harry coughs once into his fist before speaking up, voice deliberately placating. “Maybe we should just try going Niall’s way, and like. If that doesn’t work, we can head back to the second marker? Start over.”

Taylor throws her hands up. “Fine, whatever.” She stomps after Niall, the others trailing behind her.

Not five minutes later, Harry hears Niall’s excited shouts up ahead and picks up his pace. He lets out a delighted sound at the sight of the well, which quickly turns to disgust when he sees the cloudy water inside.

“It looks like milk,” Caroline says, her nose wrinkled.

Niall reaches for the coconut shell floating in the water anyway, but suddenly Louis is dropping the pot and darting in to knock the shell away before Niall can get the water to his mouth. “Does that look drinkable to you? We need to boil it first, don’t be an idiot.”

Apparently Louis has almost reached his limit in playing nice. Niall shrugs and lets it go, though he looks like he’d probably drink it anyway if Louis weren’t actively preventing him.

Taylor makes a show of retrieving the pot and filling it in a huff, but before she can turn to start back toward the beach Caroline sinks against a tree trunk, loudly declaring that they need to take a break. Harry quietly agrees; he can feel the beginnings of a sunburn on the bridge of his nose, and his head is starting to pound from the sun and dehydration.
But to be able to drink this water they need to make a fire, and they’re losing daylight. So instead of joining Caroline, he follows Taylor. “C’mon, Caroline. We all need to drink some water. Then we can rest. Promise.”

“I agree with Legs,” Louis says, moving to follow Harry and Taylor just as Caroline lets out a dramatic “Thank you!”

A second later she realizes Louis hadn’t been talking about her and makes a squawking disgruntled sound as she struggles to her feet. “Hey!”

Jesy bursts out laughing. It’s the first time she’d so much as smiled all day.

“I’m the one with the great legs,” Caroline says, catching up with Louis to smack him on the arm. “Harry can’t be Legs!”

Louis looks pointedly at Harry’s legs then back at Caroline, eyebrows raised. “Keep tellin’ yourself that, babe.”

As a rule, Harry doesn’t blush easily, but the compliment is so unexpected that he can’t help it. He hopes it’ll be passed off as sunburn. “Don’t listen to him, Caroline. If anyone here is Legs, it’s definitely you.”

The mood has successfully lifted now that they’re a step closer to having water and actually know where they’re going, so the walk back to the beach passes quickly. They agree that once they get back to the beach their two priorities should be making a fire and building a shelter. Taylor’s the only one still upset, but for the time being she takes her aggression out on the trees she’s marking with the machete so they’ll have a path to follow back to the well.

As soon as they get back to the beach, Niall makes a grand sweeping gesture toward the seemingly endless stretch of sand. “Where do ya wanna make camp, ladies and gents?”

“We need to see if we can find a big tree to be our base,” Louis says, an air of authority to his voice that’s almost surprising after watching him spend the last ten minutes trying to walk and wrestle Niall at the same time.

Suddenly it clicks, and Harry remembers that in his last season Louis had said he was in construction. He’s just thinking how lucky they are to have someone on their tribe who actually knows what they’re doing when Jesy interrupts Louis to say it’d be better to build on an even patch of ground. Taylor nods her head in agreement, Niall shrugs, and Caroline looks like she doesn’t care as long as it happens quickly.

Harry thinks that Jesy has a good point, but when he looks to Louis, he’s huffing a breath through his nose. “I don’t think that’s a good idea…” he begins, but Taylor cuts him off.

“Look, Louis. I watched your season. I know you’ve got this whole macho thing going on. You think you’re hot shit. But you need to know I’m not going to put up with it. We can vote on it, if it’ll make you feel better. Who thinks it makes more sense to build a shelter on even ground?”

No one moves for a second, but slowly the rest of the tribe raises their hands. Before Harry can cast a vote, Taylor turns back to Louis. “We’re doing it our way. If you don’t want to help, you can go work on the fire.”

There’s a frosty silence when Taylor finishes speaking. Jesy and Taylor look smug, but Caroline and Niall look almost guilty, carefully looking anywhere but at Louis.
“Fine,” Louis says, eyes steely and voice even. He turns on his heel and heads back toward the jungle. “I’m gonna get kindle for our fire.”

Niall and Caroline turn to huddle with Jesy and Taylor to start planning the shelter. Apparently everyone else is planning on steering clear of Louis for now, but Harry knows they need at least two people to build a fire. Looks like he’s following Louis then.

But after two hours, Harry and Louis still haven’t managed it. Louis is getting more frustrated by the minute, cursing every time they almost get a flame only to watch it smoke out.

He’s muttering through gritted teeth, not looking up from where he’s working the stick into the coconut husk that Harry’s holding still for him. “Worked every fucking time when I did this at home, but oh no, guess it’s too much to ask when I actually need a fucking fire…”

“I dunno if this is gonna happen for us tonight, Louis,” Harry says quietly. “Maybe we should switch, have someone else try. Our hands are raw and the sun’s gonna set soon. This is gonna be even harder to do in the dark.”

Louis gives another derisive snort, and Harry rolls his eyes.

“You’re telling me that you’re willing to let us all go without water just because you don’t want to ask one of them for help,” Harry says flatly, because quite honestly, fuck that.

Louis doesn’t say anything, so Harry drops the husk and straightens, arching to stretch out the kinks he has in his back from being hunched over for the better part of two hours.

“I’m getting people to switch with us,” Harry says decidedly, starting back toward their makeshift camp without looking back at Louis. “You can take it up with them if you have a problem.”

He treks back up the beach, making sure to take a few calming breaths before he reaches camp. He gets why Louis is frustrated and he doesn’t blame him for it, but Harry’s frustrated too, especially after dealing with a moody Louis this afternoon. Still, he doesn’t want the rest of the tribe to pick up on his bad attitude, not when they all look eager and pleased with themselves where they’re gathered around the structure that’s starting to take shape.

“This looks so great, guys,” he says, bumping fists with a beaming Niall.

“It’s pretty sick,” Niall says happily.

Taylor shoots him a genuine smile. “Thanks, I think it’s going pretty well? We should be done a little after sunset.”

“Where’s Caroline at?” Harry asks, realizing she’s not anywhere on the beach.

Jesy rolls her eyes. “Went to the jungle to go to the bathroom about half an hour ago, haven’t seen her since. Honestly, I doubt we’ll see her again till the shelter’s finished — not that we’ll miss her. She’s mostly just been sitting here watching us this whole time.” She nods toward where Louis is sprawled on the beach. “No luck with the fire then, I guess.”

Harry shakes his head. “We’ve almost had it a few times, but we can’t get it to catch.”

Jesy snorts. “Bet Louis’s being a right sunshine about that.”

Harry could sell Louis out, tell the rest of the tribe about how childish he’s been since being outvoted. They could all bond over how annoying Louis is, maybe even lay the groundwork for
voting Louis at their first tribal. But Harry’s strength lies in his social game, and he knows better.

He shrugs noncommittally. “He sent me over to see if we could switch places? He doesn’t think we’re gonna be able to do it on our own. Can’t say I disagree with him, I feel like my arms might fall off if we keep going.” He turns to look at Niall. “You and Taylor might be better at it. Jesy, you can tell Louis and I what you need done here, right?”

A shrug doesn’t confirm or deny anything, and lying about this won’t hurt him. If he needs to throw Louis under the bus later, he can. But the first immunity challenge could happen anytime now. Their tribe can’t be physically and emotionally exhausted when it does. In the short term, Harry needs to focus on getting fire and keeping peace within the tribe. The lie helps him work toward both.

Jesy and Taylor exchange a quick look, but Niall agrees easily. “Yeah, we can definitely do that.” He waggles his eyebrows exaggeratedly. “C’mon Tay, let’s use our undeniable chemistry to make sparks fly.”

“That was awful,” Taylor says, but lets herself be pulled away.

Several minutes later, Louis trudges up and silently begins helping Harry chop wood into the lengths Jesy asks for. It’s an uneasy truce, but it’s a truce all the same, and Harry counts it as a win.

“I didn’t know I was gonna be, again, on the idiot tribe, but, uh, apparently I’m the brains behind this operation, so we’re gonna have to make it work somehow.” - Tommo, Chapera

The shelter is a disaster, just like Louis knew it would be.

He’d tried to play nice and follow the strategy he’d come out here with. *Keep your mouth shut and follow someone else’s instructions until the merge. Just slip under the radar.*

Unfortunately, in all his careful planning Louis hadn’t factored in his own personality.

He rolls over for what must be the five hundredth time since he’d laid down to sleep, trying and failing to get comfortable on the horribly constructed floor of the shelter. If he had just followed his
instincts and taken control, he might actually be sleeping, or at least lying awake without sand mites biting all up and down his arms and legs.

Louis hears a tiny groan not too far from where he’s laid out. He tries to remember who had settled there since he can’t see a thing without a fire in the pitch black night.

Louis closes his eyes and shakes his head. No fire. No water. Poor shelter. Maybe playing this game again was just a waste of his time. Louis knew whichever tribe got water first would have an edge in the first immunity challenge, and if they won, then they’d have momentum.

Louis won’t be on the losing tribe twice. He won’t.

The source of the groan starts to shift, but they’re moving slowly, like that will somehow be less likely to disturb the people around them. He suddenly remembers that it’s Harry who’d taken a spot at the edge of the shelter; Harry, who hadn’t raised a word of complaint all day, who’d somehow managed to thank everyone for how hard they’d worked even as he’d winced while sneaking little rubs to the same spot on his back when he thought no one was looking.

So Louis isn’t the only one not sleeping.

Fuck the plan. Tomorrow he needs to take charge of this hellhole, or they’re all going to be too weak to compete successfully in the upcoming challenge.

He rolls over again so he’s facing Harry, closes his eyes, and tries to shut his brain off.

“We’ve bitched about the shelter. We’ve bitched about the fire. We’ve bitched about each other. We’re gonna have to toughen up.” - Niall, Chapera

DAY 2
Harry gives up on sleep almost as soon as the sun rises. He rolls out of the shelter and heads toward the beach, rubbing at the corners of his eyes and trying to fight the prickling he feels there. It was a pretty horrible night, but he knows it’s just a combination of exhaustion and dehydration that’s making him tear up. He’ll snap out of it after a splash of cold salt water and a few minutes alone.

It works for the most part, but as he walks back to camp ten minutes later he hears raised voices. The rest of his tribe clearly woke up equally miserable.

Jesy is frozen halfway between the jungle and their camp, watching Louis incredulously. “The fuck do you think you’re doing?”

“Building us a shelter people can actually sleep in,” Louis says tightly.

Louis is closest to the shelter, which now looks more run-down than ever. The roof is drooping sadly from where several of the pieces of wood they’d fashioned into support beams have been wrenched out, tossed into a pile that includes wood that’s been torn from the shelter’s floor.

“What’s going on?” Harry asks, looking between the two of them.

Jesy laughs humorlessly. “Came back from collecting kindle to find this idiot tearing down the camp we spent all day building!” She sounds a little hysterical, but Harry doesn’t really blame her. Louis looks bored by her dramatics.

She turns back to Louis, seething. “You were outvoted!” She starts toward the woodpile like she means to put everything back in its rightful place. “What part of that do you not understand? Did you miss the day in elementary school where you learn how voting works? Or did you not even make it that far in school?”

That’s uncalled for, in Harry’s opinion, but he can’t say he’s surprised. Jesy’s known for picking fights, after all.

Louis’s eyes flash dangerously and he moves to block her path, disdain clear on his face. “Yeah, I got outvoted, and look where that got us. Hate to break it to you sweetheart, but this isn’t a shelter. You threw some sticks together — you didn’t build anything worth a damn.”

Jesy opens her mouth to argue, but Louis cuts her off.

“You tellin’ me you enjoyed getting eaten alive by sandmites last night? Anyone here really excited about the bruises and kinks in your back from that sorry excuse for a floor?”

He gestures to the ashen, tired faces of the rest of the tribe. Caroline isn’t looking at anyone, tracing patterns in the sand where she’s leaning against a palm tree. Niall looks torn between agreeing with Louis and telling him to shut up, standing with his arms crossed over his chest defensively. Harry can sympathize.

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“Look,” he continues, rounding on Jesy again. “This shelter is shit. We all know it. What if it’d rained last night? What if it storms? It took me two seconds to tear this thing down. If any of us had so much as sneezed last night the whole thing would’ve fallen down around us.”

Jesy’s fuming, but quiet, when Taylor interrupts them. “You better check yourself, Tommo. If you keep acting like a spoiled brat, don’t forget — I’ll write your name.” Shit. This is escalating too quickly. “I get that you couldn’t sleep last night, but we have six thirsty people here. Fire has to come first,” she says, looking from Jesy to Louis carefully.

That sets Jesy off again. “Exactly! Tearing down the shelter isn’t helpful! We should work on fire
and fix the shelter later!”

Harry glances over at Taylor, who’s pulling her blonde hair back into a ponytail, face carefully neutral. He gets the feeling that she’s secretly pleased by this shitshow.

Louis rolls his eyes. “Don’t kid yourself, that thing can’t be fixed,” he says, voice dripping with derision. “It’d be faster to just start over. We need to move it anyway, this one’s way too close to the beach.”

“If you think you can do so much better, why can’t you cut your own damn wood? If mine’s so shit why are you gonna use it?” It comes out more petulant than she probably wanted it to.

“It’ll be faster if I use what we already have,” Louis says, like he’s speaking to a small child. He changes tactics halfway through speaking, trying for something more diplomatic when he turns to look at the rest of their tribe. “You’re right, we need fire. But we only need three people working on it at a time. Any more than that will just be in the way, so that leaves two to help me with the shelter.”

No one can say anything to that; he’s not wrong. He seems to sense that he has the momentum now.

“Niall, Caroline, you two can help me. We can get it done by tonight. We have an immunity challenge coming up. If we divide and conquer, we can get fire and actually be well-rested enough to compete.”


Harry exchanges a look with Niall before following. Taylor immediately catches up with Jesy. “I can’t believe him. He’s such a jerk.”

She elbows Harry in the side, looking to him to back her up when they choose a place to work. “Uh,” he says eloquently, then clears his throat. “Yeah, he shouldn’t’ve started tearing the shelter down without talking to anyone about it first. That’s like. Not very nice.”

Taylor shoots him an unimpressed look from where she’s arranging the kindle they’d brought, and Jesy snorts. “Oh, harsh Harry.”

“None of us slept well. It’s our first night on a deserted beach, of course we didn’t. He’s just being a big baby about it.” Taylor says, taking hold of a coconut husk while Jesy chooses sticks to strike with.

“He’s definitely got a big mouth,” Harry agrees. He stays quiet after that, letting Taylor and Jesy vent and making sympathetic noises whenever the conversation calls for it.

Whether or not they want to admit it, there’s no way that Louis can make the shelter worse. At least this way he’ll be busy for the rest of the day, and if it goes well they’ll have a better night’s sleep to look forward to tonight.
“Someone has to say something. He can’t just do that. Who made Louis the master of camp? When did that happen?” - Jesy, Chapera

As the day wears on, Louis stays at the shelter while the rest of them switch roles. The girls had vented for the better part of the morning, but become tellingly quiet once they realize that Louis actually knows what he’s doing. It’s obvious to anyone with eyes that his shelter is better than the last one.

Apparently Jesy knows when she’s been beat, because she’s actually civil with Louis when it’s her turn to help. Surprisingly, Louis doesn’t try to lord anything over her, even asks her opinion once or twice. Like a peace offering.

Taylor seems a bit put out. Harry suspects it’s because she expected the fight to last longer, but he’s grateful they’ve managed to move past it. The mood at camp is considerably lighter, and they’re even able to joke around by the time the sun starts to dip back down towards the ocean.

At one point Caroline declares she’s too tired to keep working and goes to lay down on the beach. Louis overhears her as he’s passing by carrying a shoulder full of logs and calls out “There’s that can-do attitude I like to see!”

Taylor actually lets out a startled laugh, because Caroline’s lacklustre work ethic hasn’t escaped anyone’s notice. Sometimes they even get more work done without her help.

Caroline isn’t alone in being the butt of tribe jokes. A second day of shelter-building has alerted everyone to the fact that Harry isn’t exactly the most coordinated person on the tribe. He follows Louis’s instructions as best he can, but there’s not much he can do about his constant tripping, or how many times he’s almost knocked himself out with tree branches. The rest of the tribe has taken to following him around, offering to help him with even the smallest tasks ‘for his own safety.’

Harry doesn’t mind. He’s accident prone; it’s part of his charm.

So when Harry is asked to collect driftwood down the beach in the off chance that at some point they’ll manage to make fire, Louis immediately volunteers to go with him.

“Jesy, you know what you’re doing, can you can keep an eye on everyone working on the shelter? Can’t let Curly here impale himself on our firewood.”

Harry rolls his eyes good-naturedly, but doesn’t complain when Louis follows him down the beach. They fall into an easy silence, occasionally racing each other to pick up prize pieces of driftwood and
doing stupid little victory dances around each other when they win. It’s maybe the most fun Harry’s had in the past two days.

They stop to catch their breath when they’re about ten minutes down the beach, a disgruntled camera crew still trying to catch up with them after their last race.

“You fight dirty, Harry.” Louis takes off his snapback to wipe the sweat from his forehead, eyes still crinkled with laughter from when Harry had pinched him in the side to get to the driftwood first. Apparently the infamous Louis from St. Louis is ticklish. Who knew.

Harry smirks. “Hadn’t you heard? They made a whole movie about it.”

Louis snorts, and Harry grins to himself as he lifts his hand to shield his eyes from the sun, trying to gauge whether or not there’s any more driftwood to be collected down the beach.

“So,” Louis says, replacing his snapback and turning to look at him. “What do you think? You wanna make an alliance?”

That gets Harry’s attention. He’s so surprised that he giggles, which — yeah, maybe not the best response he’s ever come up with. “Sorry,” he says, “I just. Didn’t expect that. Dunno if I can take you seriously.”

Harry points toward a longer log that’s washed up on shore a little ways down from them. “Let’s get this one and head back, yeah?”

“I’m a hundred percent serious,” Louis says, falling into step beside Harry.

Harry stays quiet as they duck to pick up the log, thinking his options over. His strategy is to lay low until the merge and that requires making the right allies. Louis can be a bit of an arrogant asshole, but he’s also someone Harry would rather have with him than against him.

If Louis is actually serious, then that gets Harry a strong ally. He can always break the alliance later on and no one would blame him, since contestants are rarely held to alliances made so early in the game. If Louis is playing him, it’s better for him to think Harry’s falling for it than to say no.

“Alright.”

Louis glances back at him over his shoulder, crooked grin in place. “Alright,” he repeats. “Just — we can’t make it obvious at all. Like, now is okay, because we’re carrying logs together. But later, when we’re back at camp, we have to be careful.”

“We’ll be careful, then,” Harry says easily.

“Alright.” He can hear the grin in Louis’s voice when he says it, and feels himself smiling too. “You and me to the end, babe.”

“Harry and I have an alliance for obvious reasons. He’s beautiful, obviously. Any idiot can see that. But I’ll keep my word no matter what to him. I trust him. I don’t think he’s gonna screw me.” - Tommo, Chapera

DAY 3
It’s amazing what a good night’s rest does for the tribe’s mood.

Louis doesn’t want to brag but...it’s totally all thanks to him and the new floor he’d built for the shelter.

Caroline even deigns to thank him — in her own way. “It’s more comfortable to lay in the shelter than on the sand now. I might not even have to nap today.” She says as she strips down to just her bathing suit.

Niall and Louis share a look, and Louis can’t help but ask, “Why’d you decide to play again, Care?”

She shrugs as she delves into her personal stash of sunscreen and starts to lather her famous legs. Louis must admit, they are pretty fantastic. Harry’s are only marginally better.

“Ever since the divorce settlement, I haven’t had much to do.” Caroline’s very public romance with a Hollywood action star had been tabloid fodder for almost a year after their Vegas wedding and subsequent divorce when he very publicly cheated on her. Caroline’s lawyers had demolished him in court. It was speculated that her settlement was somewhere in the tens of millions range. “I like to compete and I like to win, so I thought, why not?”

Caroline’s so blasé about the whole thing that Louis and the rest of the tribe are exchanging bemused glances. Honestly, Louis likes Caroline. She might be lazy and a really bad Survivor player, but she says what she means.

“Well, alright,” Louis says dryly. “I guess we’ll just have to win then.”

She smiles back at him sweetly. “That’s the plan.”

She takes off to the beach without offering to do anything to help around camp. At least they know what to expect from her.

Jesy gestures after Caroline. “So now that the Queen of Sheeba has left us, what do we need to get done today?”

Louis pushes himself up from the shelter and stretches his arms above his head before scratching his stomach. “I’m gonna go see if we’ve got any tree mail--”

“No.” Taylor jumps up from where she’s been watching them all morning. “I’ll go get the tree mail. You don’t have to do everything, Tommo.”

“Fine by me,” Louis raises his hands in surrender. “As long as someone gets it, I don’t really care.”

Taylor huffs and stalks off down the beach.

“What was that? I thought we were all having a good time this morning?”

Louis looks over at Harry because he thought he’d been doing a good job of keeping everyone happy. He hadn’t said anything to offend Taylor since yesterday, had he?

Harry shakes his head a little, but Niall’s the one who answers. “Don’t worry about it, Tommo. She’s just mad because things are going more smoothly since you’ve taken charge of things.”

“I wouldn’t go that far-” Jesy starts, nudging Niall in the ribs. “I think she’s just wants to be useful.”

Niall shrugs, as per usual, and they drop the issue. Harry and Jesy volunteer to go grab more firewood and palm fronds, while Niall and Louis stay back at camp and try to make some sort of
breakfast out of the two coconuts they’d found on the beach.

They’ve all settled into their tasks by the time Taylor makes her way back into camp.

“Well, I’ve got some good news and bad news.” Taylor announces, new Chapera flag in hand and a scuba mask perched on her forehead.

“Uh-oh.” Louis says under his breath, bracing himself for whatever torture the producers have set up for them.

“The good news is that I got another pole for us to sleep on.” Taylor continues as she waves the big piece of bamboo. “This,” she says pointing to the scuba mask, “is the bad news.”

Idiot. “What’s bad about that? That’s good.” They might finally be able to eat something that’s not coconut. Maybe catch some fish. Louis’s mind is already racing with the different things he’ll need to make a spear.

But then Taylor waves the piece of parchment in front of his face, which no doubt signals an immunity challenge, and suddenly Louis is hyper-focused on the paper. An immunity challenge already? The producer’s aren’t fucking around this season.

“Wanna read it as a group?” Harry suggests.

The rest of their tribe has already gathered — minus Caroline, who’s still sunning herself on the beach.

“Caroline! You wanna come over?” Louis calls.

“Just speak up!”

There’s a moment of tribe bonding when they all look at each other and roll their eyes.

Louis raises his voice as he begins to read the terrible rhyme on the parchment. “To and from each challenge fly your colors as you stride. In a show of unity --” Louis stops, clears his throat for dramatic effect, and projects in Caroline’s direction pointedly because how can he resist?

“UNITY...”

Niall cackles, Harry giggles, and when Caroline gives Louis the finger, even Taylor chuckles. Louis grins and continues. “Your flag shows tribal pride. Three more days are guaranteed to those triumphant in the game. Bring your dive mask with you to face the Man of Flame.”

“Man of Flame? Who do you think that is?” Most of what Taylor has said or done in the last two days has made Louis want to claw his own face off, but he can’t blame her for looking for clues as to which of the other famous Survivors are here. The only good thing about having an immunity challenge this early on is that he’ll finally know who he’s up against.

When the camera crew signals it’s time, Louis and the tribe begin to head out with their flag proudly displayed. If the reward for the challenge is fire, and Louis strongly suspects that it is, it’s absolutely crucial that they win so they can really start playing the game.

“We just got our first tree mail today. A little earlier than expected, but I guess today is as good as any day, being that we’ll probably just be thirstier tomorrow.” - Taylor, Chapera
They’re led to a holding area, where they’re made to wait until they get the go ahead to enter the clearing on the beach where the immunity challenge is going to take place. Harry can practically feel his tribe mates vibrating with anticipation.

It’s a nice change from feeling dehydrated and exhausted, but before they have to go face the other tribes, he still makes a point to squeeze Niall’s shoulder reassuringly and make a few awful jokes to distract Taylor from where she looks like she’s about to break her own hands from how hard she’s cracking her knuckles. It won’t do for the thrill to turn to nerves.

When they get the signal to go ahead and enter the clearing, the first thing Harry sees is Jeff Probst in his signature blue shirt, looking dashing as always. Everyone who watched Harry’s original season knows that one of his reasons for signing up in the first place was his massive crush on Survivor’s host. Harry isn’t embarrassed about it. Jeff is extremely attractive, no one can tell him he’s wrong.

Jeff welcomes them to the game, and Harry learns that their tribe name is apparently pronounced sha-pier-uh. He catches Jesy’s eye and mouths “Chapera, Chapera!” while doing a little shimmy, because who is he to waste such a perfect opportunity? Niall breaks into Shakira and soon the tribe devolves into laughter that Taylor tries to hush.

Jeff takes it good naturedly — probably because it’ll be some good footage for the show to use. It’ll set them up to be the silly tribe if they don’t win or the fun-loving tribe if they do. Either way, it’ll help the editors create some sort way for the audience to identify Chapera. So the more he can make himself and his tribemates likeable, the better.

Just at the edge of his field of vision he can see Louis shaking his head at them in exasperation, but there’s definitely a small upward twist to the corner of his mouth, and his eyes are definitely on the verge of crinkling, so.

Harry snaps back when Jeff asks a question. “Chapera, what’s going on?” He says, with his Emmy-winning smile.

“We want to ask you that same question.” Jesy says.

Harry feels his pulse pick up. For the first time, he really feels like he’s in the game. He’s almost giddy with adrenaline. What with the sleepless nights and the lack of water and fire, he’d almost forgotten how exciting it is to play. “Yeah, Jeff. We want to know.”

“How could I resist telling you, Harry?” Jeff’s flirting sarcastically with him, as had become their custom during Harry’s last season on the show.

Harry winks at him. “You can’t, don’t bother trying.”

He feels Louis shift where he’d moved to stand behind him, but Harry’s too busy to studying the massive wooden statue behind Jeff to glance back to check on him. Were they going to have to climb that thing? Chop it down?

“Wanna see who you’re playing against?” Jeff asks, and really, what a tease.

The whole Chapera tribe turns to look as Jeff calls, “Mogo Mogo, come on in!”

The faces that jump out to Harry are Richard Hatch, esteemed first ever winner of Survivor; Cher Lloyd, winner of Survivor: Amazon, best known for taking off her top to win a reward challenge; and Bressie, Harry’s ally and friend from Survivor: Australia. The others are less memorable. Then
Harry sees Louis making a funny face at a middle-aged woman whose name Harry vaguely remembers is Mary who must’ve played with Louis in his season.

Once Mogo Mogo is settled, Jeff asks, “Any surprises so far? Hatch, surprised to see anyone over there?”

“Count them gone, Jeff.” Richard says. “One, two. Gone. Who are they? Who cares?” He shrugs, as if he’s not digging his own grave in front of the rest of them.

Jesy speaks up. “His team looks like they love him already.” Harry laughs; the entirety of Mogo Mogo looks ready to stab Richard in the throat.

“Well,” Jeff continues, “Twelve Survivors would be nice. Two tribes would be fun. It’s not enough. Saboga, come on in!”

This tribe brings a few more familiar faces. Zayn won Survivor: Africa, and Lou won Harry’s season. Harry waves wildly at her as soon as he spots her. They’ve kept in touch since leaving the show, and Harry considers her a friend. And then there’s Liam, who had played in the most recent season of Survivor and made a name for himself as one of the most likable contestants to ever play the game.

Caroline catcalls as soon as she sees him — because of course she does. “Alright! There he is! The big man in the back. Now we’re talking.”

Liam blushes but smiles at her good-naturedly in his homemade peace-sign tank, and they all spend a few moments laughing at his expense.

When they settle, Jeff begins again. “Alright. Here we are. Survivor: All Stars.”

There is a brief discussion about how their first days have gone, which reveals that none of them have made fire yet. Harry can feel Louis relax behind him, and Harry is with him on that. It’s much better for their tribe, both physically and mentally, to know that they’re all on an even playing field.

“Let’s get to your first Immunity Challenge,” Jeff pauses for dramatic effect, “which harkens back to our first ever Immunity Challenge, Quest for Fire. Here’s how it works.”

Jeff proceeds to describe a challenge in which each tribe has to bring fire over water and under a series of obstacles to light a final torch. Two of the tribes will win immunity, and one will be sent to tribal council. Chapera will not be that tribe if Harry has anything to say about it.

>>>>>>

“Chapera wins first immunity!” Jeff shouts, throwing his hands in the air to signal their win.

Louis drops the raft, arms totally exhausted from swimming with and carrying and pushing the damn thing, and immediately turns to celebrate with his tribemates. He honestly didn’t think they could do it, but they did. He’s never been so relieved.

He launches himself into Harry’s arms, wrapping his legs around his waist and his arms around his neck, and even though Harry must be exhausted too, he swings him around in a victory dance like Louis is the embodiment of the immunity idol.
When Harry sets Louis down, Niall comes dancing up to them, and they all start dancing ridiculously together. Even Taylor and Caroline join in. Louis doesn’t think anything could beat this feeling.

When Jeff dismisses the other tribes and announces that Chapera gets to set the great hulking statue on fire, the victory cries swell up again and the entire tribe watches as the thing goes up in flames. Louis turns to look at his tribemates and finds himself fixated on Harry’s face, the flicker of flames playing over his big green eyes and deep dimples. God, but he’s beautiful.

On the walk back to camp they’re all still filled with adrenaline. When Louis is keyed up like this he tends to make motivational speeches, and now is no exception. “Nice job, you guys. When we won that, we played as a team,” Louis points his finger emphatically. “Never mind what’s going on back here. When we had to pull it together and get it done, we got it done.”

“We killed it!” Caroline chimes in.

Everyone is making noises of agreement, and when he instigates a huddle, everyone puts their hands in. For the first time in this game, Louis feels like he’s actually on a functioning tribe.

“Wasn’t that the coolest?!” Taylor says, skipping ahead of them down the beach, and suddenly Louis is reminded that they’re the same age. She always seems older. Or maybe that’s the role she’s supposed to play — like Louis is supposed to play the asshole. It makes him see her in a different light. (He still doesn’t like her, though.)

“That was the best.” Louis grins back in agreement. “The best.”

“We didn’t just win,” Harry’s voice carries over theirs, and Louis immediately redirects his attention. “We came in first place of the very first All-Star challenge.”

Harry says it with the biggest, goofiest grin that Louis’s face can’t help but mirror.

This really is the best.

“We are the biggest bunch of misfit survivors you could put together from seven seasons, and we go out there and win it. No one’s expecting us to get it done. Well, at least I wasn’t.” - Tommo, Chapera

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Camp life is surprisingly fun once they’ve got fire, water, a good shelter, and the immunity idol in their possession. The day before Niall had made up a game based on beer pong for them to play using the pot and bits of coconut, and they ended up playing it until the sun set into the sea. The novelty has worn off a bit today, so once they’ve finished all their ‘chores’ in the morning, the tribe settles in around the fire trading stories.

“-after that, I decided to give up on boys all together. I’m focusing on myself and my friends for now.”

Taylor has been recounting her relationship history for the better part of an hour, and Harry would be annoyed if she didn’t make it sound so interesting. She’d had some pretty colorful things to say about the guy she’d dated from her season. She seems much more self-aware and reliant than she had the last time she’d played.
“Good for you, girl.” Jesy says from her space by the fire.

“Yeah,” Harry adds. “It’s good to, like, focus on yourself before you try to rely on someone else for everything.”

Niall hums in agreement from where he’s lying, flicking his Raybans up and down on the bridge of his nose. “Self-fulfillment. Had a whole unit on that in my Psych class. Interesting stuff.”

Harry somehow doubts that Niall has ever had trouble with his sense of self, but it is impossibly endearing to hear him talk about this stuff.

“Thanks guys. That means a lot, actually.” Taylor smiles, small and sincere, and Harry thinks that if she would just loosen up and stop trying to play so hard all the time, she’d be awesome to be around. “My friend Karlie has been helping me a lot with, like, not needing a man in my life to be happy, so.”

“I wish one of my friends had said something to me before I married my ex,” Caroline drawls from where she’s lying in the sun. She opens one eyes to look at them and grins. “Just kidding. His settlement is the best thing that ever happened to me.”

They all laugh because Caroline is so...unfiltered. It’s great. Louis cuts in, “And here I thought that Harold was the sugar baby of our tribe.”

Harry flushes, but Caroline actually sits up and glares at Louis. “I resent you giving all of my favorite monikers to Harry.” Then she tilts an assessing look over at Harry. “Though I suppose I can see where you’d be confused. Harry does have the wardrobe.”

“Heyyyy.” Harry pouts, but he can’t help but smile a little as the rest of his tribe members laugh. He’s just happy they’re all having a good time.

“Taylor,” A member of the crew cuts into their chit chat and gestures that it’s time for her to give her confessional.

Taylor huffs as she pushes herself from the ground before pointing a stern finger at them all. “Don’t have too much fun without me. I have a chronic fear of missing out. And maybe get some more firewood while I’m gone, the stack looks like it’s getting low.”

After she’s gone, Louis leans forward and says, “How I got to twenty-seven without Taylor Swift leading me by the hand is a mystery.”

Niall laughs but then says, “That’s not very fair, Lou.”

“C’mon, Ni!” Louis throws his hands up. “She’s the bossiest woman I have ever been around!”

Harry wants to stuff his headscarf into Louis’s mouth to get him to shut up. Seriously, the boy has no sense of when to stop talking.

“If she were a man, you wouldn’t be talking about her that way, and that double-standard is not only harmful for women, but men, too. Gender norms keep all of us trapped in a social paradox that threatens individuality and self-worth.” Niall shrugs again. “Jesy or Caroline would know more about this than I would. But you shouldn’t talk about Taylor like that, Louis.”

Louis just blinks at him. That was. Unexpected. It feels like the whole tribe is doing a double-take.

Jesy barks out a laugh and raises her eyebrows at him. “Boys talking about gender-based oppression.
My favorite,” she says sarcastically. “Tell me more.”

“Umm, Niall?” Harry starts.

“Yeah?” Niall, who is either completely oblivious to everyone’s focus on him or just doesn’t care, is now throwing his Raybans up in the air above his face and catching them.

Harry doesn’t really know how to ask the question. Luckily, Louis does it for him. “Where’d you learn all that, then, Horan?”

Niall stops throwing his sunglasses about, and places them back on his face before shrugging. “Dated a girl in college who got me to take a women’s studies course. We broke up, but I actually made it my minor.”

“Women’s studies?” Caroline says disbelievingly.

“Yeah. They tried to get me to do Gender studies instead, but I figured I’d rather have it all from the other perspective, you know?”

Harry leans over to give him an impromptu hug. He loves him even more when Niall just hugs him back no questions asked.

“What about you, Harry?”

“What about me?” Harry says as he rests his head on Niall’s chest. It’s comfortable.


“Well, there’s not much to know, really? I’m twenty-five, I like long walks on the beach...” he says that last part dryly and silently counts it as a win when he hears the others chuckle in response. “...poetry, and people who can play the piano. I work in public relations, or, like, I want to work in public relations. Right now I’m just someone’s personal assistant.”

He almost leaves it at that, but at the last second decides to continue. “I want to see the world though, so that’s, like. Why I started this whole Survivor thing. Don’t want my life to be boring.”

Oops. He’s rambling.

Harry catches Louis’s eye, and he kind of expects him to laugh, but instead he just says, “That’s a commendable goal.”

Harry smirks. “Someone swallowed a thesaurus today.”

Niall snorts over Louis’s “Shut up!” And while they’re all laughing, he pauses for a second, like he’s debating his next move, before saying in the lewdest voice possible. “I have better things to swallow.”

Caroline goes for a high-five and Jesy rolls her eyes at him.

Harry’s a little too stunned by Louis’s innuendo to respond right away, but then he sees Louis start to shift uncomfortably and he says the first thing that comes to mind.

“Heh. Penis jokes.”

There’s another beat, and then Louis is laughing with his head thrown back. And as much as there are other factors for him to think about, Harry thinks if he could listen to that laugh for the next
however many days he has left out here, it would be time well spent.

DAY 7

Harry is sitting cross-legged by their fire weaving palm fronds for the roof of the shelter when he catches sight of Niall and Taylor stumbling back from the jungle carrying a long wooden box between them. Harry glances up just in time to catch a flash of excitement on Louis’s face before his expression settles back into something that Harry can tell is intentionally neutral.

When Harry gets a better look at the box he realizes why — there’s a giant Home Depot logo plastered across its top. If they’re doing a challenge involving tools, it’ll be another opportunity for Louis be the tribe’s most valuable asset.

Once everyone is gathered around, Taylor pries open the box and Caroline provides a dramatic reading of yet another poorly-rhymed note, which describes the reward challenge they’ve been assigned. They have one day to remodel their shelter with the tools provided in the box, and tomorrow a professional will judge whatever they’ve come up with. They’ll be scored on creativity and structure, and only four of them can participate in the challenge. The winning tribe will receive something to make sleeping more comfortable, whatever that means.

Louis had been eyeing their tools while listening to Caroline attentively, but when she finishes speaking, he straightens. “This is what I do, so…”

Harry thinks it’s a little embarrassing how quickly the girls jump to validate him, especially after how unwilling they’d been to follow Louis’s lead when they’d first tried building the shelter. But apparently the prospect of winning a reward challenge is enough for even Taylor to be sweet with Louis. Harry stays quiet through a whole chorus of reassurances — “We need you,” “You have to do this,” “This is your job” — before the tribe gets down to deciding who’s helping Louis and who’s sitting out.

Caroline is the first to bow out, of course. “I’ll be over here if you need me,” she says from where she’s reclining against a tree.

Jesy looks around at everyone, having already positioned herself closer to Louis and the box. “Who else is sitting out?”

Harry sighs dramatically, as if preparing to shoulder a terrible burden. “I’m sure everyone here is thrilled at the prospect of me wielding tools, but I think I’ll sit this one out too.”

It’s true that he’d probably be more of a hinderance than a help, but Harry also doesn’t want to run the risk of putting himself in a position where he’ll have to choose between following Louis and the girls. He helps both the tribe and himself by staying out.

Louis’s head had whipped around to focus on Harry as soon as he started speaking, and he shot him a small, amused smile before turning back to Niall, Taylor, and Jesy, who are now gathered in a semicircle around the box.

“How do you guys trust me enough to give you a plan? And we’ll go by it, and you’ll do it, and you won’t-”

Louis must realize that in a few hours time, after an entire afternoon of taking instructions, they might be more resentful of his expertise than grateful for it. It comes off as a bit patronizing, but Harry figures it’s a smart move for Louis to get a verbal agreement to follow his lead now, so if something
goes wrong later Louis can remind them how quickly they’d handed him responsibility.

Jesy cuts Louis off before he can finish speaking. “You’re a construction worker, sweetie, this is all about you.”

Harry almost snorts, but busies himself with reassembling his pile of palm fronds and finding a comfortable spot from which to watch the proceedings.

Louis pulls a sheet of paper and pencil from the box and leans over it, already drawing up plans.

“Let’s get to work, then.”

“I was right up and at it, and I was pumped. I was like ‘Yeah, this is for me, this is my challenge. We’re winnin’ this.’” - Tommo, Chapera

Four hours later, Harry has made barely any progress in his stack of fronds. He will go to his grave claiming that he absolutely cannot be blamed for it, because somehow there is nothing more fascinating than watching Louis work on a construction project.

Harry is...surprised. To say the least. Within minutes of finishing their blueprint, Louis had delegated tasks and gotten to work. Harry had expected Louis to relish the power he’d been given. To some extent he had — there was no mistaking the authority in Louis’s voice when he asked someone to pass him a tool, or explained exactly what he needed them to do.

But while he was clearly in charge, he also made an effort to ask the others for input often enough that they wouldn’t feel bossed around. Everyone had worked together to haul wood to cut for beams. When it got to the more complicated task of fitting the right beams in the right places, Louis had asked Niall and Taylor to take turns assisting him, since both of them were at least somewhat familiar with construction. Instead of asking the remaining two participating members to get out of his way, he’d assigned them another project, and phrased it so that it sounded like he was entrusting them with something instead of dismissing them. “We need to have some creative aspect to this...I don’t know. Will you guys make a plan?”

So. Surprise number one: Apparently Louis has actual, genuine leadership skills.

Surprise number two: Apparently Harry is actually, genuinely into watching people competently wielding tools. That’s very much a thing.

For most of the afternoon he just sits there, biting his lip and staring at Louis. Occasionally he gets up and pretends to collect more fronds (an activity he is well aware has been rendered useless by the fact that Louis is constructing what Harry is sure will be an air-tight roof before his very eyes), or to prepare fruit (to put on the perfectly-even table Louis had patiently explained to Niall how to build), or to find a shadier place to sit (so the sun won’t obstruct his view of Louis).

At one point, Caroline feels the need to discretely warn him that the camera crews had captured at least twenty minutes’ worth of footage of Harry “watching Louis like a serial killer” so “maybe you had better go do something else for a bit, hun.”

At another, even lower point, he is forced to follow that advice because he’s actually getting hard from watching Louis intently design and build a swing just because Niall offhandedly mentions how cool it’d be to have one at camp.
At what is probably his lowest point, he jokingly offers to feed Louis pieces of fruit while he works so Louis doesn’t have to take a break. Louis actually smirks and takes him up on it; which leads to Harry trying to call his bluff, grinning challengingly and letting his fingers linger against Louis’s lips a second too long; which leads to Louis playfully nipping at them, a mischievous glint in his eye that is maybe somehow more attractive than the fact that Harry has just practically had his fingers sucked on.

So for Harry, the rewards challenge is surprising at the least. Enlightening at best. Embarrassing at worst.

He figures it’s worth it, because by this time tomorrow they’ll have won this challenge. Harry’s uncertain about a lot of things in this game. But the one thing he does know for sure is that Louis’s going to win this for Chapera.

“In the beginning, the flirting with Tommo was complete strategy for me, and on the other hand, I thought it was complete strategy for him, too. And I’ll admit, when I saw him building that shelter...he was pretty hot building that shelter. He’s good at doing what he does. It’s getting easier and easier to flirt with Louis, for sure.” - Harry, Chapera

Jeff arrives at their camp with the judge a little after midday. They come by boat, so everyone has time to strew themselves artfully across their newly-constructed, travel guide-worthy home before
Jeff and Rafa, the judge, have even set foot on shore.

Taylor and Jesy are pretending to be in the middle of a heated game of beach checkers, Niall is leaning against one of the porch support beams, Caroline is lying out in their zen garden, and Louis is sprawled out on the swing, eyes shut and arms folded behind his head.

Niall hops up as soon as they walk into camp, grinning at them maniacally. “Welcome to The Bungalow, boys.”

Jeff lets out a low whistle. “What’s goin’ on Chapera? Looks like you’ve been busy…” He trails off, clearly impressed. Harry doesn’t know if they’ve been to either of the other tribes yet, but he feels an entirely unwarranted swoop of pride at the reaction to their shelter, considering he did absolutely nothing to build the thing.

“Rafa here’s going to take a look around,” Jeff continues, patting the judge on the back as he looks out at their tribe. “Make sure everything’s structurally sound. You guys wanna give him a tour?”

One of Louis’s eyes had peaked open when Jeff had first started to speak, but it’s not until Jeff asks them to show the judge around that he deigns to give them the time of day. He sits up slowly, eyeing the judge like he’s trying to size him up before hopping off.

Harry is pretty sure that Louis was going for careful nonchalance before, but once the judge is yanking and kicking and pulling at The Bungalow he seems incapable of keeping up the façade. By the second kick to the shelter’s foundation, Louis is already muttering “You’re not moving it, it’s not moving” to himself under his breath.

And by the time they get to the support beams, Louis doesn’t even wait for Rafa to start before he’s pushing at them himself, muscles straining with effort. “You see that? It’s not going anywhere. Look at that!”

Part of Harry is a little put off by what an asshole Louis is being, but another part of him can’t help but feel just a twinge of fondness. Louis is so excited, is the thing. He looks so happy to be able to show off his work, to know that it’s as good as he thinks it is.

After the judge has toured the zen garden Jesy and Niall built, and seen the checkerboard Taylor insisted they have, Harry smiles over at Jeff and says “Tell him to hop up on the swing!”

Louis’s eyes brighten immediately, like he’d almost forgotten about it. His eyes land on Rafa, who at this point looks beyond done with Louis’s shit but doesn’t put up much of a fight when Louis steers him back to the swing.

“Come on up, buddy. It’s not going anywhere,” Louis pats the bench as he speaks, and as soon as Rafa has hauled himself up, pushes it. “See? Wanna swing?”

Harry rolls his eyes, because of course Louis acted first and asked questions later. Typical.

Jeff claps his hands to get their attention. “We’ve got to head out now.”

“No way anyone beats ours. They might as well have built their houses out of playing cards;
we’re gonna blow ‘em away. We’ve got it in the bag.”

Niall lets out a whoop of agreement, and soon everyone’s high-fiving each other before settling in to wait for the verdict.

“Guess we’ll wait and see,” Louis shrugs, settling back into the swing to wait out the verdict. But he catches Harry’s eye, just for a moment, and he’s got this small, crooked grin on his face. Harry is sure they’ve already won.

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Harry and Louis are the first ones out on the beach when the camera crew tells them that the plane is coming, but Taylor runs ahead of them and straight into the surf, eyes trained on the dot in the sky that’s moving steadily closer.

Louis looks tense, a chorus of “Come on, come on…” falling from his lips, probably without him realizing it.

Harry wants to scoff at him, because it seems almost like false modesty at this point. Louis has nothing to worry about. Unless Frank Lloyd Wright himself has somehow appeared to one of the other tribes, there’s almost no way Chapera’s going to lose.

But. He doesn’t like seeing Louis unsure of himself. It doesn’t suit him, and it makes Harry uncomfortable, and it’s probably bad for tribe morale to see Louis hesitate. Or something.

Except tribe morale is the highest Harry’s ever experienced it in the game. They’ve only won the first two immunity challenges, but Harry’s pretty sure it wouldn’t matter if they won this reward or not. They have fire and water, and he knows they’ll be sleeping better in The Bungalow than they would if the challenge hadn’t happened. So whatever the reward is would only be a nice bonus, really. They’d be fine without it.

And yes, it was lucky that Louis happened to have the exact skillset the challenge called for, but Harry also knows that if Louis had approached his tribemates differently, if he’d been too dictatorial or alienated them, they’d be in trouble even if they won.

Chapera deserves that damn reward and Louis shouldn’t doubt it. So Harry starts shouting at the plane like it owes them something, because as far as Harry’s concerned, it does. “COME ON, DROP IT!”

Louis looks startled at the outburst, but soon everyone else has joined in, Jesy and Niall hurling abuse at the plane without regard for the editing team that’ll be responsible for bleeping out their language.

When the reward crate drops just offshore of their beach, just like Harry knew it would, they’re almost too busy hugging and dancing in celebration to swim out and retrieve it.

“We’ve never been so excited in our lives. It was just a pinnacle moment for us since we’ve been here. It was the happiest moment ever. Ever.” - Jesy, Chapera
The crate turns out to be full of mattresses, blankets, a tarp and — best of all — wine.

“Let’s get that wine open!” As Louis looks around at their new camp and the unadulterated excitement on his tribemates’ faces, his chest swells with pride. “You guys. We’re the friggin’ best.”

Louis makes sure to high-five everyone because he knows a good bonding moment when he sees it. He also knows that because he almost gets sole credit for this win, he’s just endeared himself to his tribe and solidified his position as a provider. Honestly, Louis could not have asked for better when he came out here. He’s warm, he’s happy, he’s gonna have a belly full of wine, and he’s not eliminated.

Life is good.

Of course, Niall is the first to grab the wine and take a long swig, which starts a take-a-sip-and-pass-it-'round circle in their newly refurbished shelter.

“Drunken on day eight,” Louis muses.

An unfortunate, and somehow unforeseen, side effect of not eating properly for eight days is that the wine hits a lot stronger than it usually would. After only a few sips, Harry is cuddled into Louis’s side, head lolling and dopey grin in place. Not that Louis minds, of course.

Harry is goddamn beautiful at all times, but right now, like this, with his large green eyes half-lidded and his pink lips parted and spit slick, it’s like he’s Louis’s personal fantasy come to life.

“M’stomach’s all burning, and my chest is all...you know...burning-“ Harry says slowly, even slower than usual as he passes the bottle to Taylor, who barely presses the bottle to her lips before closing her eyes and giggling, “I can’t have too many more of these sips.”

Louis is feeling a little less gracious than he did without wine in his bloodstream, so he keeps recounting their win. “Rafa had never had more fun than he did on our swing.”

“It’s the swing what did it!” Niall agrees. Loudly.

It only occurs to Louis to be worried about how affectionate he and Harry are being when he lies down on their new mattress, Harry on one side of him and Jesy on the other. They all moan in appreciation for the softness after days of hard bamboo against their backs.

“I’m getting drunker and drunker-er.” Harry exclaims through his giggles, and Louis can’t hide his fond smile.

Louis’s head is a little spinny in that pleasant-drunk way that makes you want to just close your eyes for a second, but he knows Harry must feel like he’s on a tilt-o-whirl or something, because Harry’s laughing uncontrollably and rolling onto his side so he's pressed up against Louis from toe to shoulder. That’s when Louis feels the semi Harry is sporting in those goddamn yellow shorts, and feels his temperature rise from zero to sixty.

Before Louis can attempt to adjust them so he can just ignore the problem until further notice, Harry presses his mouth somewhere in the vicinity of Louis’s neck in what appears to be his attempt at a whisper, but comes across more as a declaration. Apparently Harry’s volume control is non-existent in the face of some wine.

“You know, if you want to kiss me, kiss me now, ’cause m’not gonna do it when you have nasty
breath later. Now you have wine breath.”

Louis feels Jesy tense on his other side and *fuck* — Louis needs to dissolve this situation ASAP.

“Woah,” He tries to act mock offended and hopes she buys it.

Yes, joking is always the best way to go in these situations. It’s all one big elaborate joke. And Harry’s hard on pressed into Louis’s hip must be the punch line. How funny. Absolutely hilarious.

“The wine hit Harry a little bit strong. He wanted to kiss me in front of everyone...Here’s the thing, Harry and I have been flirting with each other since we got out here. We have an alliance together. He probably thinks he’s playing me. I think I’m playing him. Who know’s how it’s gonna turn out? One thing’s for sure, though. There can only be one winner in this game.” - Tommo, Chapera

**DAY 10**

“We need a boat. Mayday! Mayday!” Niall makes a big production of waving his arms and swooning in the direction of the camera crew. Harry wonders if it makes him a bad person that he’s glad the crew has to experience this horrible storm, too. Because it truly is a *horrible* storm.

Harry had known it was going to be rainy season in Panama coming into the game, but he could never have imagined this. Their amazing camp had been turned into an honest-to-god river, making their shelter a sinking raft.

Niall’s outburst had come in response to the water starting to rise up through the floorboards. Jesy and Taylor are already passing the pot back and forth trying to bail out the water. Harry is confident that their shelter will hold, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t afraid of their belongings washing away. It had happened during the flood on his first season, and someone had almost died trying to get their bag of food back. So Harry’s worried.

A warm hand comes to rest on the small of his back, and that simple thing shouldn’t relax him as much as it does, but. His responses towards Louis are veering toward unacceptable. He doesn’t feel
like there’s anything he can do about it, except hope no one’s caught on.

Caroline keeps sending him sly winks, though, so…it’s probably not as much of a secret as he wishes it was.

Before Harry can pull away and recalibrate, Louis jokes, “Well Nialler, looks like we aren’t getting any help. How’s about we make this thing into our own boat? We can take the parachute along the bottom to block the water from getting the blankets wet in case the water keeps rising.”

Taylor stops bailing out water and looks heartbroken that she hadn’t thought of that. Jesy claps her hands together and moves to rouse Caroline from where she’s somehow managing to nap through all of this.

“Weyhey, Tommo! Let’s do it.” Niall exclaims, clapping Louis on the shoulder.

So the next few minutes consist of the tribe working together to pull up all the blankets and then replace them over the parachute. It’s brilliant. Harry has no idea how any of them would survive without Louis.

“We should all try to get some sleep and keep warm for now,” Louis says when the last blanket is in place. Everyone murmurs their agreement and begins to line up in their sleeping order, which had been established a few nights ago according to the most efficient way to keep body heat. Louis lies on the edge and Harry goes beside him, snuggling in under the blanket.

Harry immediately lets out an involuntary moan and closes his eyes in pleasure. “You’re so warm,” He mumbles into Louis’s shoulder.

“Well, your feet are ice blocks. Hold on.” Louis starts to pull away, but Harry whines and grabs him closer. He’s not giving up his personal heater.

Louis chuckles. “Get off me, you overgrown koala!” Harry just whines again and tries to tuck his feet in between Louis’s calves.

“Jesus!” Louis hisses. Then softer, “Come on, love. Let go. I’m just gonna grab you my extra pair of socks, then I’ll be right back for a cuddle.”

This time when Louis pulls away, Harry lets him go with warmth spreading through his belly. He instinctively hides his face in the pillow, even though he knows the darkness is probably doing a good job of hiding his blush. All the same, better to be safe than sorry.

Louis comes back and rolls a pair of only slightly damp socks onto Harry’s feet, and if he didn’t know any better, he’d say Louis was caressing his ankles. Harry’s body certainly doesn’t know better when Louis’s hands brush up his calves, because his dick is suddenly very interested.

Harry grits his teeth and curses silently. He’d been sporting semis for what seemed like the majority of the past few days. He really doesn’t think he can be held responsible for that when Louis is there all the time and Harry can’t exactly take care of the issue himself with all the cameras around.

When Louis lies back down beside him, Harry makes an executive decision to save himself some embarrassment. He rolls so that his back is facing Louis.

He can feel Louis hesitate before he says, “What’cha doin’, babe?”

Harry tilts his head back, eyes half-lidded, and whispers, “I’m the little spoon.” Because he is.
He swears he can hear Louis gulp before he says, “Yeah, alright,” and wraps an arm around Harry’s waist, tucking them snuggly together.

It’s the best sleep Harry’s had since the show started.

“I slept through the night. I was warm under the blanket, and I slept right through the storm.” - Tommo, Chapera

“Harry and Louis were layin’ on the thing kinda gettin’ a romantic mood. Maybe the rain was just an excuse to snuggle a little closer.” - Niall, Chapera

Going into the reward challenge, Louis is in high spirits despite the terrible weather of the past two days. His hands and feet still feel a little raw, skin bloated and sensitive from all the water it had absorbed, but he’s confident that his tribe is at least in better shape than the other two.

There’s the usual banter when all the tribes meet with Jeff, and as Louis assesses the other tribes he can tell he was right about the storm affecting them more. The remaining four members of Saboga, including the beautiful Zayn and the burly Liam, are looking downright depressing. He can’t help he smug grin that makes its way on his face.

Harry elbows him in the ribs, and Louis looks at him with a faux innocence. Harry just rolls his eyes and shakes his head in response before Jeff begins to explain the rules of the game, prompting them to pay attention.

It’s a simple matching game where every contestant has a few items in a covered box. If they win, they’ll get the key to their rice box and a full “Survivor Bathroom” kit made up of a bunch of product
endorsements. Louis is going to go to sleep smelling like Herbal Essences tonight if he has anything
to do with it. He catches Harry running his fingers through his matted mane of hair and only feels
more determined to win this one.

After the director calls cut for the additional explanation time, Jeff asks for one person from each
tribe to come forward to pick the order. Louis looks to the others to see who wants to go and is
immediately met by all five of their gazes on him. It’s heady, the rush of power that it gives him.

“I can go?” He suggests, like it’s even a question. They all nod along in agreement. Louis presses his
lips together to hide his smile and steps forward.

This time is so different from his previous season, and Louis finds that he really likes having people
look to and depend on him.

His self-discovering realization is cut short when Jeff holds out a bag and asks them to pick rocks.
Louis and the other two tribe representatives reveal simultaneously, and Louis’s stomach drops. He’d
picked first turn. In a game of matching, that was the absolute worst position, because he’d be the
only one guessing without any information.

He turns back to his tribe with an apology on his lips, but Harry’s shaking his head and smiling at
him, eyes twinkling. “Well, since you picked it you have to go first.”

“Whatever, Styles. I bet I make more matches than you.”

“I bet I make more matches than either of you,” Taylor says semi-seriously. Everyone breaks out into
laughter, and Louis can see the other tribes looking at them strangely. He honestly doesn’t care.

When Jeff gives them the signal to begin, Louis immediately turns to Zayn, who’s looking
steadfastly down at his box. Well, if Louis isn’t going to get it right, he might as well make it fun.

“Hey, Pretty Boy!”

Zayn’s head immediately turns, and Louis can’t help his laugh of glee even as Jeff asks, “Who’s
Pretty Boy?”

Louis points at Zayn and teases, “Wow, he looked right at me. Must be my boy, Zayn.”

Zayn, who had previously looked pretty gloomy, rolls his eyes with a hint of a smile. Louis counts it
as a win.

“Gotta rock, Pretty Boy?”

“You wish, Tomlinson.” Zayn replies. Louis just shrugs, smile still on his lips. This game is gonna
be fun.

“Hatch?” Jeff prompts the next contestant.

“Tommo, gotta rock?”

Louis shakes his head, laughing as he hands his rock over, and Jeff declares, “That’s how you play
the game!” with all the overexcited relish expected from a game show host.

That exchange sets a precedent of banter and laughter for the rest of the challenge, and despite
Louis’s initial bad luck, Chapera easily pulls ahead of the other two tribes and stays in the lead
throughout.
Louis makes his last pair and then it’s just up to Jesy to make one last match. They’re so close Louis can practically feel the soap on his skin.

If Jesy feels the pressure she doesn’t show it, and cool as anything, asks Eleanor for her shell. There’s a moment when they all hold their breath before Eleanor sighs in defeat, “I do have a shell.”

“We had to carry everything we won back to camp, and Niall put the toilet over his head. I’m willing to bet it’s not the first time Niall’s had his head in the toilet.” - Caroline, Chapera

“Harry and I — we’re not so sure it’s a good idea to bathe each other because the others might get the wrong idea — but, soap and scrubs with my boy?” - Tommo, Chapera

Everyone’s spirits are high off the win and their new cleanliness, so they spent the rest of the day after the reward challenge lounging about in the sun. Harry in particular seems to be enjoying it — his tits are out, tattoos and legs on display, and his head is resting on Louis’s thigh. Louis, in turn, is enjoying playing with Harry’s hair.

Harry’s hair is majestic, Louis decides. It smells amazing, and it’s super soft. So it really isn’t Louis’s fault that he keeps petting it, especially when it makes Harry nuzzle up into his hand like an attention-seeking cat.

This might just be the best reward ever.

Their peaceful silence is interrupted by Niall’s stomach rumbling so loudly that Louis jolts, dislodging Harry from his thigh. Harry whines as he shakes the sand from his hair, and Louis presses his fingers to the back of Harry’s neck in a silent apology before hoisting himself to his feet.

“Looks like it’s time to find the key to our rice box. What d’ya say, Nialler?”

“You know I’m always up for some food, Tommo.”

“I’ll go get the clue.” Taylor runs up the beach to their shelter and Louis stretches his arms over his head to shake off the laziness in his muscles before looking down at Harry, scratching his chest idly.

Harry’s expression seems to be caught in between a pout and something…else. Louis lowers his hand from his chest and Harry’s eyes spring up to his, half-lidded and ridiculously green.

Luckily, Taylor comes running back with the clue right then, forcing them to look somewhere other than each other.

“Okay, so it says it’s ten paces from ‘a place you go to find out what’s in store,’ so that’s obviously tree mail,” Taylor says a little breathlessly.

Louis nods, “Okay, then. Let’s get digging.”

Twenty frustrating minutes later they’re still looking for the damn key and debating what constitutes a fucking ‘pace’.

“It’s just a step!” Louis is done with this shit.

“But, like, my step is different than your step.”
“Are you trying to make a comment on my height right now, Harold?”

Harry’s eyes widen. “No! That’s not — I just meant —”

“Just messing with you, H.” Louis tries to hide his fond as he turns and assesses the places they’ve dug up already.

“Maybe we’re digging in the wrong direction?” Taylor calls from the beyond the tree line on the beach.

Louis goes to stand next to their tree mail-box and has to hide a snort at what he sees. Taylor is standing in the middle of a sand hole digging furiously.

“Um, Taylor. I think you’ve gone the wrong way. The clue said behind and in a shallow grave.”

“Well, you haven’t had any luck back there, so I’m gonna try over here and see how it goes.”

Louis raises his hands and backs off. “Okay, then.” He’s not responsible for other people’s stupidity.

Harry pops up beside him. “Do you want some help, Taylor?”

She just shakes her head fiercely. “I’ll dig up this whole beach if I have to.”

If the girl wants to be stubborn, there’s nothing Louis can do to stop her. He pulls Harry away and turns to Niall, who’s on his hands and knees digging a trench where they believe ten paces should be.

“It’s gotta be back here. It’s gotta be. Just-hold on a second.”

Louis stands to the right of the mailbox and takes ten steps forward, which makes him fall slightly short of Niall’s trench. Then, he sticks his shovel down into the ground to his left, and says, “Right here. It’s gonna be right here.”

“Fingers crossed!” Jesy calls from where she’s digging.

“It shouldn’t be deep.” Louis says as he starts to dig, and after just a few shovels, he sees cloth amidst the dirt.

“I got it.” He says, almost to himself. Then, he says it louder, followed by a celebratory shout (maybe a “Yeah, baby!”) and Harry plastered to his back in a koala-style hug. The rest of the tribe joins in the celebration after a few moments with Taylor pulling up the rear, covered in sand and looking a little put-out. Louis gives her a high-five and tries not to look smug.

“Here’s the thing. I looked over, and I saw Taylor building a friggin’ sandcastle on the beach. It’s like she’s twelve years old, you know. She’s got her shovel and everything. This girl’s living in lala-land.” - Tommo, Chapera

Niall does the honors of opening their rice box. Once they’ve pried the top off, they realize it holds not only rice but also a mysterious bottle.

“Guys, that’s alcohol,” Jesy shouts, “That’s whiskey!” She grabs the bottle out of Niall’s hands, pulls out the cork, and takes a sip.
Harry, meanwhile, takes out the rice bag and opens it, sticking a hand in like he’s checking that it’s real.

He looks up with a huge smile on his face. “We’ve got rice!”

“We’re dominating the game, you guys. No one can stop us!” Niall shouts in a way that would be obnoxious if it wasn’t Niall. Instead they all laugh, do a series of weird dance moves that has somehow become their team handshake, and eat their fill for the first time since the game started.

Louis has to agree with Niall. No one can stop them.

“I don’t know how any of the other tribes are gonna catch us now. We’re so far ahead of them it’s insane. I feel sorry for ‘em… Not.” - Jesy, Chapera

DAY 12

Harry carries the Chapera banner into their next immunity challenge. When they arrive to the patch of beach where the challenge is taking place, it’s to find rows of giant color-coded tetris pieces, which means it’s going to be a puzzle of some kind.

Once the camera crew signals them, Jeff explains the challenge. “Today, we’re going to test how well you communicate within your own tribe.”

Harry can feel his tribemates relax slightly at that. Chapera is probably the most tight-knit of the tribes, simply because they haven’t yet been sent to tribal council. They haven’t had to conspire against each other or obsessively watch each other’s every move because they haven’t had to send someone home. That clears their mental game. And on top of that, they’ve won both reward challenges, so they have the resources they need to be at the top of their physical game.

Jeff explains that one person from each tribe will act as guide. Three others will be blindfolded while the guide uses vocal directions to help them find fifteen scattered puzzle pieces and bring them back to the team square that’s outlined in the sand. Once all fifteen pieces are in the bounds of the square, they can take off their blindfolds and begin putting the puzzle together to build a cube.

Because Chapera has two more members than the other tribes, Jeff asks them to choose two people to sit out. Harry immediately raises his hand, because he knows what his tribe’s opinion will be on him stumbling around blind while trying to carry giant puzzle pieces. After a quick discussion, it’s decided that Taylor will be the other member to sit out.

He and Taylor make their way to the sidelines while Jesy takes a seat in what looks like a repurposed lifeguard chair and Caroline, Louis, and Niall are led away from the beach so the crew can scatter the puzzle pieces.

Taylor looks downright gleeful. “Mogo Mogo’s halfway to killing each other already, they don’t stand a chance.”

Harry laughs and almost immediately feels guilty for it, because it was entirely up to luck that he got placed on the tribe he did. But he can’t quite get the grin off his face anyway.

When the players are finally called back to the beach, Harry keeps his eyes trained on this tribemates. Jesy looks at home in her perch, Niall seems unbothered by the blindfold, Louis is fidgeting in
impatience, and Caroline looks like she’s about start the game herself if Jeff doesn’t do it soon. Luckily she doesn’t have to wait too long.

“Survivors ready? GO!”

Harry is taken aback by the confusion of three different people shouting directions to three people each. He can barely hear himself think, let alone tell Jesy’s voice apart from Mary’s. He doesn’t understand how any of them are actually getting anywhere.

Louis must have the same thought, because about a minute in he starts calling for Jesy rather than waiting for her to direct him.

“JESY!”

“Louis, to your right, three steps to your right. Good! Now forward!”

And that’s how they get their first piece piled into the square.

Harry does a little fistpump at Louis’s quick lead, then takes a moment to check in on Caroline and Niall. Caroline has located a second piece, but she’s struggling to get it back to the square. Niall looks like he’s having a much harder time navigating than the other two, but despite that, he’s almost made it to a third block.

Several minutes later, Chapera and Saboga are tied with three pieces each. Harry’s torn between shouting encouragements and keeping quiet so his tribemates aren’t subjected to even more yelling. Meanwhile, Jeff sounds far too happy to be announcing a play-by-play of people falling or getting knocked over amidst the chaos.

Poor Niall looks like he’s getting more and more disoriented the longer he plays; he’s falling more than he’s walking at this point. But Caroline snags the fourth piece for Chapera, and Harry is reminded how fierce she can be when she sets her mind to it.

Harry scans the beach for Louis and finds him struggling to carry back another piece, just in time to watch Louis collide with Eleanor from Saboga. She goes stumbling backwards, but he keeps barreling on like he didn’t even feel it.

Harry sends her a silent apology on Louis’s behalf, but then he’s distracted yet again, this time by a swell of sympathetic noise from Taylor.

“OUCH, looks like Niall’s down!” Jeff’s shouting. “He just got ploughed, took a shot to the chest! Looks like he might be hurt! No, wait, he’s up again, good on you, Niall!”

Soon Chapera and Saboga are tied with fourteen pieces each, and Mogo Mogo is only trailing by two. When Caroline brings the last piece across, Jeff calls for Chapera to remove their blindfolds and start piecing the puzzle together. Harry and Taylor exchange high-fives.

“Come on, Chapera! You’ve got this!” Harry doesn’t hesitate to yell encouragements now. If the noise confuses the players still looking for puzzle pieces it can only help his team.

Several minutes later Saboga finishes collecting pieces, and several minutes after that, so does Mogo Mogo. In that time, Chapera has made almost no progress fitting their pieces together.

Slowly but surely, the other tribes catch up and pass Chapera. They’re trying their best, but it seems like they they’re struggling to figure out the bigger picture -- they literally don’t understand what the designs on the completed cube are supposed to look like. They’ve all been clobbered by giant tetris
pieces at least once, and everyone’s too high off adrenaline and frustration to slow down and think logically.

Harry doesn’t mean for his focus to stay so fixed on Louis, but that’s what happens. It’s hard to watch and do nothing. Louis looks like he’s already blaming himself for losing the lead, like he wants to scream and shout and hit things but is trying to stay level-headed so that Caroline and Niall will too.

Harry’s so busy watching his tribe, leaning forward till he’s almost doubled over, that he doesn’t realize how close Saboga is to finishing until Jeff’s declaring Saboga the winner.

“Chapera, Mogo Mogo, you still have a shot at immunity, keep fighting!

Harry mostly tunes him out again in favor of clutching at Taylor’s hand and holding tight, but Caroline must take it to heart because suddenly she’s knocking down whatever progress they’d made.

“It’s not right!” She shouts, fighting to be heard over Saboga celebrating their win and Mogo Mogo scrambling to finish. “We have to start over or we’re going to keep building it wrong!”

Logically, Harry knows that there’s almost no way they can come back from this. But for some reason it’s not processing correctly, because he’s so sure that they’ll pull through and keep immunity. It seems less likely that they wouldn’t come back from it — they’ve won every challenge thrown at them so far. They can’t just stop winning now.

“Come on, Mogo Mogo! Send one of them home!” Harry distantly recognizes Liam’s voice and bristles. He understands why Saboga is siding with Mogo Mogo. That doesn’t quell the surprising urge he has to glare at Liam until he shuts up.

When Mogo Mogo finishes their puzzle a few minutes later, Chapera doesn’t have anything that even vaguely resembles a cube.

Harry lets himself put his head in his hands for a few seconds, listening to the other tribes celebrate. He’s lucky to have had the luxury of the last twelve days, but they’d done so much team playing he’d lost sight of the fact that Survivor is, at the end of the day, a single-player game.

He, Taylor, and Jesy go to stand with the rest of Chapera so the cameras can get a good shot of Jeff’s dismissal. Harry’s thinking about who to eliminate before Jeff even addresses them.

“Chapera, first time at tribal council. First member to be voted out of the tribe tonight. You have the rest of the afternoon to figure out who that’s gonna be. Head back to camp.

Before Jeff is finished talking, Louis is stalking out, head bent. Harry finds himself just a step behind him — finds he wants to comfort their de facto team leader. But as soon as he catches up, Louis brushes him off.

Harry sighs, but tells himself that Louis needs space more than comfort right now. He turns instead to the rest of his deflated tribemates. They could use some cheering up, and Harry is more than willing to help.

“Today was our first immunity loss. I mean, this is the first time we’ve got to go to tribal council. Day 12 and we’ve really just gotta start playing the game now.” - Tommo, Chapera
The walk back from the challenge is exhausting and humiliating. The majority of his tribe is quiet, lost in their own thoughts, but Harry is doing his best at the front of the group to make everyone feel better.

“That was so frustrating! The other tribes were just lucky, I think.”

“I know!” Taylor chimes in. “We totally had them, and then out of nowhere—’

“You think you’re getting somewhere, and you have to start all over again. It was all luck, I’m telling you. You guys were great.” Harry glances back at his battered tribemates with a smile, and for once, Louis can’t muster one in return.

It just sucks, is the thing. Because when Louis had stepped off that boat on Day 1 he had been totally prepared to play this game. But now, after twelve days of bonding with these people, it’s going to be a lot harder to cut one off. And Louis knows that the final decision will come down to him.

He knows it has to be between the girls. Niall will be easy to lead, and it’s obviously not going to be Harry. So for him it comes down to Caroline, Jesy, or Taylor, and they each have their pros and cons.

Louis sighs, and then, for the benefit of the cameras says, “It’s always this way. You can’t just have, like, a really good run.” He lets go of his train of thought once they reach their camp and the producers take Taylor for her confessional.

Before she goes, Taylor approaches him. “I felt so bad for you guys, taking all those body-shots like that. You okay?”

Louis shrugs. “It was a tough challenge.”

She nods and goes off to the beach with a camera crew in tow. Louis’s mind starts working a million miles a minute.

Jesy or Caroline would be the obvious choices for the vote tonight, since both are argumentative and not very helpful. Jesy’s good in challenges, which is a plus for her. But Taylor. Taylor is smart. Taylor’s the kind of player who could put a wrench in his plans down the road.

Louis needs to think this through. All the possible scenarios. Then he’ll make his decision.

“There’s three possible ways the vote could go tonight: Taylor, Caroline, or Jesy. I haven’t made up my mind yet, but when I do, that’s who’s going home.” - Tommo, Chapera

After his confessional, where Louis had played up to his role of being the over-confident leader of the tribe, he comes back to a surprisingly normal camp. Niall’s eating some rice. Caroline and Taylor are laying in the shelter. Jesy’s chopping some firewood and Harry’s tending to the fire. It doesn’t look like anyone is scrambling to make sure they’re not voted out tonight, which is good. It means
that Louis has done enough to make everyone feel comfortable with their position in the game.

But. Something seems a bit off.

Louis needs to talk to Harry.

“I’m going down to the water to clean up,” Louis announces to the group at large, catching Harry’s eye for a moment and tilting his head toward the beach as the rest of the tribe just murmurs their acknowledgement.

So Louis heads down to the water and Harry follows him a few minutes later.

Before Louis can begin to speak, Harry asks, “So, who do you think?”

It kind of startles Louis when he takes a look at Harry and sees the steely glint in his eye before he remembers that Harry’s here to play this game too. He shakes the feeling off and pushes it to the far recesses of his mind to examine later.

“I was thinking Caroline, because she does absolutely nothing, but I’m actually leaning more toward Taylor, if I’m honest. She’s—”

Harry nods. “Too smart to keep around. Yeah, that’s what I was thinking.”

Woah. When did they start finishing each other’s sentences? When did that happen?

“Also, I’m pretty sure she’s trying to start an all girls alliance,” Harry adds.

That’s news to Louis. “Wait. What?”

A little furrow appears on Harry’s brow as he looks at Louis. “Um, I mean, yeah. Like, haven’t you noticed her going off with Jesy and Caroline all the time? And I mean, we haven’t exactly kept our alliance a secret, so since her options were limited—”

Louis cannot believe how blind, how complacent, he’s been these past few days. The only way to stay ahead in this game is to make sure you know where everyone’s heads are at, and he’d done a piss poor job of it so far, obviously. He was lucky he had Harry, otherwise he’d be sunk.

Something in Louis’s expression must worry Harry because suddenly he’s saying, “I’m sorry. I know you said you wanted us to keep our alliance to ourselves, and it’s probably my fault because I’m terrible at being subtle, I just—I’m sorry but, like, I think—”

“So, I’m sorry. I just—I didn’t know that’s what Taylor was doing.”

He hadn’t, but Harry had. Maybe Louis had been underestimating him this whole time. Harry obviously wasn’t as naive and easygoing as he seemed. While that meant another error of judgment on Louis’s part, it also meant that he had a strong strategic player on his side. So — it’s not all bad.

Now as for strategy…

“We need to make sure we have either Caroline or Jesy on our side of the vote.” Louis doesn’t second-guess himself as he reaches out to put his hand on Harry’s shoulder. He’s just calming his boy down. His alliance member. Whatever.

“We need to be smart about this, okay? And that means you should be the one to talk to them. You’re much closer to the girls than I am, and way more trustworthy.”

Somewhere along the way, Louis’s hand had started stroking up and down Harry’s arm, and…well,
Harry doesn’t seem to mind, so Louis doesn’t feel like he should stop.

“Okay, yeah. I can do that. But, like, what’s our argument?”

Harry has started to lean forward like he can’t afford to miss a single word Louis says, and Louis shifts his weight to his right hip, curving his body towards Harry. It’s a posture that Louis finds completely comfortable, almost like this is how they were made to fit together.

He looks back up at Harry’s questioning eyes and curses himself for being so easily and continuously distracted by this boy. He needs to get his shit together.

Louis clears his throat and takes a step back. “The obvious argument is that Taylor is a former winner. Do we really want someone who already walked away with the million to get another chance at it?”

Harry nods in agreement, so Louis continues. “If that doesn’t work, you can always offer them top three with us.”

Harry’s brow furrows. “But isn’t that Niall?”

“He’s never asked, and I never offered.” Louis shrugs. “Maybe he considers it unspoken, but it won’t matter anyways. We don’t have to honor a top three agreement made before the merge. Things’ll change so quickly then that it won’t hold.”

Harry looks skeptical, so Louis pokes the butterfly that sits on Harry’s ridiculous torso. “C’mon, Curly. I know you can talk them around. You’re a whole new level of charming.”

Harry ducks his head and pushes Louis shoulder. “You’re an idiot.”

Louis grins as he looks towards the horizon and sees that the sun is starting to dip towards the ocean. “We don’t have much time before tribal, so we need to get this thing squared away. You just keep me updated, okay? I’ll let Niall know it’s Taylor.”

Louis turns to walk back up the beach.

“Wait. Louis—” Louis looks over his shoulder at Harry, and it’s hard seeing him look so vulnerable after seeing him look so determined just a few minutes before. Louis is beginning to realize there’s more to Harry than his funny patterned shirts and affable expression, and while it may be interesting to Louis on a personal level he’s not quite ready to admit to, it’s a little scary to think that Harry might just be playing him.

“Yeah?”

A flicker of something passes across Harry’s face before he shakes his head. “Nevermind. I’ll let you know how my talk with the girls goes.”

Louis wants to press the issue. He wants to know what Harry was going to say. What it would mean for their alliance moving forward. Their flirting had gotten them this far, and while Louis had thought he’d had it under control, he now sees that the lines are far too blurred to tell who has the upper hand anymore. And that should scare him more than it does.

But — he knows deep down that even if Harry turns on him later, he’s at least with him for this vote, so he pushes everything else from his mind. He’ll take it one vote at a time if he has to. As long as his name isn’t written down, he doesn’t care if it’s Harry pulling the strings.
He’d come out here to play a game for a million dollars, not to be sidetracked by some boy who’s out here trying to win the same prize. As Jeff always says: There can only be one Survivor, and Louis didn’t come here to settle for second place.

An idea strikes Louis as he moves up the beach. A way to guarantee no votes will be thrown his or Harry’s way. A move that Louis can take credit for.

He approaches Taylor on the outskirts of camp and signals for her to follow him.

The settle a little ways down the beach, and she breaks the silence, “So what’s your pitch, Tommo?”

“No pitch, Taylor. I’m letting you know that you need to watch your back.”

He can practically hear Taylor’s neck snap as she whips around to look at him. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that there are a lot of players who don’t want to see former winners make it to the merge.”

“Is it going to be me tonight?” Taylor’s eyes widen in fear, and Louis honestly feels a little bad about what he’s about to do. But it is a game, and Taylor already won her million dollars.

“That’s what I heard from Jesy. But if it’s not you, it’s me, so I say we create an alliance of our own.”

She narrows her eyes, and Louis leans into his pitch. “Look, I know we don’t really get along, but think of it like a marriage of necessity. If you go, then I’m next. But I think I can convince the others to vote Caroline if you agree to stick with me. I don’t want to hear about you going behind my back with some all-girls alliance or anything like that.”

Taylor sighs and puts her head in her hands for a second before looking up at Louis. “Okay. Fine. But if you screw me, Tommo, so help me…”

“Don’t worry, Taylor. We’d all be dumb to keep Caroline over you. I mean, I bet you would’ve been a big help in the challenge today.” Louis is talking out of his ass, and Taylor is eating it up. Poor thing.

“That’s what I’ve been saying!” She says, throwing her arms in the air in exasperation. “Okay. I’m in. Do I need to talk to anybody?”

Louis shakes his head. “No. Let Caroline think you’re the one going home. I don’t really want to deal with her dramatics if she catches wind of this.”

Taylor nods and holds her hand out to shake. Louis takes her hand and does a little victory dance in his head. If the rest of the game plays out like this, he and Harry will be unstoppable.

“I made an alliance with Tommo, and I don’t know if I can trust him...but I’ve got his back one hundred percent and we’ll see how far we can take this thing.” - Taylor, Chapera

“Go ahead and grab a torch and dip it in the fire.”

They enter the proverbial lion’s den that is the tribal council set. Louis has always thought it was a little over the top and just this side of racist, but...if there’s one thing Jeff and the Survivor producers
love, it’s dramatics.

Louis grabs his torch and joins the others by the fire pit.

“This is part of the ritual of tribal council because as you know, fire represents life on the island and in this game. As long you have fire, you’re still in the game. When your fire’s gone, so are you.”

Louis rolls his eyes, and he doesn’t care if the cameras catch it. Jeff is enjoying this way too much.

Once they’ve all settled in their assigned seats (the producers had placed him and Harry next to each other, so Louis knows there will be a few questions about their relationship thrown into the mix), Jeff dives right in.

“First time for Chapera at tribal council. So let’s talk about the first twelve days. Niall, is this tougher physically than the first time you played?”

Niall shrugs. “It’s pretty tough. All the challenges so far, I’ve had to suck it up. But when you go all out, as this tribe has done, every challenge — it’ll get to ‘ya.”

Jeff turns to Harry, and Louis unintentionally tenses.

“Harry, seeing as you were our youngest contestant ever when you first played, is there anything you’ve learned in your normal life since then that you think you can contribute out here?”

Louis doesn’t like the way Jeff is smiling at Harry. And why is he even bringing up Harry’s age anyway? What a creep.

Harry shifts in his seat before he starts to answer, voice slow and rough and ridiculous. “I think, um, that I’m very good at, like. Controlling my temper and not, you know, losing it. And I think we have a few on our tribe who, uh. Tend to lose their temper pretty quickly or throw fits, and I think I’m very good at calming people down. Talking some sense into them.”

Louis smiles a shit-eating grin. He knows what part he’s supposed to play for the cameras.

“Who does lose their temper?” Jeff asks, like the gossip he is.

Harry giggles before tilting his head to look at Louis. He hesitates, like he doesn’t really want to bring Louis into this, which is sweet. “Well, I think, uh. Louis and Jesy kind of argue back and forth a little bit.”

Jesy throws her hands up and interrupts Harry. “We only did once. How many times have we argued?”

“The one time. We quelled that real quick.” Louis agrees easily. Sure, he still has problems with Jesy sometimes, but they don’t have all out shouting matches like they had that second day.

“We put an end to it.” Jesy says with finality, like she’s daring Jeff to question them. Alright, so there are some things Louis likes about Jesy. Sometimes.

Jeff smartly moves on. “By the way, Niall, how are you feeling? Because you took a hard hit to the chest or the head today...”

“Well, I didn’t see it coming, that’s for sure.” Everyone laughs, and it’s a nice break in the tension that had been mounting as they sat there. Niall is a good sort to have around in these situations. “And the only thing I ask is that I want the tag number off the truck that hit me.”
Harry lets out a honk of a laugh that startles Louis but prompts him into a peal of laughter of his own.

After they’ve all settled down, Jeff continues. “First twelve days for Chapera, up until today, have been pretty cush. Niall, are you noticing relationships form?”

Louis knew it was coming, but that doesn’t make plastering the smile on his face any easier. He reminds himself that he has to play their relationship off as no big deal. It’s all fun and games. He just needs to smile and not look at Harry too much.

Niall laughs, but there’s a bit of a nervous tinge to it. It’s obvious Niall doesn’t want to be the one who throws them under the bus, but — they are making reality television. There has to be drama.

“There’s a little bit of, I don’t know, cuddlin’ and…it might be a little grindin’ there late one night.” Louis makes a show of laughing it off, but out of the corner of his eye, he sees Harry’s shoulders curl forward.

Jeff’s got a glint in his eye now. “You looked at Tommo when you said that.”

“Well, I’ve been kind of watching them a bit, and he doesn’t sleep on his back every night.” This time Niall looks Louis right in the eyes as he says it, as if to say, ‘I’m not wrong.’ The little shit.

“Who you sleeping next to, Tommo?”

Louis doesn’t hesitate. “I’m sleeping next to Harry.”

“Are you blushing?” Jeff is looking right at Harry so Louis feels it’s okay for him to look, too. It doesn’t look like Harry is blushing so much as it looks like he’s extremely uncomfortable. It makes something ugly settle in Louis’s chest.

“No,” Harry says simply.

“Little bit?” Jeff needs to cut the bullshit. Louis’s about to say something to take the focus off Harry, but then Harry tilts his head, grins coyly, and says, “No.”

“A little something going on?” Probst is officially on Louis’ shitlist.

Harry gets a little defensive, hunched forward with his elbows resting on his knees, hands clasped in front of him. “I’m twenty-five. I’m young! Having fun.”

“I’m thirty-five, still young, watching you have fun.” Caroline chimes in. Everyone laughs, but Louis can tell Harry’s is forced. Something isn’t right.

“Is there a little snuggling going on with Tommo?”

“Need to keep warm at night.” And there’s that look Louis saw on the beach today. Jaw-locked, eyes steely. It’s a look that doesn’t sit right on Harry, like a hand-me-down coat that fits awkwardly around his shoulders.

“So this is strictly survival cuddling?” Strangely, Louis finds himself wanting to deny, deny, deny. Which. Wasn’t part of the plan.

He doesn’t have to worry, though, because Harry does it for him. “I’m out here to play the game of Survivor. I’m not out here to play a dating game.”

Something tense settles in the space between them, and Louis only notices because it’s the first time he’s ever felt anything other than comfortable around Harry. He tries to assure himself that it’s just
Probst messing with their heads, but this defensive, unsmiling Harry isn’t the Harry that Louis knows.

But then, Louis reminds himself, he’s only known Harry for twelve days. Who’s to say that the boy sitting next to him right now isn’t the real Harry?

Louis immediately dismisses the idea. He knows his boy. His alliance member. His partner. Whatever.

Jeff turns his questioning elsewhere. “Jesy, give me the straight scoop.”

Jesy answers with twelve days of pent-up emotion. “Okay, these two are — you can’t even get in between them. You gotta be kidding me. Seriously, they’re very close.” As much as she’s throwing them under the bus, Louis has to admit that he’s glad it’s not all in his head.

“I wouldn’t even try to sleep next to Tommo and push Harry to the other side,” She continues, elaborate hand gestures and everything. “That’s out of the question.”

Finally, Jeff turns to Louis. “Does that concern you, Tommo? That there might be an impression formed?”

Louis shrugs, all confident nonchalance. “No. It’s obvious. I mean, we’ve been flirting with each other since day one — since we got out here.” He glances at Harry, who’s still stoic, and thinks that he better cover his bases just in case. “But in terms of the game, there’s gonna be one winner, and my commitment to the game is first and foremost.” Good. This way even if he does get blindsided, he won’t come across as a total lovestruck idiot.

Jeff, seemingly satisfied that he got the perfect soundbite, moves on. “So let’s talk about how you’re going to vote someone out tonight. What do you base it on, Niall?”

Louis tunes out his answer and focuses all of his energy on Harry without actually looking at him. Maybe if he — Louis leans forward so that his fist is even with Harry’s right shoulder blade, makes a thumbs up sign, and presses it into Harry’s back.

Before he can check his reaction, Jeff’s asking him another question.

“What could cause you to get voted off tonight, Tommo?”

“I guess my mug, my attitude — what else, Harry?” There’s an uncomfortable beat when Harry doesn’t answer right away like he would have at camp, and Louis immediately knows he’s made a mistake.

“Wow. You guys really have become a couple. You just asked your ‘wife’-”

“I find that offensive.” Louis says, as Harry protests, “I’d prefer spouse, Jeff.”

They catch each other’s eyes, and for the first time at tribal it seems like they’re on the same page. Louis grins, and Harry’s answering grin is brighter than the fire right behind him.

“Anyway, that’s pretty telling. What else could get Tommo in trouble?” Jeff just does not know when to give up.

Harry turns back to Jeff, and Louis tries not to glare. “I just think he’s got a big mouth, and he needs to keep it shut sometimes. At challenges, at camp, all the time. He has a big mouth and he needs to keep it shut.”
“I’m very emotional, Jeff,” Louis says, full of put-on bravado.

Jeff rolls his eyes at Louis’s cheek, and Louis just regrets the fact that it probably won’t make the final edit.

“Okay. It is time to vote. Taylor, you’re up.”

As soon as Taylor heads to the voting area, Louis turns to Harry, but before he can say anything, he feels something against his ankle. When he looks down, he sees Harry’s fist in a thumbs up. Louis has to tuck his lips in between his teeth to bite down on the grin that threatens to take over his entire face.

So it seems like things are good. Or mostly at least.

The rest of the tribe goes to vote, and Louis doesn’t feel *comfortable* exactly, because you can never feel comfortable in this game. But he also isn’t worried. All things should go according to plan.

Jeff comes back with the urn and says with grandeur, “Once the votes are read, the decision is final. The person voted out will be asked to leave the tribal council area immediately. I’ll read the votes.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! x.

If you're enjoying it, you can find the Tumblr post [here](#).

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Wanna know what you're playing for?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Walking out of tribal council, Harry feels like he’s just experienced eight kinds of whiplash.

He’d expected the grilling from Jeff about he and Louis’s relationship, but for some reason it was harder than he thought it’d be. Before tribal he hadn’t been especially worried about people reading into he and Louis’s dynamic. At first they’d been so worried about hiding the alliance that it hadn’t occurred to him to think about what people would think once it was out.

But after tribal, it’s going to be almost impossible to deny that they’re in one. Harry thinks they did a passable job of insinuating that they’re playing each other, which might prevent people from targeting them for the sake of breaking up their alliance.

Still, he needs to be careful. He wants to come off as non-threatening enough to stay under the radar, but at the same time, he doesn’t want people to think he’s weak enough to gang up on.

Then there’s the fact that Louis had been able to sense his discomfort and actually cared enough to try to reassure him. And the fact that it had actually worked. All Louis had to do was press his thumb in the dip between Harry’s shoulder blades, and suddenly all he could focus on was the feeling of warmth radiating from the touch.

Tribal had gone according to plan, for the most part. The girls had been easily convinced to write Taylor’s name down, and the votes fell just as they wanted them to. To be fair, she’d taken it well, turned on her heel and started toward the door instead of pitching a fit like others had done in the past. But just before she was out of camera shot, she looked back over her shoulder right at Louis. “I knew you were trouble, Tommo.”

Which, yeah, okay. Harry spoke too soon, of course Taylor couldn’t leave without giving the last word.

But the way Louis had tensed up beside him makes Harry think Taylor’s not just being dramatic. He’s obviously missing something.

The walk back to camp makes him even more suspicious. They’re silent until Jesy asks the question they’ve all been thinking. “So...what was that about, then?”

Louis lets out this strained laugh that immediately has Harry on edge. “Can you believe her?”

He’d been up front, but he turns so he’s walking backwards, facing them as he speaks. “She’s just mad she got voted off first. And you guys know she’s always had it out for me.”

Niall sort of hums in agreement, but no one else says anything.

“Such a hypocrite. She approached me earlier and was like ‘We should vote off Caroline, she’s gotta be the first to go.”’

Caroline makes an offended squawking noise that Harry would’ve laughed at in any other circumstance. He stays quiet instead.

“Yeah,” Louis continues, “I played along ‘cause I didn’t want her to realize it was her, but I never
agreed to anything. She’s just trying to make me look bad. What a sore loser.”

Jesy laughs, clearly satisfied with Louis’s answer. “That’s so rich, coming from her. Master manipulator in her season, wasn’t she?”

The tribe dissolves into stories about all the ridiculous things Taylor had done in the last twelve days.

When they get back to camp, there’s a clue about tomorrow’s reward challenge waiting for them. Something about building a raft to race for food that Harry’s too preoccupied to worry about just then.

He heads straight back to The Bungalow to settle in for the night. He even gives Louis the benefit of the doubt, putters around aimlessly for a bit so that Louis has the chance to get him alone to tell him what happened with Taylor. Louis stays by the fire.

Harry knows he’s probably blowing this out of proportion, that he’s just upset because he’s still rattled from tribal council. Harry has always seen Louis as an equal, and has recently started trusting him on top of that (for the most part). But if Louis doesn’t feel he needs to talk to Harry before doing things, or at the very least explain himself after, maybe that’s not how Louis sees Harry.

He could confront Louis about it, but he also feels like he shouldn’t have to. An alliance is a two-way street. Maybe Louis will approach him tomorrow to explain everything, but Harry isn’t going to go out of his way to help him figure out that their alliance isn’t going to work if Louis isn’t willing to actually do this together.

Eventually he drifts to sleep. He wakes up sometime later when he feels Louis settle in next to him, but for the first time, he resists the urge to curl into Louis’s warmth. Instead he pretends to roll onto his side in sleep, making sure to leave a few inches of space between them before he closes his eyes.

“We’ve got another building challenge, which is great because Tommo insists on doing everything and I can just chill until the challenge. Save up my strength for all the rowing we're gonna do.” - Caroline, Chapera

DAY 14

“I can’t believe it worked out like that. I can’t believe it.”

Louis really can’t, is the thing. Yeah, a part of him is still a little pissed that they lost the fishing gear to Mogo Mogo’s ridiculous pile of bamboo they were calling a raft, but things couldn’t have worked out better for them otherwise.

The twist Jeff had thrown into the challenge today was that whichever team finished last would be absorbed by the other two tribes. Honestly, there was never any doubt that it would be the weakened, four-member tribe of Saboga.

What Louis hadn’t anticipated, however, was that Mogo Mogo would choose Jerri and Eleanor to join their tribe, leaving Liam and Zayn to join Chapera.

It couldn’t have worked out better for Louis.

He and Zayn had hit it off at a Survivor afterparty about two years ago and stayed relatively good
friends since then. And as for Liam, Louis had watched his season right before coming out here, and if there’s one thing he knows, it’s that Liam’s a sucker for being a hero. It’s something that he definitely plans to use to his and Harry’s advantage.

Speaking of — Louis glances at Harry as the tribe continues to celebrate their new members and ask them questions about what their tribe had been like.

“It’s serious, guys,” Liam is saying. “Ben Winston literally tried to dig us an underground shelter. It flooded the first night. I thought we might freeze to death. It was awful.”

Normally this story is something that Louis would take great delight in. He’d brag about The Bungalow and Harry would be all ‘Lou-ehh, be nice!’ and then they’d grin at each other stupidly until someone changed the subject. But Harry has been avoiding Louis since tribal council. Or not avoiding him, exactly, but something has been off.

Before Louis can think about it too much, Zayn swoops in and drapes an arm around his shoulders. “Bro, how’s it been?”

Louis can’t keep the genuine smile off his face. “Better than for you, I’m guessing. You guys had a tough go of it.”

Zayn rolls his eyes and sighs. “You don’t even know the half of it. You better give me a heaping portion of your rice when we get to your camp.

Niall interrupts before Louis can reply. “It’s called The Bungalow.”

Louis laughs. “Just wait til you see it. We’ve got a swing and a rock garden and a checkers board.”

“Fuck off! You do not.”

“It’s true!” Jesy chimes in, and for the rest of the walk back they try to convince Zayn and Liam that they’re not lying about their shelter.

When they finally reach it, the looks on Liam and Zayn’s faces are priceless. Louis feels his chest puff with pride at their little home.

“Mi casa es su casa!” Niall proclaims before hopping up on the swing and gesturing for Liam to join him.

Liam glances around nervously. “Is it safe? It’s not going to fall if we both get on, right?”

Louis laughs and slaps him on the back. “No way! Harry, Niall, and I get up there together all the time. That thing isn’t going anywhere!”

So Liam reluctantly hops on the swing with Niall, and before he’s fully settled in, Louis says, “You, too, Z!” And gets Zayn to hop up with them.

Harry smiles one of his dopey grins at them and goes to push them so they’re rocking back and forth, which forces a high-pitched squeak from Liam, followed by a crinkly eyed smile. Zayn lets out a whoop and the rest of Chapera answers it with their own — Caroline and Jesy draped around each other laughing at the boys antics.

Louis thinks these guys will fit right in here.
Later in the day, Louis finds himself going for a walk in the woods for some time alone. It’s amazing what two weeks with people around all the time can do to a self-proclaimed ‘people person.’ Louis loves attention. Always has and always will. But when there’s a constant stream of it for fourteen days…well, he needs a little bit of a break.

And if he’s honest with himself, it has a little lot to do with how lately the attention hasn’t been coming from one person in particular.

Louis scuffs his foot against a tree trunk and contemplates how the hell he managed to get to this point.

Just then a loud rustling comes from Louis’s left that sounds like an animal hurtling through the brush. Louis immediately goes into survival mode and starts trying to climb the tree in front of him. Get to higher ground and all that. But as the noise gets closer, he hears a distinctly human, "Ouch!"

Cool as can be, Louis lowers himself down the tree and darts a glance at his camera crew, who are laughing at his expense. So not cool.

Louis goes to where the noise had come from and pushes back a few branches, only to find Harry sprawled out on the forest floor in a way that couldn’t have been purposeful. He doesn’t look like he has plans to move anytime soon.

"What'cha doin’, Harry?"

Harry’s eyes dart to him and then back up to the canopy. "Oh you know. Just lying around."

Oh, good god.

"You're terrible,” Louis says, hoping the fondness in his voice isn’t too obvious.

Harry smiles placidly back and pats the ground next to him, and since Louis is an idiot, he sits down right there in the dirt and the plants and the bugs even though he’d worked really hard to make his
pants look somewhat presentable this morning. Oh well. A little more dirt won’t hurt him.

Maybe Jeff was right. Maybe Louis had started treating Harry like he was his... spouse. He looks over to see Harry pushing himself up on his elbows and leveling a stare at him, and really, Louis thinks, there could be worse things than being Harry’s anything.

“So, what’s up?” Louis nudges Harry’s shoulder, but he doesn’t shy away or giggle or do any of the things he might usually do. Instead, he keeps staring at Louis like he’s trying to unravel a particularly intricate knot.

“What happened between you and Taylor before tribal?” Harry finally asks, his voice firm.

“I don’t-” Louis goes to object with some lighthearted banter, but Harry cuts him off at the pass.

“No.” Harry sits all the way up, so that he’s looking down on Louis. The sun peeks out from behind his curls, haloing his face in a way that really isn’t fair. Natural light shouldn’t play favorites.

Harry presses on. “Something happened between you two, and you didn’t let me know. And that’s — that just isn’t going to work for me if we keep this up.” He gestures between the two of them.

“Trust is a two-way street, Louis, and I’ve been trying to meet you halfway. But you saw how Jeff went after me at tribal, and it got me thinking about, like. How people are going to see our relationship, and I’m not going to be a tag-along player who has no say in any decisions. I’m just not. I have to play my own game.”

He stops to take what looks like a steadying breath before continuing. “So — If you’re just looking for a pawn or, like, someone to have around when it’s convenient for you, then. This isn’t going to work.”

Louis is...well, he wouldn’t say he’s surprised that Harry confronted him, because he knows Harry’s smarter and more stubborn than he lets on, but. He does find the inherent subtext of what Harry’s saying a little upsetting.

“Is that really what you think of me?” Shit. That came out a lot more hurt than he’d meant it to.

Harry shrugs. “I don’t want to, but we are playing a game.”

“I’m not playing a game with you.” Double shit. “I mean, I am, but we’re playing it together, and like, I’m not playing games when it comes to you as a person. Or whatever.”

Harry is staring at him unblinkingly, and Louis takes a moment to reflect on all of his poor life choices before Harry replies. “You’re not?”

“No!” Louis is going to be adamant about this. If there is one thing he’s going to accomplish with this conversation, it’s going to be making Harry feel as comfortable as possible. “I’m not going to sell you out, okay Harry?”

“Then what was the thing with Taylor?” Harry still looks skeptical, and Louis maybe just wants to kiss the pout of his face — but those thoughts do not belong in this conversation.

“I’m sorry I didn’t let you know,” Louis begins. “I just didn’t really have time to before tribal, but I realized that the best way to make sure neither of our names were written down was if Taylor thought we were in an alliance with her.”

They’re silent for a moment while Harry processes this information. “You really didn’t tell me just
because there was no time? Because you could’ve told me since then.”

Harry has that stubborn tilt to his lips that Louis loves feels apathetic about, so Louis rolls his eyes and says, “Well, I couldn’t, could I? Because you’ve been avoiding me.” He raises his hand as Harry opens his mouth to protest. “Don’t lie. I know you have been. I just didn’t realize why until now. I thought...I don’t know. I thought you were trying to distance yourself from me.”

What the fuck is wrong with him today? He needs to stop sounding so weak and pathetic, like, right the fuck now. Harry has shown that he’s obviously here to play the game and that game could very easily extend to Louis. Louis might be making a huge mistake by revealing that their flirting relationship means more to him than he’s previously let on, but...well, in for a penny, right?

“That wasn’t-” Harry starts, as he scoots a little closer to Louis, their feet touching. “I mean, I guess it kinda was because I needed to think. You really should’ve tried to talk to me about what happened at tribal. I thought you didn’t think I needed to know, and it felt like. I dunno. Like maybe I wasn’t important enough to know, or like you thought I’d be too oblivious to realize something had happened.”

He stops for a second, like he’s trying to think of how to continue. Louis lets him.

“It made me second-guess our...” he hesitates for a second before settling on a word. “-alliance. I needed to think, and I guess. I couldn’t be objective with you being you around me all the time.”

Ouch. “I didn’t realize I was annoying you. I’ll stop-”

“No!” Harry grabs Louis’ hand. “Fuck. That’s not what I meant. It’s kind of the opposite, actually? Being around you...you can be really, like...charismatic, I guess? When you want to be. And I didn’t want to let that affect how I was thinking.”

Louis chuckles self-deprecatingly. “You’re the one who’s a whole new level of charmer, Harry.”

“Yeah, but you do this thing where you can make people think what you want them to think.”

There’s a thick silence between them after that.

“Guess that makes us the perfect pair, huh?” Louis says, trying to lighten the mood.

He doesn’t like seeing Harry’s brow furrow and his lips turn down, the way they have for most of this conversation. Harry’s face was made for smiling, Louis decides, and he’s going to do his best to make Harry smile for however long he can.

“No more leaving me out of important decisions, okay Lou?”

Louis nods, and Harry squeezes his hand. “I’m sorry I thought the worst of you. I know you’re not that guy.”

Louis shrugs. “I can be that guy, but I promise I won’t be like that with you.”

Harry nods, face softening, and while they’re not 100% alright yet, Louis thinks they’re on their way there.

“Definitely at first I was stringing him along. The flirting was a huge strategy in the beginning. Um. But then I got caught up in it. And feelings — you know — emerged.” - Harry, Chapera
“Everyone at this camp seems very comfortable with each other, especially Louis and Harry, so I don’t really know what that means for me and Liam if we don’t win this immunity challenge. Probably nothing good.” - Zayn, Chapera

DAY 15

The immunity challenge isn’t even a fair fight if Louis’s being honest. They’re supposed to run across a balance beam obstacle course to retrieve flags, facing off with other contestants whenever they need to run on the same beam. It’s total domination by his tribe from start to finish.

Louis has always had good balance, but it had never come in as handy as it had today. Jeff makes some comment as Louis races along the balance beam about Louis having “no control,” but Jeff is wrong. Louis is completely in control. Of this challenge and of this entire game.

"It felt real good to be able to propel my team to a win. I might not be as strong as some of ’em, but I guarantee I’m tougher than all of ’em." - Tommo, Chapera

Hours after the immunity challenge, Harry still hasn’t had the chance to get Louis alone because Chapera isn’t done fawning over him. Harry doesn’t blame them.

Harry had done surprisingly well in the challenge, had even retrieved a few flags, but there’s no doubt that Louis won it for them. At one point he literally picked Bressie up — a guy twice his size — and just deposited him in the water, like it was nothing. By the end of it the rest of Chapera was intentionally jumping off the starting platform to let Louis take his turn more quickly.

So fawning is definitely warranted. Harry isn’t done fawning either, he just wants to fawn a little differently than the rest of his tribe. Like maybe drag Louis into the jungle, shove him against the nearest tree, and kiss him until the camera crew either gets bored and leaves them alone or drags them apart.

Louis has been doing absolutely nothing to discourage the stream of praise, and Harry’s been trying not to feel too fond every time he catches Louis doing that crinkly-eyed crooked-grin thing with his face.

“Thought for sure Mary was gonna get you when she sat down on the beam,” Liam says, shaking his head at Louis.

Zayn smirks. “Thought for sure you were gonna let her, you giant softie. Could tell you didn’t wanna hurt her.”

“Yeah, but soon as Harry yelled for Tommo to drop, too, he did!” Niall’s eyes are practically shining at the memory; they’re all pretty bad, but if there were a Louis fanclub, Niall would probably be president. “He fuckin’ lunged, man. Never seen anything like it. Tackled her right into that water.” He grins over at Louis. “Absolute legend.”

“Remember the look on Bressie’s face when you knocked him in?” Jesy sighs wistfully. “That’s gonna keep me going for days. What a twat.”

Harry laughs, catching Louis’s eye as he stands and stretches his arms over his head. “As thrilling as
this is, I lived it the first time. And the last eighteen times we’ve rehashed it. Think m’gonna go do something actually useful, collect firewood or summat. You keep going this way his head’ll be too big to compete in the next immunity challenge.”

Louis jumps off the swing to join him. “Now now, Harold. Jealousy doesn’t suit you.” He turns to address the rest of the tribe. “I’ll help, give you all a break from my awe-inspiring presence.”

Liam laughs good-naturedly, Niall cackles, Zayn pelts him with a coconut husk, and Caroline raises an eyebrow to say “Yawn-inspiring, maybe.”

Harry really, really likes these people. Which is why he feels bad about what he’s about to suggest to Louis.

They start down the beach, walking close enough that Harry could tangle their fingers together if they were anywhere but on an island for a game show to win a million dollars.

Louis bumps their shoulders together, eyes bright when he glances over and wiggles his eyebrows exaggeratedly at Harry. “Gonna personally congratulate me on my win, Hazza?”

“You wish,” Harry says, trying to bite down on his smile.

Louis laughs, but his voice is a touch rougher when he speaks. “You know I do, babe.”

Harry feels his face heating, but does his best dramatic eye-roll for the benefit of the cameras, even if he can’t stop himself from grinning. “Wanted to talk, actually.”

“About my amazing win,” Louis nods in agreement. “Lots of that going ‘round lately.”

“I think we should make an alliance with Zayn and Liam.”

Louis’s pace doesn’t falter, but Harry’s paying attention, so he sees Louis straighten himself a fraction of an inch, the exact moment when the playful glint to Louis’s eyes slides away, replaced by something more focused.

Before Louis can say anything, Harry pushes forward.

“I was thinking about how you approached Taylor so that no one would write our names down. If we go to Zayn and Liam now, we’ll have them on our side, and we already have the rest of Chapera. This way we’ll have everyone covered. No one will write our names down.”

Louis isn’t responding, so Harry slows them to a stop so he can better read Louis’s expression. “Louis.”

Finally, Louis huffs out a breath. “Okay,” he says, running a hand through his hair. “Sorry. Just. Didn’t expect to be having this talk now, y’know? We just won immunity.”

Harry nods, because he gets it. But this feeling, that they’re safe, that they’re unstoppable, was exactly how he’d felt right before they’d been sent to tribal council.

“I know,” he says softly, almost apologetically. “But now everyone knows how incredible you are at immunity challenges. We’ll be targeted as soon as we get to the merge. If we get sent to tribal council and anyone on our tribe is playing long-term instead of short-term and they decide to turn on us, you’ll have a target on your back. We need to have a plan.”

Louis is silent again, but this time he looks like he’s searching Harry’s face for something before he
answers. “You’re right,” he says, turning to resume their walk down the beach, marginally closer than they were before.

Harry hums his agreement, then takes Louis’s hand and squeezes for a second before letting go, leaving the back of their hands brushing as they walk.

“Alright,” Louis says slowly. Harry can tell that he’s coming up with a plan as he’s saying it. “We should approach Liam, then. He’s got a white knight complex a mile wide. We can tell him we’re on the outs with our tribe. We’re chummy at camp, but when it comes down to it Chapera would vote us off because we’re a power couple, and they don’t want to have to compete with us after the merge.”

Harry raises his eyebrows at Louis’s choice of words, trying to fight down yet another grin. Louis doesn’t look up, though, just keeps on the same train of thought.

“We can tell them that at the last tribal council our names floated around, that we just barely scraped by. They’re already on edge because they’re new, but we can give them some security. It’d make sense for them to form an alliance with us.”

It’s the perfect approach because everyone knows that nobody talks to each other in Survivor because they’re too afraid to cross alliance or tribal lines. If Harry and Louis approach Zayn and Liam first, they’ll be hesitant to agree to additional alliance offers. But even though this is the right move for their game, Harry still feels a lurch of guilt at the thought of plotting behind Zayn and Liam’s backs, and he’s only just met them.

“I know you’re friends with Zayn—” he starts hesitantly.

Louis cuts him off before he can finish. “Don’t worry about it,” he says, with a quick jerk of his head. “We’re playing to win, we can’t—” he shakes his head again, like he’s trying to clear it. “We have to make decisions like this. And you’re right. We need to have a plan in place. I’ll talk to Liam tonight.”

Harry nods. “Okay.”

They’ve been walking for about ten minutes and still haven’t collected anything, and Harry feels guilty for bringing the mood down. He elbows Louis in the ribs, offering him a small smile that he’s hoping will pass as a smirk. “That’s what you get for dominating an immunity challenge. Be more careful next time, yeah?”

Louis blinks once, then shoots Harry a grin, and it feels like finally seeing the sun after a cloudy day. Harry would take a moment to feel embarrassed for how cheesy that sounds, even in his own head, but then Louis is speaking again.

“Race you back to camp? Bet I can get more wood than you.”

“No one gets more wood than me, Lou.” Harry nudges him in the shoulder before taking off.

“Tommo and Harry approached Zayn and I about an alliance because they need our numbers to stay in the game. I guess you could say it’s mutually beneficial. It feels good to be able to help them out, especially because it seems like they really like each other.” - Liam, Chapera

“I’m not one hundred percent sure I believe the tale Louis and Harry are spinning, but Liam wants to be in an alliance with them so — what can I do?” - Zayn, Chapera
Tragedy befalls the Chapera camp in the wee hours of the morning, and it all starts with an almighty shriek cutting through the dark.

Immediately, Louis jumps up from his space on the edge of the shelter, brushing the sleep from his eyes and glancing down at Harry to make sure he’s not the one in distress. But Harry just blinks heavily at him until they hear another shriek come from the woods.

Louis does a quick headcount of his disoriented tribemates in the near darkness and realizes who’s missing: Caroline.

Before he can verbalize the thought his feet are taking him in the direction of the sounds still coming from beyond the treeline. Time seems to speed up and slow down all at once as Louis stumbles through the darkness until he reaches a sobbing Caroline curled in fetal position on the ground.

Kneeling beside her, Louis tries to figure out what’s wrong, but it’s not immediately apparent in the dark. “Honey, what’s wrong?”

Caroline struggles to get a word in edgewise between her sobs, but eventually communicates that it’s her knee. That she must have tripped over something in the dark. That she thinks she might have dislocated it.

Louis runs a gentle hand up Caroline’s calf and before he even reaches her knee, she’s crying out, “Stop! Stop! Please, dont!”

Louis feels sick to his stomach as he recognizes just how swollen her knee has become in the short minutes since her fall. His mother’s a nurse, so he knows enough about this sort of thing to know that isn’t good.

“Okay, love. I won’t touch it. Just — lie back for me.”

More tears run down her cheeks as she rolls onto her back and Louis grabs her injured leg and elevates it.

“Do you want me to call for medical?” Louis says just as he hears clamoring footsteps nearby and the rest of their tribe congregate around them. He hears Harry’s distressed little sounds and Niall’s muttered curses when they see what’s going on, but he keeps his focus on her. “I’ll do whatever you want me to do, Care.”

Calling medical is always tricky because they could very easily pull you from the game and rob you of any chance you have at a million dollars. Caroline needs to make the decision herself.

He watches her intently as sobs still shake her chest, but before she says anything, Liam steps forward. “Why haven’t you called them yet? Are you crazy?”

Liam looks to the edge of the clearing where the crew is waiting with baited breath, and Louis growls, “Don’t you dare, Payne. It’s her choice to make.”

He looks down at Caroline again, and her eyes meet his. “What’s it gonna be?”

There’s a suspended moment of connection between them, and for the first time Louis can see how much Caroline wanted to play this game. It may not have been the same game that Louis had come
out here to play, but she’d played it her way and Louis respects her for that. The moment ends when Caroline closes her eyes on a sigh and nods. “Call them, please.”

Harry holds her hand while they wait for the medics, and the next half an hour is a whirlwind of tears and goodbyes before Caroline’s gone. Pulled from the game because of a dislocated knee.

Harry’s beside himself, face blotchy and swollen from crying, and the rest of the tribe isn’t faring much better. Caroline may have been lazy, but she was still one of them. The player in Louis reminds him that this also means that they’re down on their numbers advantage. But now isn’t really the time to be thinking like that.

When they get back to camp, Louis ushers them all back to bed with the promise that they’ll all feel better once they’ve had a little more sleep. If he cuddles Harry in a little closer than usual and Harry cries some more into the crook of Louis’s neck, who needs to know?

The atmosphere at camp after that is gloomy at best, so all Louis can hope for is a distraction in the form of a reward or immunity challenge. They could use a win to lift their spirits.

“Looks like we’ve got an immunity and a reward challenge at the same time, and like, that’s kind of scary so close to a merge. Because that has to be coming soon, right?” - Harry, Chapera

They are unstoppable beasts. This is now a fact, and Louis cannot stop smiling about it.

They’d had a combined immunity and reward challenge, and just as it looked like Mogo Mogo was going to pull it off, Louis had gotten the best of Tom in a foot race, which led to victory for his tribe. As soon as Jeff had shouted, “Chapera wins! Immunity and reward!” Niall had jumped on his back with Harry close behind, almost knocking them over.

During their revelling, Louis had spared a glance over at the other tribe and saw their heads bent in defeat, and Mary crying softly. His heart goes out to his friend. It can’t be fun to always be on the losing tribe.

When Jeff had reminded them that they would get to ‘kidnap’ a member of the other tribe to join
them on their reward and save them from elimination, Louis knew it had to be Mary. Harry had backed him up, and the rest of their tribe agreed.

So Mary is here with them on this amazing 300-foot yacht. Louis can’t stop smiling as they all start digging into the chips and dip that’ve brought out for them.

“First, I just want to thank you all for choosing me. I couldn’t be more grateful.” Mary says to the group over the sounds of Niall and Liam jokingly fighting over a chip.

“We’re happy to have you, Mary,” Harry says as primly and politely as someone with dip on his face can manage.

Louis laughs, wipes the dip off Harry’s dimple with his thumb before sucking his thumb into his mouth and smirking at Harry’s expression. Can’t waste food out here, can they?

“Yeah, Mary!” Louis chirps, slinging an arm around her. “You know you’re my girl. I wanted you to eat, too.” He also wanted to get some dirt on Mogo Mogo, but he wasn’t going to press for that just yet.

“Thanks, Boo Bear.” Mary teases, squeezing his middle affectionately. The rest of the tribe snickers at the nickname around their full mouths, but Harry’s face just looks soft and Louis wants to touch him. God. He hasn’t even had any alcohol from the open bar yet.

After they’ve all gorged themselves on the massive buffet of every fattening food imaginable -- Niall just went in with his hands instead of grabbing a plate — they settle on the deck with more alcohol than is probably advisable. It’s exactly what they all needed after losing Caroline.

The tribe is doing a great job of getting information out of Mary, who seems to be fitting in just great with all of them. Louis is glad. He really likes Mary, and he’s glad she’s gotten this far. He just hopes he won’t have to be the one to cut her loose, especially after hearing her gush to Harry about her three kids and what a million dollars could do for her family. Harry eats it up, and Louis feels lightheaded from more than just the alcohol when he hears Harry start to gush about children.

Just as Louis is starting to feel the buzz of alcohol in the tips of his toes, one of the yacht attendants comes out with a set of golf clubs. He shows them the golf tee set up on deck and explains that they can hit biodegradable balls into the ocean.

Harry and Niall start squealing like overexcited puppies, bonding over their shared love of golf as they alternate taking swings with the clubs. And it’s not like Louis is jealous or anything. Definitely not. It’s just that Niall is being a little too friendly with Harry, and Louis doesn’t like it.

“Gimme that.” He grabs Niall’s club and sets up at the tee. He hears a few wolf whistles from the assembled crowd, including Harry’s, so he wiggles his ass exaggeratedly before swinging with all his might and….well, he might be a little more tipsy than he thought because his club goes flying out of his hands and into the water, along with the ball.

The whole deck erupts into laughter. Even though it’s a little humiliating, it’s still funny, so Louis laughs, too. He catches Harry’s eyes, which are filled with mirth and — something Louis can’t quite place — and shrugs.

“I can teach you how to swing,” Harry offers generously, but with a touch of teasing. Louis waves him off. “Nah. I’m going to find another activity. Liam!”

Liam’s head swivels toward Louis at his call. “Yeah?”
“Teach me how to fish. But with a pole, not a stick, yeah?”

Liam jumps up, always eager to please. “Aye-aye, Captain.”

Louis rolls his eyes and starts following Liam down to the lower deck when he doubles back to whisper in Harry’s ear, “Can you hold down the fort up here?”

Harry nods, and Louis can feel his curls against his cheek. It’s not at all distracting.

“I got this. Go catch some fish.” Harry says, before kissing Louis on the cheek and pushing him away playfully.

Louis realizes at any other time, they’d both probably freeze up at such physical contact. It is, after all, the first time that they’ve kissed. Even if it was just on the cheek. But right now, they’re both too loose-limbed and happy to do anything other than smile at each other goofily.

So Louis spends the rest of the afternoon trying to catch a fish with Liam. All he really accomplishes is scaring Liam when he almost hooks him a few times while trying to cast the line. It’s a good afternoon all in all.

As the sun starts to set, they all gather at the bow and pop open a bottle of champagne.

Louis raises his glass. “A toast! To the almighty Chapera. May we continue to beat the socks off of Mogo Mogo — no offense Mary.” She just rolls her eyes as the rest of the tribe chants, “To Chapera,” and clinks their glasses. But then they realize that Niall has already downed his, which sends them all into another fit of laughter.

If someone had told Louis he’d have this much fun with people he’s supposed to be competing against, Louis would’ve called them a dirty liar. He’s glad he would’ve been wrong.

Harry’s eyes meet his over their champagne glasses, and Louis thinks that he’s glad he was wrong about a lot of things.

“This tribe has something that we’re missing over at Mogo Mogo: They’re having fun. They have silly dances and songs, and they’re having a good time. I’m not going to tell my tribe that I fit in over here, but I’m definitely going to tell them about Harry and Louis. They’re running things on Chapera, and if I end up on the bottom, that’s going to be my bargaining chip.” - Mary, Mogo Mogo

“Niall and Harry both like golf, so I guess they’re, like, best friends now — if that.” - Louis (while drunk), Chapera

DAY 20

It’s a day without reward or immunity challenges, so everyone is taking advantage of the free time either by lounging on the beach, taking a swim, or napping in the shelter. Harry takes it upon himself to clean out their ‘kitchen’ area because in the past few days it’s gotten a little messy.

Harry takes pride in the home his tribe has built, and he wants to maintain it as best he can. Niall calls him a domestic goddess, but Harry just calls it practical. No one wants to eat dirt because they haven’t cleaned their pans properly.
Normally, Louis would be sitting by his side keeping him company and helping out when Harry lets him, but he’d wandered off a few minutes ago for a swim. So instead, he entertains himself by listening in on Jesy and Niall’s conversation.

The dynamic between the two of them has been odd since day one — Niall is in constantly awe of her while Jesy views him as something between a pet and a little brother to beat up on. It’s weird, but hilarious.

“Come on, Jes! Please let me braid your hair! It’s so pretty and shiny. Like Disney princess hair!”

“Ugh. No, Niall. My hair is all matted with salt-water if you mess with it, I may never be able to untangle it.”

“Harry lets me play with his hair!”

Harry can almost hear Jesy’s eyeroll. “That’s because Harry is our camp’s indulgent mother. And because he’s part cat.”

Harry can’t exactly disagree to either of those claims. But he’d like to point out that they’d all fallen into the archetypal roles that Survivor sets them up for. Louis is the Leader, Niall is the Joker, Liam is the Hard-Worker, Zayn is the Smart One, Jesy is the Ball-Buster, and Harry is the Mother Hen. The roles don’t truly define them, but they do provide a sort of short hand that helps them interact in the types of tough situations that the game often forces them into.

“Please, Jesy! Pleasepleaseplease!”

“No! Now shut up before I get the machete and cut your dick off, you overgrown baby!”

There’s a slight pause, and Harry looks over his shoulder just to make sure Jesy is actually joking. Because you never know.

He sees Niall literally on his knees in the dirt at Jesy’s feet, looking at her with a strange expression for someone who’d just been threatened with dismemberment.

“I find the way you continuously emasculate me to be inexplicably attractive.”

Jesy’s face sends Harry over the edge and he’s doing his full body, honking laugh that he kind of hates but really can’t help. Niall is his favorite, he swears.

Of course, that’s the moment when his actual favorite swaggers back into camp with Zayn and Liam in tow. “What’s happening over here, then?”

“I just threatened Niall with dismemberment, and I think it turned him on.” Jesy says with a perplexed, but slightly pleased expression.

“Ew, Niall!”

“What? I can’t help it if strong women turn me on.” Niall says, easy as ever. Sometimes, Harry wonders what it’s like to be Niall, who is genuinely chill about everything. He feels like he has no chill most of the time, so he’s a little envious of him to be honest.

Everyone settles around the fire to eat their portion of rice for the day, which Harry hands out as fairly as possible. He doesn’t want anyone to feel like they got less than someone else. That’d be a disaster.
He goes to put the pot back on the fire when he notices just how low it’s gotten. He turns to grab more firewood to fuel it, but there’s only a handful of sticks left.

Before he even opens his mouth, Louis speaks up. “I’m going to go grab some wood.”

“I’ll come with.” Harry offers because he’s not really that hungry. (He is. But they’re always hungry out here, so it doesn’t really make a difference.)

They stroll together into the woods and as Louis starts to kick through the brush, he says, “Lemme show you what to look for, some wood’s better than others”

Maybe Harry’s got his mind in the gutter, or maybe it’s Louis’s fault for bending over to grab some dry wood right in front of him. He’s only human after all. “I’ve been round the block. I know a thing or two about good wood.”

Louis freezes where he is, visibly choking. “Oh really?”

He turns to raise an eyebrow at him, so Harry just shrugs with a smirk and plays it off. “I mean, we are on *Survivor: All-Stars.*”

“You do know how to talk some shit.” Louis huffs and Harry laughs with his head thrown back before putting Louis softly on the bum as he passes.

“Dunno what you were thinking about, Lou.”

Louis spends the rest of the day pinching Harry’s bum in retaliation; Harry regrets nothing.

"I just want it to be known that I've been here from the very beginning. I've seen things that I can never unsee. I'm basically the cruise director for their relationship - just so we're clear." - Niall, Chapera

DAY 21

They win yet another reward challenge, and this time they get to take three items that Zayn selected from Mogo Mogo’s camp when he visited and took inventory earlier that day. They don’t get anything they need, not really, but Liam is beyond stoked about their new fishing gear. And as much as Harry hates to admit it, it definitely adds to group morale that they’ve taken things from the rival tribe.

They’d sent something in return, a gift bag of things they could spare, just to soften the blow. But at the end of the day, Chapera has so many advantages it’s almost funny, and Mogo Mogo knows that.

Harry spares a thought to how boring this season will probably turn out, since it’s such an unfair fight. But then he’s distracted by Louis cackling at Zayn’s description of Mogo Mogo’s shoddy camp — Louis, bless him, expressed sympathy for about half a second before he gave up pretending he was anything but pleased with how poorly they were doing — and he’s too busy laughing with his tribemates to think about it again.

“We’ve got everything, we’ve won everything. This whole game — the whole game — is about
Chapera kicking ass.” - Tommo, Chapera

“If Harry and Louis aren’t already playing kissy face...sucky kissy face...they’re gonna be playing soon. I’ve walked up on them in the middle of the night, and they look so guilty it’s not even funny. I know something’s going on.” - Liam, Chapera

The mood at camp that night is almost celebratory. Jesy and Niall are doing some sort of jig around the fire that they’re trying to teach Zayn and Liam, with Liam earnestly trying to learn while Zayn mostly laughs at them. Harry and Louis are cheering them on from the swing.

Amidst the ruckus, Louis leans in and whispers right against Harry’s ear. “Later, we’re going for a walk.”

Harry’s throat tightens in a gulp, but he manages a nod that he knows Louis can feel in the arm he has draped over Harry’s shoulders. His heart feels like it’s going to jackrabbit out of his chest, and if he was short even one shred of dignity he’d jump up and drag Louis away the second he felt Louis’s lips leave his ear.

But somehow, through immense force of will, he manages to stay tucked into Louis’s side until Niall breaks out the last dregs of whiskey from their stockpile. While everyone is distracted with the prospect of alcohol, Harry untangles himself and stands up, pulling Louis with him as he stumbles away from camp.

They settle on one of the makeshift benches Chapera had set up down the beach when they were first building The Bungalow. Louis pulls Harry into his lap, eyes crinkling at him while Harry loops his arms around his neck. They spend a few minutes like that under the starlight, just pulling faces and whispering to each other about their day, letting the sound of the crash and pull of waves wash over them.

Eventually Louis pinches Harry’s side to make him giggle, and when Harry looks up, breathless from laughing, their faces are much closer together than they’d been before. It’s a little harder to see in the dark, but Harry swears he sees Louis’s face soften when their eyes meet.

“You make me really happy, y’know?” Louis says, corner of his mouth pulling into a small smile. Harry’s helpless to do anything but smile back. “You make me really happy, too,” he says quietly,
hopefully quietly enough that the cameras don’t catch it. Harry feels suddenly protective of this moment; he doesn’t want to share it with anyone.

“Good,” Louis says, matching his voice with Harry’s. He keeps eye contact for another beat, like he wants to try to capture the moment and keep it, but then his smile twists into something more playful and he’s pushing forward to press a kiss right to the tip of Harry’s nose, and the quiet is broken by Harry’s startled laugh.

Louis dusts kisses along Harry’s jaw, then one high on each of Harry’s cheekbones, and one on his left dimple. Harry’s not laughing anymore, but he’s still breathless, dizzy from having Louis this close and having this much of Louis’s focus on him. He’s so, so sure that Louis is going to kiss him properly, and he wants it so badly he’s almost shaking with it.

Instead, Louis nuzzles into his cheek before pulling back so their mouths are a fraction of an inch apart and just hovers there, giving Harry the option, letting the kiss be something Harry can take if he wants.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, there’s a tiny voice telling him that this is maybe a bad move. That Louis might still be playing him, that he shouldn’t lose himself in this and let Louis distract him from the game, that this moment might be broadcast for thousands of people to see. But then he blinks, and it all slips away.

The way Louis is looking at him — Harry can’t feel anything but the warmth that’s spreading from all the places they’re touching. Warmth is exactly the right word for it; it’s not the same sparking heat he’d felt watching Louis build the shelter, but this glowing feeling that swells when they’re together.

It’s the best Harry has felt the whole time they’ve been on this beach, and if he’s honest, maybe the best he’s felt since longer.

So Harry lets his eyes drift shut and closes the distance between them, kisses Louis the way he’s wanted to for a long time now. He’s not sure of anything in this game, but. He has this feeling. If he’s sure of anything, it’s that he wants this with Louis, for however long he can have it.

“Harry is slammin’. He’s sweet, he’s beautiful, he’s funny, he’s got a great personality...his ass is smokin’, too.” - Tommo, Chapera
“It’s crazy because...coming into this game, I never expected in a million years for this to ever happen. And actually, I — I told myself that I wouldn’t really let something like this happen. But...I love having the comfort level of it. And I love — I love that he, you know, keeps me warm at night, and he, um, makes me feel safe out here. I can vent to him, complain to him about anything, and he won’t hold it against me. You’re not ever supposed to feel secure in this game, but with Louis and I...I feel 99.9% secure.” - Harry, Chapera

By the time they make it back to camp, everyone else has gone to sleep. Harry tucks himself back into Louis’s side, resting his head on Louis’s chest and lazily tracing the tattoos that span his collarbones while Louis runs his fingers through his hair, gently sorting the tangles. The last thing Harry registers before drifting off is a sleepy “G’night, love,” and the warm press of Louis’s lips against his forehead.

“It’d be nice to have a million dollars and take the boy away, too.” - Tommo, Chapera
Louis jerks awake to the sound of crashing, and Niall yelling, “Timber!”

Fucking assholes. Louis will never understand Liam and Niall’s need to be up at the asscrack of dawn trying to wake everyone else in the tribe with their shenanigans.

Harry snuffles and buries his face even further into the crook of Louis’s neck, and Louis feels his annoyance melt away. He hides his smile in Harry’s hair and pulls him closer because after last night, Louis just wants to stay close to his boy.

Liam and Niall continue to make a ruckus, causing Harry to stir again, which brings Louis’s annoyance roaring back to life. They’ve been doing this more and more lately and it’s getting old quick. Chapera has plenty of firewood. There is literally no reason for them to be cutting trees down and waking people up. It’s rude.

There’s an unsettled feeling in Louis’s stomach even as he strokes Harry’s hair to lull him back to sleep. It’s a feeling that Louis sometimes gets before a really bad day. Louis scolds himself for being paranoid and tells himself to just enjoy the day, but even after Harry and the rest have woken up and they go about their morning routines, the feeling won’t go away.

“Niall and I are definitely the worker bees on Chapera. I’m not happy for any of them to lay on their asses while we do all the work, but… I can’t go in there and say, ‘Get your ass out of bed and get to work!’ I can’t say that.” - Liam, Chapera

Late in the morning, a little tub of paint arrives in their tree mail with no instructions for what to do with it.

“I think it’s body paint. Like, for us to paint each other for the challenge,” Zayn guesses, and the rest of them agree. Who doesn’t like finger painting?

“Hey, Lou?” Harry approaches, holding out the pot of paint. “Will you paint me?”

“Like one of my french girls?” Louis quips even as he takes the paint from Harry, who just rolls his eyes and giggles.

Louis puts on a faux-serious expression and stands back, bringing his hands up to frame Harry like he’s examining a canvas or setting up a photograph.

“Hmmm. What should I do with this, then? There’s already so much clutter on my canvas!” He says, gesturing to Harry’s collection of tattoos.

Harry pouts. “You said you liked my tattoos.”

Louis steps back into Harry’s space and breathes an “I do,” into his ear before swiping a blob of paint onto one of Harry’s extra nipples, causing him to squeal and try to squirm away, but Louis holds him in place with a hand on his shoulder.

Harry stills, so Louis proceeds to tickle him more than paint him, but eventually leaves an elaborate design stemming from Harry’s butterfly tattoo. Harry looks down at his torso, his nipples decidedly perked in interest, and grins.
“Thanks, Lou.” He looks up with a glint in his eyes. “Now s’your turn.”

Harry ends up chasing Louis for a good two minutes, laughing and yelling the whole time, before pinning Louis to the floor of their shelter and swirling his paint-covered fingers all over Louis’ torso. It’s some kind of delicious torture, having Harry’s hands on him for purely functional reasons. By the time Harry’s done they’re both a little glassy eyed. When they make their way back to the rest of the tribe, Niall taunts, “Ya better not have done anything naughty in the shelter, boys. We all have to sleep in there.”

“Shut it, Ni.” Harry says, cheeks a little pink, but there’s a smile on his face.

Louis wraps an arm around him. “Yeah. Like I would let Harry’s first time be in the dirty shelter. Our Harold is a delicate flower that deserves only the highest romance!” Louis declares dramatically.

Niall almost falls over he’s laughing so hard. Harry elbows Louis in the ribs, still pink despite the unimpressed look he’s trying to level at Louis. “I’m no blushing virgin, Lou.”

Louis sighs at him and flutters his lashes. “But you’re so pretty when you blush.”

“You’re both sickening.” Zayn cuts in, stepping forward to grab the paint still in Harry’s hand. “We need to finish painting before we have to go.”

The mood gets a little more serious as Zayn begins to paint something elaborate on Liam’s chest.

“So, do you think it’s the merge?” Niall asks.

“It’s gotta be, right?” Jesy says from where she’s lying in the sand.

Louis spares a sympathetic thought to Jesy being the only woman on a tribe of rowdy boys, but she seems to be handling it with as much grace as can be expected. She and Harry are downright chummy at this point. Not that Louis is keeping tabs or anything.

That unsettled feeling makes a reappearance in Louis’s chest when Harry says, “You never know. I mean, they keep throwing us curveballs, so this could just be another one.”

Louis sends up a silent prayer that this is the merge. They’re in a perfect position for it right now. They’ve got a numbers advantage on Mogo Mogo, no one is likely to flip to the other side, and he and Harry have the power position in their tribe.

Please, let it be a merge.

“We’re going to the challenge, and we don’t know if it’s a merge, but we know something is going to happen.” - Jesy, Chapera

“Chapera!” Jeff calls as they walk into the challenge area. “Lookin’ good!”

“We had fun,” Harry calls back, and Zayn chimes in. “Thanks for the paint!”

Once they’re settled on the mat, Mogo Mogo is called in.

“Chapera, you’re getting your first look at the new Mogo Mogo. Eleanor voted out at the last tribal council.”
“Good,” Louis hears Liam say under his breath. Apparently the two of them hadn’t gotten along on the former Saboga.

When Louis gets a real look at the other tribe, he realizes that they didn’t paint themselves and are instead carrying their paint with them. Louis wonders for a moment if they weren’t supposed to use the paint, but the look on Jeff’s face reassures him that Mogo Mogo are the ones that look foolish right now, not Chapera.

“So we sent you some paint, and as we can all see, Chapera used it while Mogo Mogo did not. Tommo, is this a sign of team spirit?”

Louis shrugs and tries not to smirk. “Yeah, I guess so. We’re having fun over here — we had fun painting each other.”

Chapera breaks into laughter at that, and Mogo Mogo looks as sad as ever. Good, Louis thinks. The lower their morale is, the better it is for Louis and his tribe.

When Jeff questions Mogo Mogo about not using their paint, they give some bullshit answer about wanting to conserve it, and Louis can’t hold back his disbelieving snort. Harry pinches him in the side for it.

Jeff finally gets down to why they’re here and tells them that they’re going to have one-on-one private conversations with a member from the other tribe. Tom gets to pick first, and he picks Louis, which sucks because Louis can’t stand the guy. Tom is too intense and annoying by half.

On the bright side, they’ll be getting lunch boxes of food to share, and since their tribe has two extra players, Harry and Zayn are paired up. They’ll have a good time at least.

When they sit down, Louis opens the basket and grabs some food, but Tom launches right into game talk. “I’m so ready for us to be merged. I’m ready for all of us to be one tribe, for there to be individual immunity challenges, to really shake up this game.”

He looks like Gollum sitting there all hunched over, eyes wide and just a touch desperate. Louis would love to inform him of just how terribly irrelevant he is to the game, but he keeps his head down and his mouth shut just as Harry instructed.

The rest of their little lunch date passes in much the same way; Tom talks, Louis listens and eats. When they are called back to meet Jeff, he tells them to stand however they want, and Louis feels a zing of excitement because it’s the merge. It has to be.

“Drop your buffs.” Jeff says with a grin and Louis breathes a sigh of relief. He was right. Merge time. He looks down the line and meets Harry’s gaze, giving him a small thumbs up.

Okay. So the first thing they’ll have to do when they get to their new camp is talk to -

Louis’s train of thought turns into white noise when Tom pulls a brand new red buff from the pot. A Chapera buff. What the fuck?

“What? Did you think we were merging?” Jeff says, a smirk clear in his voice. Louis wants to smack the smug look off his face. “We’re just switching things up. Tom is now a member of Chapera.”

Louis’s heart feels like it’s dropped to the sand at his feet. He glances nervously down the line and breathes through his nose. It’ll be fine as long as he pulls the same color as Harry.

Louis pulls Mogo Mogo green, and a flash of anger spikes through him. All of his hard work at
Chapera — gone. In a fucking instant.

“Green looks good on you.” Jeff says tauntingly as Louis walks towards the Mogo Mogo mat.

“No. I like red,” he says, just as he passes by Harry. Harry tries to smile reassuringly, but Louis can tell he’s just as thrown by this new development.

“Tommo, you don’t look happy.”

“Do they get our camp?”

Jeff nods, and Louis shrugs. “Then, no. I’m not happy.”

Niall goes next and picks green, so at least Louis will have someone he likes around. Then Bressie pulls red, and everyone starts to murmur how weird it is that the tribes just seem to be switching colors. Leigh-Anne draws red, Liam draws green, Mary draws red.

Literally nothing has changed, and now Louis is thinking numbers. Chapera had two more members than Mogo Mogo going into this, so the swap was probably meant to even the number of players on each tribe. That means, if things keep going in this trend, one member of the original Chapera will be with the the original Mogo Mogo. And Harry’s going to be the last to draw his buff.

Louis feels like he’s not breathing as Jesy draws green, leaving Zayn and Harry as the last two to draw. One will be red and the other will be green. From the look on Harry’s face, he knows it, too.

“Something about these tribes is meant to be!” Jeff says gleefully. The bastard.

Zayn reaches his hand into the urn — and draws out a green buff.

No. Louis thinks. No. No. No! This isn’t how things are supposed to go, he and Harry are going to the end together. That’s the plan.

But no matter how much Louis’ mind protests, Harry steps forward with a grim set to his mouth and resignation written in the curve of his shoulders and pulls a red buff from the urn.

“Harry will be the only one to remain on his original tribe. Unbelievable.” Louis wishes he could tune Jeff out, but it’s like all his senses are working in overdrive, trying to catch every little detail about Harry, like it’s the last time he’s going to see him, and — fuck, no. That’s not true. Harry will be fine.

Harry walks over to his new tribemates with a smile on his face that is so obviously fake it makes Louis feel a bit sick. Louis watches Harry, but Harry doesn’t so much as glance his way, which — yeah, it hurts, but Louis thinks he gets it. It would be hard for him to look at Harry if he was the one being forced onto a tribe of relative strangers. This has to be so hard for Harry, and Louis just. He wishes he could do something to make it better. He wishes it was him instead.

“Kind of weird, huh, Liam?” Jeff asks.

“Yeah, very weird.”

“Almost like it’s fate?” Jeff is way too fucking pleased about this, and Louis is about two seconds from setting him straight when Liam says, “Well...Harry should be over here.” And Niall chimes in with “Yeah. Harry should be here.”

Louis’s heart throbbs in his chest. Everyone loves Harry; he belongs to their little makeshift family,
and Jeff can’t just take that away.

Louis looks back over at Harry to see how he’s doing, but Harry is looking resolutely at Jeff, face frozen in a half-smile that doesn’t give anything away. His boy is upset, and there’s nothing Louis can do.

Finally, Jeff dismisses them to ‘head out to their new homes,’ and Harry turns towards his old tribe and waves, eyes darting to Louis for a moment. That breaks something in the atmosphere around them, because Niall takes off running and scoops Harry up in a hug, followed closely by Jesy.

Louis finds himself edging closer to their little huddle, and suddenly, Harry is breaking off from them and throwing his arms around Louis’s neck, hanging on for dear life. Louis pats his back, trying to reassure him, even as Harry breathes harshly into his ear.

“You’re gonna be alright.” Louis whispers into Harry ear with more confidence than he actually feels. He squeezes his boy and wills his words to be true. Harry will be okay.

Harry just nods and pets at the back of Louis’s neck like he’s trying to reassure Louis, which makes something heavy settle in his chest as they pull apart.

Walking away from Harry and back to a strange camp is the most emotionally exhausting thing that has happened to Louis since the game began, and Louis wonders if maybe his good luck has run out.

“I definitely feel like I’m the one who got screwed in this whole situation. I was so mad. When Jeff held up the new pot full of buffs — really the main thought that was running through my head was ‘please, just pull the color that Louis pulls.’” - Harry, Chapera

“Welcome to Chapera!” Harry says grandly, making a sweeping gesture toward their camp. “I hope I can make it as comfortable for you as possible.”

For the first few seconds, when everyone is too impressed to do anything but stare and fishmouth in awe, Harry feels a surge of pride at all his tribe managed to accomplish on this beach. It’s safe to say that theirs is one of the best camps in Survivor history. The Bungalow is a testament to how well they’d played the game, tangible evidence of how much they’ve deserved the wins they’ve had.

But then everyone rushes forward and begins helping themselves to anything and everything they can get their hands on, and Harry feels like he’s swallowed an anchor his stomach drops so fast.

He’d hoped that if nothing else, being back in familiar surroundings would make him feel better, but it might actually be worse to be here with people who don’t belong.

“I never thought I’d see toothpaste again!”

“No fucking way, is that a chess board?”

“Holy shit, that’s actually a mattress, we’re actually going to sleep on a mattress!”

He knows these people have had a rough time at their camp. If he were in their shoes, he’d probably run straight to the nearest bottle of shampoo, too. That doesn’t make it any easier to watch.

Tom is fiddling with the instrument Niall had been teaching Zayn how to carve; Bressie is toeing at
the rock garden Jesy had been so proud of; Leigh-Anne is rearranging Liam’s fishing gear; Mary is sifting through the makeshift kitchen he’d spent most evenings in, trying to cook for everyone while Louis did his best to distract him.

Harry feels another pang. Losing his tribemates was horrible, but losing Louis...He thinks he could’ve faced anything the show threw at him, as long as he’d been next to Louis.

There’s no use thinking that way now, though. He’d done this without Louis before, and he can do it again.

He busies himself with showing everyone around camp for the rest of the afternoon, doing his best to help them settle in. He needs to make himself as useful as possible because if the new Chapera loses immunity, Harry is the obvious choice for elimination.

As of right now, his best bet is to encourage the tribe to start playing a post-merge game. The merge can’t be too far off, and once it happens the players will need to think about final numbers and who they want (or don’t want) to be competing against or aligned with in individual immunity and reward challenges.

Maybe he can convince them to vote for someone else in the tribe who’ll be a greater threat post-merge. Or maybe he can promise them a place in his alliance with Louis, since Mary has surely told them about it by now.

Inevitably, his thoughts turn to Louis, who’s probably facing similar situation at Mogo Mogo now that he’s there by himself. The rest of the tribe is probably aware that the merge is coming soon. They won’t need Louis to win tribe immunity challenges anymore; instead he’ll be their biggest competition in the individual challenges. If Mogo Mogo gets sent to tribal, Louis’s name will definitely come up as a possibility for elimination.

Harry does his best to put it out of his mind. He needs to focus on learning the tribe dynamic so he can come up with a plan to save himself.

“*It’s a little strange having everyone here. They’re making themselves at home, and that’s hard, but it’s something I have to get used to. It’s definitely not home without the people who belong here. Kinda sucks.*” - Harry, Chapera

“*Losing Harry and losing our camp all in one fell swoop — we didn’t feel we had much to celebrate.*” - Zayn, Mogo Mogo

The atmosphere at the Mogo Mogo camp is gloomy at best even with the basket of food that had been waiting for them. No one is really talking, and for once, Louis doesn’t feel like being the one to break the silence. He’s too busy thinking about his boy all alone in a nest of their enemies. His heart feels sick with the weight of knowing Harry’s chances — And the fact that he can do nothing about it.

The overwhelming feeling is that he let Harry down, and he can’t stand it.

Louis isn’t stupid. He knew his feelings for Harry had gotten out of hand. But now — being separated — Louis is starting to realize that his feelings might be bigger than this game, which is both terrifying and exhilarating. Mostly terrifying. Especially when Louis isn’t sure what exactly Harry feels.
Liam is stoking the fire with lazy pokes and sad puppy dog eyes when he finally breaks the silence. “It’s a shame Harry’s not here.”

Louis resolutely does not look at anyone, though he feels their eyes on him.

“It is.” Zayn agrees, and in his periphery, Louis sees the rest of his tribe nodding in agreement because — fuck — everyone loves Harry. There’s no denying it. And if Louis was thinking with even a portion of his brain instead of his whole goddamn heart, he would be glad that this happened.

It’s the perfect way to wash his hands of his alliance with a major threat to win the game without having to backstab him in the process. Because Harry is a major threat. As much as Louis has tried to ignore this fact, it doesn’t make it any less true. He should be happy right now. He wants to win the game, right?

Louis shakes his head ruefully. Maybe if he had never played with Harry to begin with things would be different, but now — Now that he knows what it’s like to sleep next to Harry, to have Harry there to calm him down and make Louis enjoy himself...Louis doesn’t think he can play the rest of the game without him.

“They got the shelter. They got the food. They got all the pillows and blankets. All the fishing gear. Everything.” Liam moans, poking the fire a little more vindictively, as the rest of the group maintains their mopey silence.

“Well you know what’s nice about this?” Jesy leans forward, as she chews on some nuts. Louis would love for her to enlighten him to what could possibly be nice about the situation they’ve landed in. “Let them be impressed with all we’ve done. Let them see how well we’ve been living. Maybe that’ll knock them down even further ‘cuz they suck.”

It is a nice attempt, but it falls short of any real comfort. Of course they suck. No question. But even though they hadn’t won hardly any rewards, they now get to reap the benefits, and Louis and his tribe do not. That’s what really sucks.

Normally Louis would be raging about the injustice of it, but honestly...it’s the least of his worries right now.

“I hope he’s alright.” Louis doesn’t mean to speak, but once it’s out, "-I really do.”

“Harry?” Zayn nudges Louis’ knee with his own. “He’s gonna be alright. Just a few days.”

“Yeah! He’s gotta be,” Niall chimes in.

If he’s lucky, goes unspoken.

“If it was me, I would’ve been able to—” What? Louis’s subconscious sneers. You would’ve been voted off for sure. Is that what you fucking want? “-feel a lot better.”

He feels the sympathetic gazes of his tribemates like another weight on his shoulders, and this time no one offers any words of comfort.

There’s only one thing for it. Louis grabs the untouched bottle of wine and takes a long sip. If he can’t do anything, he might as well get drunk and try to forget about it. It’s a solid plan.

He finishes his swig and raises the bottle. “To Harry! Hope he makes it.”

“Yep. Damn straight.” Niall grabs the other bottle.
“He will. He’ll make it,” Jesy says, like she can will it to be so.

After a while more around the fire, they all scatter. Some go to sleep, but Louis wanders down to the rocks at the shoreline and sits sipping at the bottle of wine, looking at the moon like the lovesick fool he is.

He’s very aware of the camera crew set up nearby filming him, but he doesn’t care. His wine-addled brain wonders absently how the editors will cut up his and Harry’s relationship. If they’ll twist it into something it’s not. Or if they’ll broadcast the truth — Louis as the chump that fell for his competitor.

Louis shakes his head, trying to clear it a little. He needs to focus and think of a way to save Harry. He can’t give up now.

And so Louis sits on that rock until the sun starts to peek over the horizon and runs through every possible scenario. By the time he hears the others stirring back at camp, a cold certainty has settled in Louis’ stomach. He knows what he has to do.

“I don’t care that the other tribe has our camp. I don’t even really care that they have all of our possessions. As much as we’re crying about it over here, it doesn’t matter. What aggravates me is they got my boy over there.” - Tommo, Mogo Mogo

DAY 23

The day passes mostly in a blur for Louis if he’s honest.

Even when Liam and Zayn come back to camp with the clue to their next immunity challenge — Survivor trivia from past seasons — Louis can’t bring himself to participate as his tribe starts to study up on the Survivor knowledge. When they ask if he’s okay, Louis blames it on the whole no sleep thing, but if he’s honest with himself, for the first time he doesn’t want to help his tribe win this one.

It was the only solution he could come up with as he sat on that rock last night. The only way to keep Harry safe is to make sure he doesn’t go to tribal council. And the only way to make that happen for sure is to throw the immunity challenge.

So he’s not going to help his tribemates study for the quiz. He’s just going to sit back and hope that the old Mogo Mogo can actually win one for once.

When they’re summoned to the challenge, Louis waits with bated breath to see his boy. Harry comes around the corner and it’s like all the air is punched from Louis’s lungs.

God, he’s beautiful. It takes all the self-control Louis has not to run to Harry, wrap him up in his arms, and never let go. Harry sends him a small private smile that Louis knows is meant to convey that he’s okay, but his eyes are sad and tired.

Jeff doesn’t really give him time to fully recover before he’s diving into the challenge explanation which is as simple as they had guessed. They get a point for every correct answer, and the first tribe to ten points wins.

Louis doesn’t pay Jeff any mind and continues to watch Harry. He can’t help it. Did Harry sleep alright last night? Was it hard to see strangers in their camp? Did Harry miss him at all?
Louis can’t tell much from the back of Harry’s head, but he’d like to think the answer is yes.

The game starts and even though Louis isn’t really paying attention, he can tell that the questions are easy. Both tribes get the first couple of answers right without any problems.

The next one must be a little harder, though, because when his tribe starts whispering about the answer, their eyes turn to him. Louis just says, “I don’t know,” and they move on, but Zayn shoots him a look that says he knows something’s up. That isn’t good. Louis wants to throw the challenge, true, but he doesn’t want his tribe to know that he threw the challenge.

When they get the answer wrong, putting the new Chapera in the lead, Zayn nudges him and whispers, “What’re you doing, bro?”

Louis shrugs but can’t stop his eyes from darting back over to Harry’s curls. Zayn—being Zayn—sees through Louis in a second. “Don’t be stupid, Louis,” Zayn hisses. “Play the game.”

Fuck, but he doesn’t want to.

Zayn grips his shoulder, and Louis forces himself to listen to Jeff’s next question.

The tally for both teams racks up, but they stay mostly even. Both tribes get what is supposed to be the last question right, bringing both their totals to ten, and Jeff announces a tie-breaker.

“Name the first player voted off of each of the last seven seasons in order. You have one minute.”

Louis’s stomach sinks. He vaguely remembers hearing his tribemates reviewing this exact question around the fire at camp. He looks over to where Harry’s head is bowed with the rest of his new tribe and hopes for some kind of miracle.

“Shit.” Niall exclaims under his breath. “Who the fuck was it in season four?”

“I thought we said it was Jaime!” Jesy says, panicked and a little louder than she probably should have.

“Maybe it was Clive?” Liam suggests, and before Louis can really think it through, he’s saying, “It was Sarah.”

Fuck. Why the fuck did he do that?

His tribe all look at him in shock, but then Liam smiles and says, “You’re right! It was Sarah,” and writes it down before Louis can take it back.

Then Jeff’s calling time, and everything’s just moving way too fast for Louis to get a grasp on it. He clenches his fists and hopes that Harry’s tribe got them all right. That they’ll have to answer another tie-breaker, and this time Louis will be able to keep his damn, competitive mouth shut.

“Sarah from season four is correct. Both tribes still have them all correct.” Jeff says, and Niall grins back at Louis like he’s a fucking hero. He feels sick.

“Now, Mogo Mogo has written Justin for season five, while Chapera has Kelly.”

No. Louis already knows what’s coming before Jeff even says it.

“And Mogo Mogo has it right. Mogo Mogo wins immunity!”

His tribemates jump up in celebration, and Louis feels Zayn pull him up into the group hug.
“It seems no matter what color you guys are, this guy belongs to you.” Jeff hands Niall the immunity idol, who dances around with it above his head.

And as much as Louis couldn’t look away from Harry before, now he can’t bring himself to look at him. He failed him. And it will be Louis’s fault if he goes home.

His mind races through a thousand possibilities as Jeff dismisses the other tribe. He feels rather than sees Harry brush past him, and his heart clenches. But just as he’s about to turn and grab Harry, his eyes meet Tom’s and a desperate hope springs to life in his chest.

Maybe-

As Tom goes to walk past him, Louis grabs his arm and murmurs into his ear, “You take care of him, I’ll take care of you. If you can.”

Tom pulls back, shock written on his features, but nods. Louis nods back and lets him go.

It was all he could do. He had to put his trust in other people to keep his boy around now. He just has to hope it’ll be enough.

“I wrote an ‘H’ on my arm for Harry. Trying to keep him with me. All I can do now is wait.” - Tommo, Mogo Mogo

“Mary, please! I’m begging here. Do you need me to get down on my knees for you?” Harry’s dignity is not above begging, which is what it has come to after losing that immunity challenge. Mary shakes her head at him disbelievingly, but Harry knows an opening when he sees one. “I will. I’m doing it.”

Mary’s full on laughing now, and Harry dimples up at her from where he’s kneeling on the ground. He knows that Mary likes him, and he’s going to use every charm he’s got at his disposal if it means staying in this game.

“You know I love you, Harry. I want to help you, but there’s not much I can do. The decision’s been made.” Mary says sadly.
Harry pouts. “Mary. I know you have more sway here. Please. Just — just think about it.”

She hesitates for a moment before patting him on the cheek. “I will, darling. Now get up off your knees before you hurt yourself.”

Harry does as she says, feeling more than a little discouraged as they head back to camp, firewood stacked in both their arms. His mind is racing even as he sits cross-legged in the sand with Leigh-Anne and Bressie, who wave him down when they see him adding his stack to their pile by the fire. He needs to find the crack. There’s always a crack in a tribe, he just needs to figure out what it is.

Louis would know, his traitor mind whispers.

Not ten minutes later, Harry looks up to find Tom watching him expectantly, mouth set in what Harry is sure Tom thinks is a harmless smile.

“Harry, just the person I was looking for! You free to talk for a minute? Alone?”

“Yeah, f’course.”

He brushes sand off his legs and straightens up, before following Tom down the beach. He’d been expecting this all afternoon, ever since they’d lost immunity.

Tom stops when he feels they’re an appropriate distance down the beach.

“Oh, perfect. We can sit here for our chat. You guys really did think of everything when you built your shelter.”

Harry’s throat tightens when Tom settles them on the bench where he and Louis had shared their first kiss. All at once he’s fighting down flashes of memory — Louis warm against his chest, Louis raining gentle kisses along his jaw, Louis’s hands in his hair, Louis holding his wrists tightly, Louis crinkling at him, eyes bright. “You make me really happy, y’know?”

He blinks once and forces himself to smile back easily as he takes his place on the log. “Thanks.”

“Now Harry,” Tom begins, turning himself on the bench so he’s facing Harry directly. “I’m sure you know why I wanted to speak with you.”

Harry nods, face neutral.

“I try to tell everyone in person, I don’t want anyone being blindsided. I try to play this game with integrity.” He pauses, probably for dramatic effect. “We’re voting you out tonight. It’s nothing personal. It just makes more sense for my game—” He quickly corrects himself, “—our game, to vote off the outsider. I don’t like making these decisions, but I have to. Things haven’t been as easy here as they have been on your tribe.”

Harry hears the hint of condescension in his voice, the self-importance that Tom probably thinks passes for confidence.

“We’ve had to make sacrifices,” he continues. “I think you’re a lovely person, but I have to do what’s best for us.”

Harry draws his knees to his chest, cocking his head to the side thoughtfully like what he’s about to say has only just now occurred to him. His heart thuds loudly in his chest, but he keeps his voice light.
“Is that really the best move for you, though?”

“C’mon, Harry. I know a scramble when I see one,” Tom says, but he inches forward the slightest bit, and Harry catches it.

Harry shrugs one shoulder, the corner of his mouth tugging into a self-deprecating grin. “Yeah, I wanna stay in the game,” he says. No point in denying it. “But like. I think keeping me here is good for your game.”

Apparently Tom can’t resist a good hook. He fixes Harry with one of the creepy stares Harry had seen him use on Louis when they’d been paired off for one-on-one conversations, right before Harry’s tribe had been switched out from under him. They had been out of earshot, yes, but the distance hadn’t made Louis’s gravity-defying eye rolls any less obvious. Tom had looked so eager, so sure he could impress Louis with whatever he had to say-

Suddenly, Harry realizes the best way to frame this.

“The merge is happening any day now. Everyone knows that you’re the one calling the shots on this tribe. I know for a fact that Louis considers you a major threat. He’s kept an eye on you the whole game.”

Yeah right. Louis’s probably over at the Mogo Mogo camp bursting into laughter for no reason, scoffing at the mere mention of something so blatantly untrue. Despite the precariousness of the situation, Harry has to bite down a smile at the thought.

“You’ve seen how good Louis is at immunity challenges,” Harry says slowly. “Maybe he’ll slip up at one point, but he’s probably going to be untouchable so long as he’s playing. You won’t be able to vote him out. But he knows that if he messes up even once, if he loses just once, you’ll have enough sway to be able to vote him out. That makes him nervous.”

He pauses, looking out across the ocean and biting his lip in thought. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Tom track the movement.

“But Louis and I are in an alliance. I’ve seen how hard you’ve worked to lead your tribe. I know you deserve to be in this game. And I think I could convince him that you’re more valuable with us than against us.”

It comes out confident; Harry knows as he’s saying it that it’s true. Louis trusts him. Louis would listen, if Harry asked.

“You’re going to have to vote off one of your own soon anyway. You might as well do it now, when it’ll help you secure a position in final numbers and they won’t be on the jury. Between you, me, and Louis, we’ll never lose an immunity challenge. We can protect each other up until the final three, and then we’ll know we’ll be playing against people who deserve to be there.”

Tom’s eyes are all but shining now, so Harry goes in for the kill.

“I get why you think voting me out would be for the best. But in this game, big moves get big payoff. A big move now would be a game-changer. If I were you, I’d start thinking about who on your tribe wants you voted out. Because soon they’ll get their chance, unless you have people watching your back.”

Tom is silent for a beat before huffing out a breath, scrubbing a hand over his face.

“You’re something, you know that?” He says finally. “You’ve got a lot of spunk.”
Harry fixes him with his brightest, most charming smile.

“I appreciate your honesty,” Tom continues. He stands up, stretching his arms over his head. “You’ve given me a lot to think about. I’ll be honest with you, too, though: I don’t think this is enough to justify saving you. But I’ll think it over. If I decide you’re right, you might find yourself still in this game after all.”

He turns to walk away, but looks back over his shoulder at Harry. “Just to be clear, though. We’ve already decided to vote you out. If by some miracle you stay, it’s down to me. You’ll owe me.”

He turns on his heel and starts back toward camp. Harry lets out a deep breath, fingers clenching around the wood of the bench.

As strange as it is, being alone the past few days has changed the way he thinks about the game.

Right now, the best he can do is focus on making it past today. There are too many people still in the game for winning the million dollars to be his incentive. But if he manages to save himself, that’s one more day he’ll have to spend with Louis.

Harry might only have hours left in Panama. He might not see Louis again until after this is all over, and who knows how things will be then? Maybe it won’t change anything for Louis, or maybe he’ll ditch Harry as soon as he realizes he has a whole world full of people who would be lucky for him to so much as smile their way.

So Harry latches onto the thought of getting back to Louis, foolish as that may be, because right now it feels like the whole game depends on it. Like the million dollars isn’t even a possibility without Louis in the picture — or, more accurately, like winning a million dollars wouldn’t be enough without Louis next to him the whole way.

He could be back with Louis by tomorrow if he plays his cards right, and the thought alone makes his stomach swoop.

Harry sighs, standing to follow Tom’s footprints back toward camp. Leigh-Anne is the next likely target, and somehow in the next few hours he needs to convince everyone that it’d be in their best interests to vote their own tribe mate over him.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! x.

If you're enjoying it, you can find the Tumblr post here.

You can follow us at lookatyourchoices and winingandcrying.
Things can always get worse. That’s the general rule when you’re playing a game like *Survivor*; a rule that Louis had lost sight of after dominating for so long. But after watching Harry walk out of that last immunity challenge, every hour feels more tortuous than the last — and he has to wonder if this is some sort of karmic retribution.

So Day 24 had passed in a haze of self-loathing and moping. Louis is sure he’s been downright unbearable to be around — even Niall gave up at some point — but he can’t help it. Not knowing what’s happened to his boy eats him up worse than any sand mites ever could. If he were at all poetic, he might compare it to someone taking away his sun or, like, walking around with just one shoe. But he’s not, so.

Logically, Louis knows that if Harry is gone, he can’t just give up on the game. He still has a chance — maybe even a better one without Harry. But the thing is...even thinking about going another fourteen days without him is hard. Louis doesn’t know if wants to do it. (It’s not in his nature to quit, and he won’t. But the fact that it even feels like he wants to means Louis has some serious thinking to do.)

Over the time he’s been separated from Harry, he’s come to the conclusion that he doesn’t care if what he’s feeling is too big or too fast for someone he met in a reality tv competition. That doesn’t matter. What matters is that Louis does feel this way for this boy, and he’s going to do whatever he can to keep it.

If Harry’s still here, that is.

His tribemates all treat him with care when they receive the tree mail summoning them to a reward challenge. There’s also a hint to a merge, and Louis just manages not to throw a fit at the producers hiding behind the tree line. If they merge now and Harry is gone because of the stupid tribe swap, Louis won’t be responsible for his actions.

As they’re gathering their things to go, Jesy approaches him gently like he’s some sort of skittish animal. “Hey, Louis. How are you doing?”

Louis shrugs in response. What is there to say, really?

Jesy leans in and continues in a half-whisper. “Listen, I know this isn’t what you want to be thinking about, but I could be your partner going into the merge if you want. I know we didn’t start off that great, but I think we could work together — maybe bring Niall in. Have a solid three.”

Louis knows he should be listening and that she’s bringing up good points, but he really just doesn’t
want to hear it.

“Sure, yeah. Let me think about it.”

“Yeah, of course. You just let me know.” She backs off quickly, giving Louis the space he needs.

The mood on the walk to the challenge is subdued, and Louis spares a moment to feel the tiniest bit bad about casting a cloud over the tribe’s spirits.

They reach Jeff, and Louis doesn’t feel the least bit bad about trying to bore a hole in his absurdly smug face with the force of his glare. Probst and him are not cool, and he wants him to know it.

Jeff gives them the perfunctory welcome but seems to sense what they’re all waiting for and doesn’t stall before he calls in the new Chapera. “Mogo Mogo getting their first look at the new Chapera.”

Louis wrenches his neck trying to spot Harry’s signature curls, and for a heart-stopping moment, they are nowhere to be found.

But then — Harry rounds the corner and their eyes meet and it’s like the first ray of sunshine after days of rain. An uncontrollable smile bursts onto Louis’s face and he sees it mirrored on his boy’s dumb, adorable, perfect face.

“Leigh-Anne voted out at the last tribal council.” Jeff informs them, but Louis only has eyes for Harry now. He’s never letting him out of his sight again.

“He made it.” He whispers under his breath, but it’s drowned out by Niall’s whoop of joy and Zayn’s disbelieving laugh. This moment feels surreal, like it’s glowing. Like it’s fate.

Louis can’t tear his eyes from Harry, drinking him in like it’s been eighty-four years since he’d last seen him, and from what he can tell, Harry’s looking at him the same way, which just makes everything a thousand times better.

There have been a lot of emotionally charged moments since they’ve been out here, but Louis thinks that this tops them all. And not being able to touch Harry on top of that — it makes the air around him feel electric with longing.

There’s some stuff about a reward challenge, and Jeff explains that it will be their first individual game. Louis only tunes in when Jeff mentions the reward being a spa day. He knows enough about Survivor to know that whoever wins will be able to bring at least one other person with them. He’s going to win this thing and bring Harry with him. They deserve a break. It could be, like, a date.

Once more the Survivor gods choose to spit on Louis though because it’s a….really difficult challenge. And Liam wins. Louis might just want to strangle him a bit for beating him in the last ten seconds when Louis was way too out of breath to dive down again even though he could hear Harry encouraging him.

Whatever. Liam could still pick Harry to go the reward. He’s been through a lot and if Liam knows what’s good for him, he’ll choose Harry to go. Louis tries to convey this through a series of glares and facial expressions, but Liam just looks confused, so he gives up.

Liam picks Zayn to go, which, okay. Fair enough. Zayn is Liam’s closest ally.

But then Jeff says Liam can take one more person, and Liam looks at Louis quickly before saying, “Well, he’s been through a lot these past couple of days, and I’ve missed him. So, Harry.”
Harry glances back at him, and Louis gives him his warmest smile. His boy deserves to be pampered. It doesn’t matter that they’ll be separated for a few more hours. They’ve got the rest of the game ahead of them now.

Harry smiles back before throwing himself at Liam and Zayn for a group hug. It’s cute. Louis is only a little upset that he isn’t part of it. That’s how much he loves Harry.

Shit.

Shit.

He loves Harry.

As he watches the three of them board the helicopter and fly away, Louis thinks it might be a good thing he has a few hours to sort through this new information.

“I mean... it was a little hard to watch Harry fly away right after I got him back, but I’m glad Liam picked Harry. After all he’s been through, he needs a little pampering and relaxation. I hope they have a good time.” - Tommo, Mogo Mogo

Liam is the first to climb into the helicopter, bounding into it like an over-excited puppy. He pulls Zayn and then Harry in after him. Harry feels like he’s tripping over himself saying thank you, but when Zayn and Liam start talking with the film crew, Harry tunes them out in favor of watching the trees shrink below them as they take off. He tries to follow Louis walking back to Mogo Mogo’s camp, the bill of his snapback a bright red dot against the sand. He turns back to their conversation only when the beach is a distant line across the ocean.

Liam is apologizing profusely, face crumpled and puppy-dog eyes trained on Zayn.

“I’m so sorry, I didn’t know you were afraid of heights! What can I do, how do I help?”

Zayn gives a jerky nod, hand tightening like a vice around Liam’s forearm. “’S’fine. You’re fine.”

“We’ll be landing soon,” Harry says slowly, offering a hand that Zayn immediately squeezes. “Can’t be far now.”

“Let’s play a game! Cloud-spotting! We’re looking down on the clouds, and I see a cumulus one! Look how fluffy it is! Or maybe those are stratus… Come to think of it, I don’t quite know how to identify clouds correctly…”

Zayn’s face begins turning a shade of green, so Harry interrupts Liam before he can get too far.

“That’s alright, Li,” Harry says gently. “Maybe it’s best if we don’t draw attention to the fact that we’re in the air…”

They spend the rest of their time in the helicopter talking about whether it would be better to brush their teeth or wash their hair first, since Zayn and Liam have been at Mogo Mogo’s camp and gone without shampoo and toothpaste for the last few days. The prospect cheers Zayn up enough that he looks marginally better by the time they land.

They’re only at the spa for one night, but they make the most of it. Harry has the first shower while
Liam stays outside with Zayn so he can get some fresh air. Harry takes half an hour, shampooing twice and conditioning three times. When he finally emerges his face is flushed from the heat and his skin’s gone pruney from the water, but for the first time in twenty-five days he feels like he’s managed to get all the sand off him. To his delight an array of hair and skin products are waiting for him on his dresser, so while Zayn and Liam take their own showers, Harry applies lotions and lip balms and leave-in conditioners to his heart’s content.

After everyone else has showered, the three of them go and get massages, and then Zayn and Harry get exfoliating facials while Liam stays back to take a nap. Harry snacks on bananas the whole day and orders sangria and the biggest salad he’s ever seen for dinner.

That night when they return to their rooms, Harry fusses at them until everyone changes into their complimentary bathrobes so he can send their clothes to the laundry. They turn the air conditioning all the way up and fall asleep under piles of warm blankets. Harry would say it’s the most comfortable he’s ever been, but he knows what it feels like to fall asleep next to Louis.

He’s grateful to Liam for bringing him here, because as much as he’d tried to ignore it, living with another tribe had been exhausting, and it was good to spend time with Zayn and Liam again. In missing Louis he’d almost forgotten how much fun they were, how easily they got along.

Maybe it’s because Harry’s been hearing stories about Louis all day, or maybe it’s because the merge has to be any day now so they might actually be together again soon, or maybe it’s because the last time Harry had seen Louis, Louis looked over the moon at the prospect of Harry being chosen for a spa day. Whatever it is, a part of Harry is still restless, and he’s pretty sure he won’t feel completely at ease until he’s back with Louis.

The fact that he can literally be at a spa and still wish for sand and heat and bug bites, so long as it’s with Louis, should maybe set off some alarm bells. Instead Harry just has this glowing feeling in his chest, and he lets that carry him to sleep.

**DAY 26**

The helicopter picks them up shortly after noon. They’re mostly quiet on the ride back, until a stretch of beach Harry has never seen before comes into view. He can just make out groups of people standing on red and green blankets.

When the beach comes into better focus as the helicopter goes in to land, Liam and Zayn both groan loud enough to be heard over the chopper.

“Can’t believe we’re back on this godforsaken beach…” Zayn says tiredly.

“This is the merge, it’s gotta be,” Liam says, scrubbing a hand over his face. “They’re actually gonna make us live here again, aren’t they?”

It registers somewhere in Harry’s brain that they must be at Saboga’s beach — he’d almost forgotten the tribe had ever existed — but mostly he’s too busy trying to find his chill. He can’t actually run into Louis’s arms as soon as the helicopter touches the beach, even though it would probably make great television. Until they draw new buffs, he’s still on Chapera, and he needs to act like it.

So when they’re given the signal to climb out of the helicopter, Harry only lets himself take a passing glance at Mogo Mogo. Jesy is punching Zayn in the arm (“It’s not fair! You’re prettier than I am!”), Niall has Liam in a headlock, and Louis. Louis is beaming at him, black tank tight as ever, arms
crossed over his chest in a way that accentuates his biceps and hair sticking haphazardly out from beneath the snapback that he’s shoved off his forehead. Louis winks when he catches Harry’s eye, and Harry has to slide his eyes back to Chapera, biting his lip to keep from smiling too hard as he goes to stand with his tribe. They greet each other in a flurry of hugs and cheek kisses, and once Harry is settled beside Tom, Jeff addresses them.

“Welcome back, Harry, Zayn, Liam.”

They chorus hellos before Jeff nods over to Harry, a mischievous gleam in his eyes.

“How I say Harry, you’re positively glowing. Amazing what a day at the spa can do.”

“Why thank you, Jeff,” Harry says, dimpling at him. “I’m sure you’d know. Isn’t that where you stay while we’re roughin’ it on the beach?”

Jeff laughs, then turns to Louis to ask for the immunity idol back without giving Harry an answer. Typical.

“Alright, everyone. The game’s changing again. Everyone drop your buffs.”

Harry pulls it free from where he’d been using it to hold back his curls, heart racing as he drops it as his feet. Surely this time they’re actually merging.

Jeff takes an urn off a table to his left and presents it to Louis. “Go ahead and pull your new buff, Tommo.”

“This better not be another tribe mix-up, or so help me, Jeff,” Louis begins, before letting out a whoop when he sees his buff isn’t the green of Mogo Mogo or the red of Chapera, but instead a royal blue, signifying the creation of a new tribe.

Everyone immediately starts cheering and clapping and hugging each other, but Harry doesn’t let himself celebrate until Jeff calls out “It’s the merge color!” over their shouts. As soon as he does, Harry is laughing a bit hysterically and letting Tom pull him into a group hug before Jesy grabs his hand to drag him away.

She doesn’t get the chance to hug him because suddenly a huge weight is colliding with his back and a pair of wiry arms are clinging to his shoulders. “HARREH! HARREH YOU’RE BACK!”

Jeff starts speaking before Niall gets off him, so Harry just hoists him a little higher to get a better grip on his legs as Jeff explains how the merge is going to work.

“You will not be returning to Chapera. You will not be returning to Mogo Mogo. You will live your remaining days right here on Saboga Beach. It’s a little different from when you left it. Strong tides, heavy storms, pretty much wiped away your...shelter.” Harry hears Zayn snort at that and almost wishes he could see what their old shelter had been like.

“The timber’s still here. Your toolbox is still here. Some of your pots are scattered around here. You’re gonna have to scavenge, you’re gonna have to find this stuff, but you can build shelter again. Tommo’s here, he’s proven he knows what he’s doing. And cause you guys have shown you can survive out here over the last twenty-six days, we’ve decided you do deserve a little bit of a house warming gift.”

He shows them the two Hawaiian slings they’ve been given for fishing, a tarp, and paint for a new tribe flag before he dismisses them.
Niall slides off his back and pulls him into a hug. “Missed you, bro,” he says. When he straightens, he’s smirking at something over Harry’s shoulder. “And now,” he says, clearing his throat, “I’m gonna go look at that very interesting thing over there that needs my attention. Right now.”

People are slowly but surely trickling toward the toolbox, still too excited about the merge to start having conversations about fire or water or where to build the shelter. So when Harry turns to find Louis standing only a few feet away, they’re relatively alone on the beach.

Harry’s a little breathless at the sight — Louis is just standing there, golden and bright as ever, smiling at him with this soft look on his face. His hand twitches like he’s about to reach out, but he stills at the last second.

“Hey,” He says quietly. His lips momentarily press into a thin line before he’s back to smiling like he just can’t help it.

“Hi,” Harry says. He’s not really one to talk — his whole face hurts from grinning. “Miss me?”

Louis barks out a laugh, eyes crinkling up at the corners, and Harry had missed that so, so much he actually feels his heart clench with it. He doesn’t know who moves first, but soon his arms are wrapped around Louis’s waist and Louis’s arms are wrapped around his neck and somehow Harry feels dizzy and grounded at the same time, but it’s the best he’s felt in days.

They’re quiet for a moment, until Louis huffs out a breath against Harry’s shoulder. “You have no idea.”

They’ve probably surpassed the acceptable amount of hugging time, but neither of them seem to care. Louis weaves his fingers into the clean hair at Harry’s nape and whispers, “God, you smell good,” before chuckling and saying, “I stink. I’m sorry,” and trying to pull away. Harry doesn’t let him though.

“No. I like the way you smell.”

Louis’s laugh is louder this time, but just as genuine. “That’s a little gross, H, but if that’s what you’re into…”

“Shut up, Lou.”

“Yeah, okay.”

Harry presses his smile into the crook of Louis’s neck and sighs. They have a lot to talk about now that they’re back together — they have to regroup, figure out a new strategy to navigate a merged tribe, decide which of their many alliances to prioritize, make sure the others aren’t trying to vote them off. But right now the most important thing for Harry is to keep being held by Louis, and he thinks Louis agrees.

“When it came time to come up with a tribe name, I knew it was my moment to shine. I’ve always wanted to make up the most ridiculous tribe name - just to make Jeff say it a bunch of times. I think I succeeded.” - Niall, Chabogamoga

Several hours later, Harry’s trying to reassemble a kitchen from what’s left over of Saboga’s camp when Louis strolls up during his break from coordinating the construction of their new shelter.
“Chabogamoga, honestly. The shit Niall comes up with,” Louis is saying. Harry’s busy scanning the beach, but he knows exactly the face Louis’s pulling, and he feels a corner of his mouth tug up involuntarily. He’s pretty sure he hasn’t stopped smiling since the merge.

“I think it’s great,” Harry says. “We can make a great chant with that. Make a dance for it and everything.” He tilts his head and hums thoughtfully. “Maybe to the tune of ‘La Cucaracha?’”

Louis rolls his eyes at him, but doesn’t manage to keep the fond out of his voice. “Figures, you’d think anything Niall said was great.”

“Jealousy doesn’t suit you, Lou.” Harry says primly.

“I’m not jealous,” Louis scoffs. “All I’m saying is that you have a bad back, Haz. You can’t just go around giving piggy back rides to anyone who asks.”

“It was literally less than a minute! M’not gonna break.” Harry says, going for exasperated but unable to sound anything but fond.

“Might’ve done if you’d held him any longer,” Louis sniffs, like what he’s saying is perfectly reasonable.

Harry sighs, shaking his head at him. “Pretty sure we have more important things to talk about right now.”

“Right,” Louis says, immediately focused. “Alright, here’s what needs to happen. We have to get rid of Tom.”

Harry startles at that; he knew it would have to happen, but not at the very first vote. “Why can’t we go for someone like Bressie first?”

Louis looks surprised at the suggestion. “You know we can’t.”

“I just,” Harry says slowly. “Tom’s the reason I’m here, y’know? Can’t we, like — vote him out next time?”

“What, you get Stockholm Syndrome over there or something?”

“He’s gonna be on our jury,” Harry points out. “He’s gonna be one of the people who decides whether or not we get a million dollars, and you told him you’d do your best to save him. If we vote him out now he’ll have a chip on his shoulder. It’ll look better if we wait, even if it’s just for one tribal council.”

Louis sighs. “Tom is our biggest threat. He was their center over at Mogo Mogo. They follow his lead. If he wins an immunity challenge, he could get everyone to write our names down.”

Harry doesn’t say anything, so Louis continues. “Leigh-Anne’s not here anymore, so we don’t have to worry about Jesy switching sides. And once Tom’s gone, Bressie won’t have a leg to stand on. We’ll just have Mary and our people to worry about, make sure they don’t talk to each other too much.”

The thing is, Louis isn’t wrong. It sucks, but voting out Tom is the best move they can make right now. They might not get another opportunity anytime soon, and who knows what the tribe dynamics would be like by then? It would be foolish of them to wait. And if Harry’s honest with himself, Tom should’ve known better. He’s grateful that Tom made the call that he did, of course, but strategically speaking it was a bad move. If he’d voted Harry out, Louis would’ve lost his biggest ally and Mogo
Mogo would’ve have numbers on their side when it came to the merge.

Louis reaches out and takes a hold of Harry’s wrist, squeezing it once. “Look, I know this is hard,” he says, voice gentled. “I don’t like that we have to do this. I said I’d do my best, and if I thought there was another way to do this, I would. But this is a game, and we’re here to win, and this is what I have to do to protect us.”

He pulls them to a stop, turning to face Harry. “But…” He squeezes Harry’s wrist again, and doesn’t continue until Harry has made eye contact. “I’m not gonna do anything unless you agree. I really do think this is our best bet. But if you want to do something else, we can. We won’t do anything you don’t want to.”

The fact that Louis would be willing to make a move he doesn’t

Voting out Tom is the smartest move they can make right now. Harry might not like it, but it’s true. And Harry has Louis to look out for, not just himself. Louis is willing to let Harry make a different call because he trusts that Harry will do what’s best for them both. It would be a betrayal of that trust if Harry asked Louis to do something that could potentially cost them the game just because he’s uncomfortable, especially when Louis’s plan is better strategy.

Harry nods once, letting out a breath. “Alright. You’re right. We’ll vote him out.”

Louis doesn’t say anything for a second, eyes searching Harry’s face. “You sure?”

“Yeah. I’m sure.” Harry twines their hands together between them, pulling Louis back toward camp. Tribal is in a few hours, and Harry knows it’s going to be a rough night. At least they’re in it together.

“Tommo is a conniving, backstabbing liar and I can’t believe I sacrificed my game for his freaking boyfriend! I feel sick about this. Totally sick. They can’t get away with this.” - Tom, Chabogamoga

“I can’t believe Tommo is doing this. I thought he was a good kid. Obviously, I was wrong.” - Mary, Chabogamoga

Sitting at tribal council is very uncomfortable. It’s always uncomfortable, sure, but Louis should feel like he’s on top of the world. He’s got his boy by his side, the immunity necklace around his neck, and he’s about to oust the biggest pain in the ass from the game. But…

After everything that went down at camp today, Louis feels pretty shitty. After weeks of playing the hero, it sucks to have to be the bad guy. No matter how many times they reiterate that this is a game, people’s feelings still get hurt. And as much as Louis plays up the asshole bravado, he takes no pleasure in hurting other people. Hearing the things Mary had to say to and about him is especially hard. He’s just glad he has Harry by his side to remind him what he’s doing this for.

The air is somber even before it begins to rain, and Jeff takes a break from the usual questions to say, “I just want to give you all a hug! Man, you guys look awful.” And normally, Louis would roll his eyes at such a remark, but all he can do is shiver.

He needs to say something, he knows. It might not change people’s opinions of him, but he needs to
let them know that he’s not doing this to be spiteful. “I have something I want to say, Jeff.”

“Go ahead.”

“I know we’re out here playing a game, but I also know these emotions are real. Feelings are real out here, and regardless of what happened today, I just want everybody to know that if I’m your friend, I’m your friend.” He looks at Tom as he says this because a bitter juror is the last thing he wants. “And if after this is over, you don’t want to be my friend, then there’s nothing I can do about that. But I hope we can all move past what happens in this game.”

Tom nods, but he won’t look Louis in the eye. It was worth a shot.

Jeff asks him if he’s going to give up his immunity necklace, and if Louis weren’t feeling so miserable, he would laugh. Hell would freeze over before he’d give up his necklace.

The voting goes according to plan, and though it hurts to see Harry’s name written down as a way to get to him, Tom is still the one whose torch gets snuffed.

The walk back to camp is silent, and when they lay down to sleep, Harry curled against his front, Louis can hear Mary’s sniffles and his heart twists in his chest.

The producers must be happy. He’s finally fulfilled his promised role as the villain. It makes Louis feel dirty and not a small bit horrible.

Harry must sense something from his tense muscles because he rolls over so that their noses are brushing and says, “Hey.”

“Hey.” Louis ducks his head, not feeling worthy to look Harry in the eye.

“Stop that.” Harry tuts and grabs his chin so that they’re looking at each other once more. “You did nothing wrong.”

“I’m still the bad guy.” Louis shrugs and laughs a little wetly, which is stupid. He shouldn’t cry over this.

“You’re not.”

“I am, though.” Louis shakes his head again and scoots back, putting some distance between them. “Just because you refuse to see it doesn’t mean it’s not true. And just because I did it for you doesn’t make it right. For the record, you didn’t want me to vote Tom out either.”

“Yeah,” Harry’s voice is soft, his eyes gentle, as he reaches out a hand to card through Louis’s hair. “But Lou, you were right. It had to be done, and we made the decision together. So if you’re a bad guy, then I’m a bad guy, too.” When Louis opens his mouth to protest, Harry cuts him off. “Look, we’re all just doing the best we can out here, okay? It doesn’t make us good or bad. You’re just protecting the people you gave your word to from the start, and that’s a good thing. You might have to do bad things to keep those promises, but it doesn’t negate the good, alright?”

Harry pulls Louis back in and snuggles him to his chest. Louis begins to breathe harshly, his throat closing up and his eyes prickling dangerously. “I don’t know how much my opinion matters to you, but you’re good to me. So good for me. And it hurts me to see you so unsure of yourself when I know how good you are.”

“You’re all that matters.” Louis’s voice comes out rough against the warmth of Harry’s chest. “You’re everything.”
Harry grasps him tighter. “Well then, you did the right thing, okay? Now that Tom is gone, nothing and no one can stop us.”

“I won’t let them take you away from me again.” Louis promises, his voice still coming out harsher than he intends.

“I’m not going anywhere.” Harry says, stroking his back soothingly. “Now, get some rest.”

Louis closes his eyes, releases the tension from his body, and does as he’s told.

“Now that Tom’s gone, I’m surely going next if I don’t win immunity...so basically this is the end for me. I don’t know if I’ll be able to forgive Tommo for doing this.” - Mary, Chabogamoga

“Voting Mary off is gonna be hard because she was like a second mom to me out here the last time. But...if you’re not with me and Harry, you’re against us.” - Tommo, Chabogamoga

Sometime in the early hours of the morning, Harry had woken to the sound of rain. The two of them were still as intertwined as they’d been when they’d fallen asleep, Louis’s head on Harry’s chest and Harry’s arms wrapped around him securely, their legs tangled together under the blanket. He’d been afraid that he’d wake Louis when he extricated himself as carefully as he could to rearrange the blanket over them, but Louis had just snuffled a bit until Harry pulled him back in.

Harry is painfully aware of what a giant sop he’s being, but he’s so far gone at this point that he can’t find it in himself to care all that much. He has one hand fit into the small of Louis’s back and the other at the nape of his neck, fingers running through the soft hair there, and he can honestly say that there’s no where he’d rather be. It occurs to him that sometime soon he’s going to have to give this up. That he might gain air conditioning and real food and his own bed, but he could lose having this with Louis every night, that he might never have it again after all this is over.

He’s had year-long relationships with people and never trusted them as much as he trusts Louis, never felt as safe as he does Louis. Some of that is probably down to the fact that this game makes every feeling more intense. Maybe this would’ve happened with whoever he’d made an alliance with. Or maybe if he and Louis had met outside the game, they wouldn’t be able to make the same kind of connection they have now. All Harry knows is that he’s unbelievably lucky to have been able to do this with Louis, and he wouldn’t do it any other way.

Harry had tightened his hold on him, pressing a last kiss to his temple before forcing himself to sleep by matching his breathing with Louis’s. When he’d blinked awake hours later, he’d been on his back, Louis hovering over him, chin propped up on a fist on Harry’s chest.

He’d gotten a soft smile, a sleepy “Morning, sunshine,” and a chaste kiss before he’d registered that it was still raining.

It hasn’t stopped all day.

When they arrive at the reward challenge scheduled for the day, they’re forced to huddle under an impromptu tarp tent the producers had clearly scrambled to throw together right at the last minute. The real tent is set up over Jeff and a TV.
“Afternoon, survivors. Looks like you’ve had some trouble staying dry,” Jeff says by way of greeting.

Again, he looks far too cheerful when faced with their misfortune.

“We’ll get to the reward challenge in a bit, but first we’re going to give you a taste of what you’re playing for. I have with me today a video message and letter addressed to each of you, sent by a family member or friend. We’ll watch the winner’s video together, and they’ll be able to take their letter back to camp.”

The tent erupts into tiny gasps and murmurs as it sinks in. Every single one of them could use that right now. Harry’s tearing up just at the thought, and next to him Louis is grinning so hard it looks like his face might split.

Jeff gives them a moment before talking over them. “Before we play, I’m going to play a montage of tiny clips — and I mean tiny, they’re only a few seconds each — from your videos. Sound good?”

Part of Harry thinks it’s more cruel than kind of the producers to have them to compete right after dangling something so huge in front of them, but mostly he’s excited at the thought of getting to see someone he loves. People are mostly quiet as a member of the film crew sets up the video, but Harry makes a point of scooting his chair closer to Jesy so she’ll have a hand to hold during her parents’ video.

Once everyone is settled, Jeff hits play on the video. Harry’s tearing up within seconds just from secondhand emotions. A more detached part of his brain notes how fascinating it is to see glimpses of these people’s real lives, the lives they’ll go home to after this game ends. It’s finally like looking into a mirror you’ve passed every day and seeing an entirely different world in the reflection.

Louis’s video is somewhere in the middle. He lets out this choked-off laugh as soon as the video comes into focus. On screen there are four girls of various ages, two babies propped up between them.

“Say hi to Louis, girls! And Ernest!” A voice says from behind the handheld camera.

Each of the girls (the ones who can speak, anyway) say something quick to the camera — everything from “I love you I miss you please bring me something from Panama!” to “Get home soon, loser, I miss you and stuff” to “Mummy said when you get back you’ll owe me a bedtime story for every day you missed!” — before the person filming turns the camera around to wave into it, grinning widely. She’s a middle-aged woman, brunette hair trying to escape from where she has it pulled back. She has the same mischievous glint to her eye that Harry is used to seeing in Louis. “We miss you Boo Bear! Come home safe, darling.”

It’s all over within a few seconds, and when Harry glances over, Louis is a bit misty-eyed, wearing a grin identical to his mother’s. “Those are my girls! They got so big!”

Honestly, it’s unfair for Harry to have to endure this. It is maybe the worst thing he’s had to endure in the entire game. Harry’s heard about Louis’s family, of course. Nothing had made more sense than learning that Louis had a brood of girls to fuss over at home, and they’re one of Louis’s favorite things to talk about during their hushed conversations by the fire, or when they have free time at camp and go on walks together. But hearing stories is one thing — watching Louis light up like a literal actual Christmas tree, eyes softer than ever, is quite another. Harry deserves the million just for managing to stay in his seat instead of curling into Louis’s lap and kissing him senseless, honestly.

Harry’s a bit distracted during the next few videos, but he snaps back to attention as soon as he hears
his sister’s voice.

“Hiya, H!” Harry’s throat tightens watching her. Gemma’s hair is a light shade of lavender now, not the bright pink it had been before he left.

She lifts his cat to the camera, who looks grumpy as ever. “Dusty says hello! He can’t wait till you’re home so he can hack up hairballs all over your fancy boot collection instead of mine.”

He laughs wetly, trying not to sniff too loudly so he can hear the rest of the video.

Suddenly his mum is onscreen. “Hello love!” She says, unsurprisingly teary-eyed. “Miss you loads, sweetheart. I hope you’re having a good time out there. We’ll see you soon!”

His is the last to play, so the screen goes dark when she’s finished speaking. Harry takes a few deep breaths, hiccupping from the effort of not crying. He’s really, really missed them.

He feels a fist at his shoulder and looks over to see that Louis has reached across the space between them to give him their thumbs up, and Harry twists his neck to peck a kiss onto his thumb before focusing back on Jeff.


Louis’s expression goes from sweet to sour almost instantly. “What an insightful observation,” he mumbles under his breath. He looks murderous, and Harry has to bite his lip to stop himself from laughing.

Jeff continues on as if he doesn’t see it. He claps his hands together once before saying “Well, Survivors, ready to play?”

The reward challenge is even more complex than usual, and it rains the whole time they’re playing, but Louis wins without a problem.

They trudge back to the makeshift tent, everyone even more silent than they usually are after losing a reward challenge. Just as a member of the crew starts sorting through the stack of videos, Louis clears his throat.

“Jeff, if I forego watching my video, can everyone read their letters?”

Harry actually hears his neck crack from how quickly he whips it around to stare at Louis. It’s maybe the first time Harry’s seen him blush, cheeks a dusty pink. He’s avoiding everyone’s gaze, refusing to look away from Jeff despite the weight he must feel from everyone’s attention fixed so heavily on him.

Jeff looks up from where he’d been thumbing through envelopes. He glances around to make sure someone’s filming before he speaks.

“Tommo, let me get this straight. You’d give up your video just so everyone else can read their letters?”

Louis nods once, shuffling his snapback between his hands. “Yeah, I mean. I think everyone here could really use it right now, so.”

Jeff looks around at the other contestants, who are leaning so far forward in their chairs you’d think the producers were hanging steak in front of them.
“I guess we can do that,” Jeff says finally. “Thanks to Tommo, everyone will get to take their letters back to camp.”

Jesy actually knocks a chair out of the way to tackle Louis into a hug that looks almost painful and everyone else piles behind her to take their turn.

“That was really decent, man.” Bressie says gruffly, pulling Louis into a one-armed bro-hug that involves aggressive back-thumping.

By some miracle, Harry finds the self-restraint to hang back, accepting his letter quietly and running his fingers over the envelope while he waits for everyone to finish their thank yous. Louis can enjoy his space now, because the second they’re back at camp Harry is going to cling to him like a koala until someone physically pries him away. The universe owes him that much, at least.

“Louis being selfless like that...I know people are going to say he did it to win back some people in the game, but I really think he’s actually a good person deep down.” - Liam, Chabogamoga

“People can think what they want to think, ya know? I know I did the right thing, so I’m good.” - Tommo, Chabogamoga

DAY 29

“Are you quite finished, Liam?” Louis glares as the man in question walks back from chopping one of Harry’s ropes.

This reward challenge is all about how they perceive one another, and if they get the answers right, they get to chop one of someone else’s three lifelines. When all three have been chopped, they’re out of the game.

Liam is being a particular asshole today. “Stop it with your tings, man, at my boy.”

Harry hushes him, but Liam just shrugs playfully. “It’s just a game, Louis. Harry gets it.”

“I do.” Harry agrees, as he walks up for his turn. “Which is why I know you won’t mind when I do this.” He strolls right up and axes one of Liam’s ropes, putting the whole tribe in stitches from the look on Liam’s face and Harry’s shit-eating grin.

“Harry!”

“That’s me, Liam.” Harry says as he saunters back. “If you don’t like me then…”

“You can leave the island.” Louis chimes in.

Liam crosses his arms across his chest and pouts. For a big guy, it’s amazing how much Liam can look like a puppy sometimes. “I don’t like it when you two gang up on me.”

Zayn pats Liam on the shoulder. “Then you shouldn’t pick fights with them, Li.”

“Yeah! No one should mess with Beyoncé and Jay-Z.” Niall says slinging his arm around Louis.

“Just out of curiosity,” Jeff says, and Louis startles a little. He’d forgotten he was there. Oops.

“Who’s Beyoncé and who’s Jay-Z out of the pair of them.”
Niall goes to answer, but Louis beats him to it. “Obviously, I’m Beyoncé, Jeff.”

“But *Louis*. I thought I was Beyoncé.” Harry whines.

“Sorry, love.” Louis says consolingly. “I’ve got the bum, haven’t I?”

Niall hums in agreement, but Harry doesn’t reply, eyes going dark instead.

“Ohhhkay then.” Jeff claps his hands. “Let’s get on with the challenge. Who did the tribe say is the most trustworthy?”

Louis rolls his eyes at the question because the answer is obviously Liam. Like. No question. That boy is as loyal as a cocker spaniel.

So he’s in for a surprise when Jeff tells them to reveal their answers and literally every other player has written his name. Louis snorts because surely-

“All answered correctly except for Louis himself.”

“Are you serious?” It’s one of those out-of-body moments, and Louis finds himself questioning everything he’s ever known about himself. Either he doesn’t know himself as well as he thought, or these people have badly misjudged him.

“Yes, Louis. They picked you as the most trustworthy person on your tribe. Let’s see if they respect you enough to not eliminate you.”

They don’t.

Louis watches the rest of the game from the bench, still reeling from the realization that these people think he’s trustworthy. When Harry gets knocked out, he comes and sits next to him, puts a big hand on the small of his back and whispers in his ear, “You are, you know? Trustworthy.”

Louis shakes his head. How can the others think that when he’d cut Tom out so ruthlessly?

Harry presses in insistently. “You are. You haven’t let any of us down.” Harry lowers his head to catch Louis’s eye through his lashes. “Especially not me.”

Louis wonders if maybe he wasn’t wrong about himself, but rather he’s not the same person that he was when he started playing this game. Maybe being with Harry — loving Harry — has made him into what the others see in him now. Maybe Harry makes him trustworthy. Maybe he makes him strong.

“It was brutal seeing yourself crushed like that...but kind of awesome, too.” - Bressie, *Chabogamoga*

**DAY 30**

Bressie wins the immunity challenge, which definitely throws a wrench in their plans since he was the obvious choice to go next. Now, the original Chapera are going to have to turn on each other, which isn’t fun for anyone.

“Who do you think?” Harry asks as they walk to the well to get more water. They don’t even attempt
to be subtle when they go off alone anymore. It’s not like their alliance has ever really been a secret and keeping up the ruse would be a waste of time.

Louis shrugs in response. “It’s up to you, honestly. I mean, Liam could potentially be a threat since he’s good at challenges and he and Zayn are two-strong.”

Harry shakes his head. “I just don’t see Liam defecting. He’s not going to make the big move that would take.” He darts a gaze over to Louis. “If anyone would do it, I think it’d be Zayn, actually…”

“Are you sure you aren’t just saying that because you get jealous when I spend time with Zayn?” Louis smirks and Harry turns bright red.

There’d been an incident yesterday when they were enjoying their feast reward and Zayn had jokingly tried to feed Louis. That was a mistake. Harry had slapped the food to the ground with a petulant “I’m getting jealous over here.” Louis had laughed until he couldn’t breathe, but eventually comforted his pouting boy with kisses and cuddles while Jesy complained about them making her feel nauseous.

“Shut up! That’s not why! I have a point and you know it. Zayn didn’t win by mere luck.”

Louis wants to point out that while it wasn’t all luck, Zayn hadn’t exactly tried to win either. He’d just floated through the game with a very unlikable alliance member who was fiercely loyal to Zayn but an asshole to everyone else (He’d insisted on being called Naughty Boy. What even was that?). They’d made it to the end and no one was going to vote for the other guy, so Zayn kind of stumbled into a million dollars. Lucky bastard.

But still, Louis knows Harry’s probably has a point. “What about Niall?” It’s a blatant change of topic, but he also knows that Harry will let him get away with it.

“What about Niall?” Harry says dubiously.

“Well, I mean, he’s been getting pretty friendly with Bressie.”

Harry laughs. “If you think Niall would ditch you — Niall, who thinks the sun shines out of your ass — then I think you might be getting just a little bit paranoid.”

Louis huffs. “Niall isn’t stupid. He knows it’s a final two and with us he’s the third spot. He knows I’d never take him over you — no matter what the argument is.” Harry’s face softens at that, and Louis plows on. “As much as he messes around, Niall didn’t just come out here to have fun. We have to give him more credit than that. If he’s smart, and I think he is, he’ll hook up with Bressie and hope they can go on a run. That leaves you and me, Zayn and Li, and Niall and Bressie as pairs. Jesy’s the odd man out.”

“As much as I hate to say this...then why don’t we just vote Jesy tonight?” Harry bites his lip as he says it. “I mean, all six of us can get behind that vote and then moving forward, we’ll just...I don’t know...break up the other two couples. Bressie next and then Liam.”

“But what if they win immunity?”

“What if, what if, what if? Louis, every time we’ve tried to think a couple steps ahead in the game, it’s caused us problems.” Harry slides their hands together and squeezes. “I trust that we’ll be able to handle whatever comes our way in the next couple days. Together. Don’t you?”

Louis wants to say yes because he truly believes in whatever they’ve made together, but he’s also a worrier. He likes to think a few steps ahead and to have a plan. Harry must see the uncertainty on his
face because he sighs and says, “How about I feel out Zayn, and you feel out Liam. Then we can both talk to Niall together. If we feel even the least bit unsure about any of them, then we can decide if we want to vote them instead of Jesy. Alright?”

It’s smart and it’s a good compromise. God, but Louis loves this boy.

“Alright.” He smiles, and Harry smiles back. They head back to camp ready conquer anyone or anything. In that moment, Louis gets why Niall calls them a power couple.

“It was hard to see Jesy go. I really liked her, but we’re getting to the part of the game where we’re starting to vote off people that we’ve been with for the majority of the game. So that’s tough.” -

Harry, Chabogamoga

Jeff has a major twist in store for them when Harry, Louis, Niall, Zayn, Liam, and Bressie arrive at the reward challenge.

“Welcome, survivors,” Jeff says grandly, as soon as they’ve gathered. “Today you’ll be battling for reward, but you’re not the one’s who’ll be competing.”

He sounds even more smug than usual. Harry’s mind races through the few seconds of Jeff’s dramatic pause — are they bringing old contestants back?

But then Jeff signals for someone to be brought into the clearing, and Bressie’s shouting and running up to hug the older man who’s just been ushered in. Harry thinks he looks like one of the permanent benchers at the local bar, good-natured and ready to order a round of beers at a moment’s notice.

“Bressie, your dad will be the person who stands in for you during the challenge.”

A production member guides Bressie’s dad into the beginning of a line-up across from the actual Survivor contestants, and then another family member is brought in.

Next is Zayn’s sister Safaa, who’s just as beautiful as Zayn is, followed by Niall’s older brother Greg, who looks like a more uptight, preppy, brunette version of Niall.

Then a blonde girl comes sprinting into the clearing, and Louis takes off from where he’d been chewing his thumbnail beside Harry. He picks the girl up and swings her around, both of them laughing. Harry might get a little teary over the picture they make.

“Guess who got called in to do your job for you?” The girl says when he’s finally put her down.

“Someone who missed me enough to put themselves through, and I quote, ‘the dumbest game ever invented by humans.’”

Louis glares at the production person who tries to lead her away and instead walks her to the line-up himself, one arm slung over her shoulders.

Jeff clutches a hand to his heart theatrically. “That hurts, Lottie.”

They both ignore him.
“I missed you too, Lots.”

“Get off me,” Lottie sniffs, pulling him closer. “You’re disgusting.”

Louis hugs her one last time and then flicks her in the forehead. “Sorry the fact that I’ve been living in the wilderness for almost a month is so inconvenient for you.”

Harry actually feels in danger of a heart attack and absently wonders if he’ll be the first person who has to be medically evacuated Survivor because of swooning. He’d never live it down.

Niall actually elbows Harry in the ribs for the expression he must be making. “Bro. Reign it in, you look like you’re about to burst into tears.”

Harry manages to tear his eyes away from how happy Louis is to narrow his eyes at Niall. “Rude, Nialler.”

It’s not Harry’s fault that Louis talking about or existing in the general vicinity of his family is so sweet. A man of weaker constitution would’ve burst into tears long before now.

When Louis comes back to stand beside Harry, he looks like the actual physical embodiment of sunshine. Harry’s heart lurches in his chest from how unbearably fond he feels as Louis links their pinkies together for the briefest of moments before letting go.

Harry ducks his head to hide a smile, but can’t resist darting his gaze over to Lottie to see if she’d caught it. She’s staring Louis down intently, eyebrows raised in an obvious question. Louis just sticks his tongue out at her.

So Harry’s a bit preoccupied and misses Liam’s exchange with his dad, but snaps out of it when he hears Jeff say Louis’s name.

“Tommo. You’re about to meet the mother-in-law, you ready?”

Louis looks up from where he’d been pulling faces at Lottie, eyes widening in realization before he’s springing into action. He yanks off his snapback and begins trying to arrange his fringe, shooting Harry a panicked glance.

“I haven’t had a proper shower in weeks!” He hisses. “I don’t even have any flowers to give her! Harry, I was supposed to have flowers!”

Harry’s hand flies to his mouth to cover his laugh, and he can hear Lottie’s snort from across the clearing. He can’t do much more than roll his eyes in exasperation and whisper a quick “You’re fine, you’re perfect” before his mom is walking into the clearing.

Harry hears Bressie wolf-whistle and then a startled “Ouch, Tommo, the fuck?” But he’s too busy rushing forward and sweeping his mom up in his arms to really register it.

She pulls him close, and Harry marvels at how comforting it is to have her here, smelling a bit like hotel and travel but underneath that, like her perfume and the cinnamon candles she keeps in their kitchen. He’s sniffling wetly when she lets him go, but she just pats his cheek once and says, “You’re okay, love. I’m so proud of you for making it this far.” Harry nods, laughing and wiping at his tears with the back of his hand. She runs her hand up and down his back soothingly before fixing him with a look, eyes narrowed dangerously.

“So which one of these tanned, muscled men is my new son-in-law, then?”
Harry sighs loudly, but he’s more amused than anything else. “Really, mom?”

He turns to look at the line of his friends behind them, most of whom are trying to hide how hard they’re laughing, with varying degrees of success. Niall is almost doubled over. Zayn is half-heartedly patting Louis’s back with one hand and wiping a tear from the corner of his eye with the other.

Louis gives a jerky wave in Anne’s direction, smiling at her sheepishly. “Nice to meet you, ma’am.”

“If we’re going to be in-laws you should really start calling me Anne,” she tells him.

Lottie starts coughing loudly into her fist.

“All right, all right,” Jeff claps his hands to get their attention. “Reward challenge, anyone?”

Jeff explains what the challenge is going to be — their family members are going to have to eat ‘local delicacies’ from past seasons of Survivor as quickly as possible, the last person to finish each dish is eliminated until there’s only one person left — and what the reward will be — a night with your loved one at Chapera’s old camp.

They don’t get to spend much time with their loved ones, but they do get a few minutes while the crew is making sure they have everything where they want it for the challenge. As soon as they’re allowed to move, Lottie makes a beeline for Harry and Anne.

“Anne, my brother just called you ma’am,” she says gleefully.

Anne giggles. “Poor thing, he looked terrified. Honestly Harry, what did you tell that boy about me?”

Harry’s looking back and forth between them in horror, and then over at Louis for backup, but he’s making determined conversation with Niall and his brother. Coward.

“We met on the plane,” Lottie explains.

“That’s right,” Anne says. “Bonded over how our idiot boys thought it would be a good idea to put themselves through this again.”

“But apparently,” Lottie says with relish, “It was destiny. Fate, even.”


Harry groans. “You know we’re not actually married yet, right? And that we just met, like, a month ago?”

“Not to worry dear,” Anne says, patting him on the shoulder consolingly. “I’ll forgive you if you are. I’ve heard plenty of stories about him from Lottie. According to her, he’s an excellent brother and son, if nothing else.”

“Don’t tell him I said it,” Lottie warns.

Harry feels the tips of his ears turning pink, but it’s probably pointless to pretend he isn’t secretly pleased. His mom most likely sees through it anyway, and Lottie too for that matter.

Louis slides up beside him, hand careful on Harry’s waist like he doesn’t want to make Harry uncomfortable in front of his mother. Lottie looks like she’s on the verge of breaking out into hysterics again, but Anne, bless her, is at least pretending to try to keep a straight face.
“Hi Ms. — um. Anne,” he says, extending a hand to shake. “I’m Louis Tomlinson.”

“Lovely to meet you, Louis,” Anne says warmly. “Why don’t you go ahead and tell me everything there is to know about you, since apparently we’re already family.”

To his credit, Louis seems slightly more composed this time around. “I’m twenty-seven, I live in St. Louis, I work in construction, I have five sisters and a brother.”

Harry’s mom barely has time to look endeared before Jeff is calling for them to line up. He feels a glow in his stomach when his mom shoots him an approving look and a smile. Maybe it’s the idea that they can work beyond this game that makes him feel like he’s flying because it had been something that had started to worry Harry over the past few days. They’d created their own little family here in Panama, but it’s a relief to know that they’d fit in just as well with their families back home. That their families would fit together.

Niall’s brother ends up winning the challenge, which Harry should probably have seen coming. Eating quickly must be some sort of genetic talent. Anne was one of the first people out, but Harry doesn’t blame her. Live ants are a bit of a stretch, even for someone as tough as his mother. Lottie comes in second, done in by the tarantula dish.

When Greg is declared the winner, Jeff announces that Niall will be able to choose a second pair to join them at Chapera’s old camp for the night.

“I’ll have to go with Tommo and Lottie. She was a worthy contender to the Horan title,” Niall says, grinning with his arm around Greg’s waist.

Louis tackles him into a hug to say thank you, then checks in on Harry after Harry hugs his mom goodbye.

“Are you sure you’re good?”

Harry rolls his eyes. “I’ll see her in a week, Lou. I’ll survive.” He pinches Louis in the side. “Get it? I’ll survive? Because we’re on Survivor?”

“You should be ashamed of yourself,” Louis says flatly. But he presses a kiss to Harry’s cheek anyway. “See you soon, yeah?”

“Don’t forget to show Lottie our swing.”

“Our swing, is it?” Lottie says pointedly, joining them.

“Louis built a swing for our shelter,” Harry says defensively. “Our swing, like Chapera’s swing.”

Lottie raises an eyebrow at Louis. “You built him a swing? Of course you did, you’re such a show-off.”

“Niall suggested it! I just built it.”

“Yeah,” Zayn snorts from behind them. “And then kicked off anyone who so much as looked at it the second Harry said he wanted to sit there.”

“That was one time-” Louis begins.

“Was not,” Niall interrupts. “I’ve lived with you this whole game, are you kidding?”

“Louis shared the swing,” Liam says reasonably, a little congested from saying goodbye to his dad.
“Just not when Harry was around.”

“But Li, when was he ever not around Harry?” Zayn asks.

Jeff clears his throat loudly to make everyone look up. “As entertaining as this has been, Chabogamoga needs to get back to camp. Louis, Lottie, Niall, Greg, you guys can head on back to Chapera.”

Louis pulls Harry in for one last hug and presses a kiss to his temple. “See you tomorrow, babe.”

Lottie looks torn between wanting to coo and wanting to hit Louis, so Harry makes sure to dimple at her extra hard just in case she’s leaning toward the latter. “It was nice meeting you, Lottie.”

“You too, Harry. I’m sure I’ll see you soon.” She drags Louis away with an arm around his neck, and Harry can just make out her saying “You have some explaining to do. Just wait till Mom hears about this.”

Somehow he doesn’t think it’ll be that bad.

“It was super weird seeing Louis so hung up on someone like that. I’ve honestly never seen him like this. But Harry seems like a good one, so I guess I’m happy if Louis is.” - Lottie, Tommo’s sister

DAY 33

Liam takes it upon himself to cheer Niall up after they unanimously vote out Bressie. Niall and Bressie had really bonded since the merge (between their mutual love of food and sharing a name, it was bound to happen), so no one is surprised that he’s a bit bummed. But seeing a sad Niall is like witnessing something that shouldn’t occur naturally in the wild.

Liam is really doing them all a great service when he takes Niall down to the water for a late night swim. Soon enough, they can hear shouts and laughter coming from the shore where they’ve settled around the fire.

Zayn looks off in their direction fondly. “I’m glad Niall’s feeling better. I don’t like to see him struggle.”

Sweet as that is, Louis can’t help but tease, “For a mysterious bad boy, you’re actually a big softie.”

Zayn scoffs and raises his hand like he’s going to take a draw on an imaginary cigarette. They all catch the move, and in the quiet moment Harry asks, “Is it hard? Like, literally not being able to smoke because you have no where to get cigarettes?”

Zayn had disclosed earlier on that he’s one of those on-again-off-again smokers, the kind that quit for months at a time and then one cigarette sets them right back.

He shrugs and says, “Actually it makes it easier most of the time because it reminds me that it isn’t a necessity, you know? Like, I can live without it.” His gaze gets far away before he starts to chuckle under his breath a little.

“What?” Louis prompts.

“I was just thinking that the only time I’ve really craved a cigarette out here was that night at Saboga
when our shelter flooded because Ben Winston had convinced everyone that building a bomb shelter in the sand would be a great idea.”

That whole ordeal sounds really traumatizing to Louis, but Zayn is now practically cackling at the thought of it. Harry quirks a brow at him and Louis shrugs in return. People handle trauma in different ways.

“You know,” Zayn says after he’s calmed down a bit. “As much as Liam complains about that awful shelter was, he was, like, a hundred and ten percent behind Ben when he suggested it. He thought it was the greatest idea since sliced bread, honestly. I was the only one with enough sense to be like ‘what happens when the tide comes in?’”

“Man,” Zayn shakes his head. “I really could’ve used a cigarette that night.”

“Saboga sounds like a fucking nightmare, bro.” It’s not the first time the comment has been made, but it seems like every time it’s brought up there’s a new horror story to share.

Like clockwork, Zayn’s eyes light up. “You know, one time Li and I went to get tree mail and I handed him the letter to read aloud because I couldn’t bear having to speak that awful rhyme out loud. But Liam pushes it back at me and shakes his head and says ‘Naw, man. I can barely read.’ And like, obviously illiteracy isn’t a joking matter, but I started to laugh but Liam started to pout — you know how he gets — with those big puppy dog eyes.”

“Liam can read!” Harry protests. “I mean...surely he can?”

“Yeah, he can.” Zayn nods. “But he gets embarrassed trying to read big words aloud. It's adorable.”

“You two are sickening.” It’s true. Zayn and Liam’s man crushes on each other are so many miles wide that you could comfortably land a plane on them.

Zayn gives Louis a very unimpressed look over the fire. “Are you serious right now, Tommo?”

“What? It’s true! You go all googly-eyed every time Liam does something stupid or cute — or both at the same time.”

Harry hums in agreement, and Zayn performs a gravity defying eye roll before gesturing towards the two of them.

“If anyone is sickening around here it’s you two! I bet you couldn’t keep your hands to yourselves for more than five minutes if you tried.”

Harry’s head pops up from where it had been resting in Louis’s lap, disturbing the hand that had been petting through his curls.

“We could. We just don’t want to.”

Zayn’s eyes glint challengingly, and Louis can’t resist a challenge — even if it’s a dumb one. “You want to bet, bro? If Harry and I don’t touch until we go to sleep, you have to…”

Harry leans in and whispers a suggestion in his ear that has Louis doubling over with laughter.

“You have to kiss Liam and make him think it was an accident!” Louis finishes.

Zayn doesn’t look bothered. “Alright. Even if I don’t win, which I will, I don’t mind.”

That’s the moment that the tribe’s two overgrown puppies come bounding back into camp, dripping
water everywhere. Louis shrieks when Niall plasters himself to his back, making him cold and wet.

“How very dare you?!”

Niall just laughs, running a hand through his hair before sitting down next to Louis by the fire to get warm. It draws Louis’s attention to something that’s been bugging him for days — ever since he met Greg.

“Niall?” He just grunts to acknowledge the question as he chews on some coconut. “Why do you dye your hair blonde?”

“Because I am blonde.” Niall responds, easy as anything.

Louis looks to the others for support because they’ve all noticed the massive dark roots Niall’s grown out here. It’s not exactly a secret.

“Niall, by nature of having to dye your hair, you are not a natural blonde.” Zayn says gently, like he doesn’t want to hurt Niall’s feelings.

“No, I’m a natural blonde in here.” He pounds a fist to his chest and keeps eating, unbothered by the way they are all staring at him now.

“So...you dye your hair...?” Liam asks like he’s not really sure anymore.

“So that my outer appearance can mirror my inner self. Yes.” Niall explains in an almost patronizing tone.

“I think it suits you.” Harry says because of course he does. Louis goes to grab his hand, but catches Zayn’s grin before he does and draws it back with a glare.

“It does. I mean, I have the best hair here.” Niall says, shrugging like he hasn’t just thrown down a gauntlet.

Harry and Zayn both gasp like they’ve been wounded, and Liam chuckles uncomfortably.

“Niall,” Louis says reasonably. “You can’t actually believe that.”

Finally, Niall deigns to actually look at them. “What? You think your hair is so great? Nah. Mine’s the best.”

“But what about Harry’s hair! You love playing with Harry’s hair!” Louis just doesn’t believe this.

Niall shrugs, but it’s Liam who says, “I mean, Harry’s hair’s quite boring, innit? It always looks the same?” Harry lets out a strangled little yelp at the insult, and Louis says, “That’s a bit offensive to be honest, Liam.”

“You always looks the same.” Harry gripes. Without thinking, Louis goes to draw Harry close to his side. Harry’s the one who stops him this time with a look.

There’s an awkward moment where both Niall and Liam look at them with shock and trepidation.

“Oh my god. Are you guys fighting?” Liam says, a worried crease between his eyebrows.

“No! Mom and Dad can’t fight!” Niall pouts. ‘I’ll take back what I said about my hair — even though I’m still right. I mean, let’s be honest, Zayn’s my only competition and that’s just because he’s genetically superior.”
“Thanks, Ni.”

“Guys. Calm down. We’re just not touching.” Louis explains.

Both of their eyes widen. Niall’s might actually have tears in them. “But, why?”

“We made a bet with Zayn, and I really want to see him carry through when we win.” Harry explains.

“Oh.” Niall immediately is back to normal. “What’d ya bet then?”

“It’s a secret.”

“Secrets secrets are no fun, unless you share with everyone.” Liam proclaims, and Zayn looks like he’s about to melt into a puddle of goo.

They really should get some sleep, but they end up staying up most of the night carrying on and making stupid jokes. Even though not touching Harry is hard, Louis finds it’s not hard to imagine the five of them at home at a bar doing the exact same thing.

When they finally do settle down for sleep, Harry gives Zayn a look that says, ‘We won, now pay up.’ Zayn sighs like a Brontë heroine before settling next to Liam in the shelter and putting his face very close to Liam’s.

“Zayn?” Liam asks quietly.

“Come on, then. Come on.” Zayn says right before he leans in and kisses Liam.

Liam freezes. “...what?”

“Goodnight, Liam.” Zayn rolls over, leaving his victim reeling in the aftermath.

Harry looks beside himself with glee, and Louis does have to say they’re pretty cute. But when he finally gets to snuggle up with his boy, he thinks that they’re no competition.

“I ended up kissing Zayn last night. Zayn was like ‘Come on, then. Come on,’ putting his head close to me - like when you’re going to have a fight. Then he just leaned forward and kissed me!” - Liam, Chabogamoga

“They make a beautiful couple! I wish them all the best.” - Harry, Chabogamoga

“I’m starting to feel like a third wheel here…” - Niall, Chabogamoga

DAY 34

The reward challenge was yet another obstacle course, this time involving balance beams, ropes, puzzles, and bean bag tosses. The first person to fly down the final zipline and reach a pair of keys would win a Chevy truck and drive-in movie date with another contestant. It came down to Harry and Louis, but Louis got ahead in the rope challenge and ended up winning.

“I almost don’t want to bother asking this,” Jeff says, “but Louis, who’s going to the movie with you?”
“Harry,” Louis says immediately, shit-eating grin on his face. “Finally gonna take you on a date, Styles.”

Harry almost wants to apologize at this point, but the other three seem okay with it.

“We’re gonna have our own date,” Niall says, slinging his arms around Zayn and Liam’s shoulders. “Proper romantic-like.”

Zayn falls dramatically into Niall’s arms. “Niall, I thought you’d never ask!”

“We’ve got a beach, we’ve got a fire, we’ve got some rice. Honestly, it’ll be nice to get some peace and quiet from you two.” Liam finishes.

Louis gives them an unimpressed look. “It’s cute that you think we don’t know you’ll spend the whole time we’re not there talking about us.”

Zayn flutters his eyelashes at Louis. “Like we could ever talk about anything else.”

That’s quite enough of that, as far as Harry is concerned.

“Jeff, don’t we have a movie to get to?” He says, raising his voice to be heard over Niall’s cries of “Not you too, Zayn! Not you too!”

Jeff looks reluctant to cut off their banter. Harry guesses that the All-Stars season has basically been counted as a loss; somehow the season they’d planned to be the most cutthroat ever had become the equivalent of a giant cuddlefest. At a certain point in the game everyone seemed to accept that Louis was untouchable when it came to immunity challenges, and since then it’s been less of a competition and more of one big group camping trip. The producers probably figure if they can’t have drama, they might as well play up the hijinks.

But Harry isn’t overly-concerned with how the season is going to look once it airs; right now there is the much more pressing matter of Zayn fake-flirting with Louis while Louis is supposed to be taking Harry on their first date.

Zayn and Niall see right through him. Zayn’s smirking, and Niall’s not bothering to hide that he’s laughing at how whiney Harry sounds. Liam is just shaking his head at all of them like he has no idea how they got here.

“You’re right, babe. We’ve got a movie to get to.” Louis does the thing where he tries to bite down on his lips to hide a smile. At least he’s trying. Harry appreciates the effort. When he pulls Harry into his side and presses a kiss to his forehead, Harry tries his best not to look too smug about it.

Jeff signals the crew. The others are led away while someone explains to Harry and Louis that Survivor doubles as a giant commercial. Apparently Louis is supposed to make the car ‘look good,’ so Harry is immediately worried that Louis has misheard that as permission to drive dangerously. Based on the glint Louis gets in his eyes the second they let him sit behind the wheel, Harry’s pretty sure he’s right. Based on the way Louis glances over at Jeff in the front passenger seat and says casually “You don’t get motion sickness, do you Jeff?” right before revving the engine, Harry is absolutely certain he’s right.

Somehow Louis manages not to crash the car, but Harry still hears crew members muttering about getting the car checked out before they ship it to Louis.

Jeff looks grateful when he’s finally allowed out of the truck, and Harry doesn’t exactly blame him, but….Turns out watching Louis drive a car competently is a pretty great way to pass the time.
Still, he makes a point of elbowing Louis in the ribs while they wait for Jeff to regroup enough to be able to film.

“Lou, you did that on purpose,” Harry says accusingly.

“You do talk some shit, H.” Louis says, nose stuck in the air primly. “I’m sure I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Harry sighs and settles for pinching him in the side, hissing a “be nice!” under his breath just as Jeff turns back to them.

“Right! What a ride,” Jeff says. Apparently he’s regained his sparkle. He leads them to a clearing, where they find a couch, popcorn machine, hotdog stand, and candy cart set up across from a giant projector screen where they’ll be watching *Grease*.

“I do have one more thing for you, though. Didn’t want to mention it in front of the other contestants. Right this way!”

They exchange a look before following Jeff through a path in the underbrush. They turn a corner and suddenly stumble upon a car, just sitting there sparkling in the sun.

“Harry, one of the perks of being chosen to go on the reward challenge is that you win a car, too.” Jeff announces, like it’s just a super casual thing.

Harry’s jaw drops, and he’s silent for half a second before he’s launching himself into Louis’s arms, screeching like a banshee.

“You won me a car, Louis!” He’s probably yelling directly in Louis’s ear but has no volume control at this point. “On our first date! A car!”

He whips his head around to stare at Jeff. “Are you serious?! I get a car?!”

“Pretty great first date so far, huh?” Jeff tosses the keys and by some miracle Harry catches them, reflexes better than usual because of all the adrenaline.

Harry turns to look back at Louis, who somehow looks even more shell-shocked than Harry feels. Harry grabs him by the wrist and drags him into the car, and then Louis is wearing one of the biggest shit-eating grins Harry’s seen on him yet.

“Not too shabby,” he admits.

Harry rolls his eyes. “Not even a little shabby,” he says. And honestly, watching Louis driving the truck had been bad enough, but now Louis has won him a car. Harry turns to the film crew and says, politely as possible, “Thank you, you can go now, please,” and crawls into Louis’s lap without waiting for them to respond. He slides one hand into his hair and the other around his shoulder, kisses him as thoroughly as he can while stooped over to avoid hitting his head on the roof.

Louis looks a little dazed when Harry pulls away, so Harry deliberately presses a few more kisses to his mouth until he can refocus.

“Thank you,” he says sincerely, then kisses him again. “Best date ever.”

Louis smirks, but his eyes are soft. “We haven’t even started the date yet, H,” he says, pressing a knuckle into Harry’s left dimple.
Harry shrugs one shoulder, wiggling happily in Louis’s lap. “Still.”

Louis huffs out a laugh and pushes him off gently. “Alright, alright. Enough of that. Let’s go have our movie date.”

They head back toward the theater, hand in hand, not in any real hurry.

“Really though, Lou. This is so great. I’m still paying off student loans, I didn’t think I was going to be able to afford a car for years.”

Louis looks at him curiously as they settle onto the couch. “Is that what you’re gonna use the million dollars for, then?”

They’ve all talked about something they’d buy with the million dollars at some point or other, but back at camp people generally avoid talking about what they’d actually use the money for. Nobody wants to jinx themselves, and it’s also not as much fun to talk about with people you’re competing against.

“I don’t know,” Harry says slowly. “I know that for, like, part of it m’gonna use to send my parents on a trip around the world. They’ve always wanted to go, y’know, but haven’t had the money. So I think that’d be nice.” He pauses again, eyes flitting off toward the beach. “Then I guess I’d pay off the rest of my student loans. And whatever’s left will probably go toward, like, Grad school. Or maybe I could invest some of it, my step-dad’s pretty smart about that kind of thing…” He trails off, finally settling his gaze back on Louis. “Anyway. Thank you, I don’t know if I’ll be able to say it enough.”

Louis hasn’t stopped watching him the whole time he’s been speaking. “I’m glad I could help,” he says carefully. “But I don’t think I actually did much. You came in second in the challenge and you’ve been a fantastic ally, you deserved to come with me. I think you won the car for yourself.”

That almost knocks the wind out of him, as simple a sentiment as it is. He’s suddenly struck by how much had to happen so that the two of them could be together on this beach right now. How incredibly lucky he is that he’s ended up here, of all places, with this boy, of all people.

“Harry?” Louis inquires into the quiet moment, and Harry hums, prompting him to continue. “I know we haven’t, you know really talked about stuff — real stuff — after the game, and I just-”

Louis wrestles with himself for a moment while Harry holds his breath.

“I just want you to know that — I’m in this, okay? I want this, with you, after we’re done with this stupid game.” After the moment of bravery, Louis shrinks down into himself, making him look even tinier than normal. “I just wanted to check to see if we were on the same page about that.”

He must take Harry’s silence to mean something it doesn’t because he starts talking really fast. “If we aren’t, that’s okay, too. I’m not going to, like, hold it against you or anything. We’ll still go to the end together and-”

Harry can’t help himself anymore, so he kisses Louis quiet. He pulls back a little after it seems like Louis has calmed a bit and says, “We’re on the same page,” against his mouth.

Louis tries to hide his smile in Harry’s cheek as he says, “Thought so. Just checking.” He leans back to look at Harry, open affection on his face, before he pulls off his snapback and fits it over Harry's curls instead. "Looks better on you," he decides, cheeky smirk back in place.

Harry shakes his head fondly and stands, bending to press another kiss to the corner of Louis’s mouth. “You’re pretty damn wonderful, Louis Tomlinson. Did you know that?” He kisses him again.
because he’s weak, but then starts toward the hotdog stand. “I’m getting us one of everything. You better eat at least three hotdogs before we leave, Lou. We still have five days left on this beach, and I’m not gonna let you starve on me between then and now. You promised me dates.”

Later, he presses another kiss to Louis’s pulse point before settling against Louis’s chest. They end up missing most of the movie, because it turns out that it’s one of Louis’s favorites, too, and that he’d played Danny Zuko in a production back in high school (“Please please please tell me someone somewhere has a recording of that”), and that he still remembers Danny and Sandy’s dance, and that he’s a really great teacher. It’s absolutely, without a doubt the very best date Harry has ever been on.

“I’d say our first date went pretty well - all things considered.” - Tommo, Chabogamoga

DAY 36, 37, 38

It’s amazing how much the game speeds up after knowing there’s something to look forward to on the other side. (Besides the million dollars, because Louis is pretty sure they’ve got that in the bag.)

Yes, it really sucks having to vote Liam out on Day 35 and then Zayn on Day 37, but neither seem to be too bitter about it.

Louis finds himself both counting down the hours until they’re done and dreading the moment they step outside the game because no matter what he and Harry say about wanting to be together beyond Survivor, it won’t be the same once they leave. For one thing, they won’t be in the same space after being together 24/7 for almost 39 days. That’s going to be hard.

So if Louis holds Harry a little tighter at night and acts a little more clingy, who can really blame him? Harry certainly doesn’t seem to mind, preening under all the attention. He’s so responsive to Louis’s touch that Louis is reminded of another reason why he wants to get himself and Harry out of Panama and away from all these cameras.…

It’s not like the cameras have stopped them from being physically affectionate with one another, but they have stopped things from — progressing beyond a certain point. And they’re both more than a little frustrated by now.

He can feel it now in the way Harry strains against him, wiggling down in his lap on ‘their’ bench. Harry’d been upset after seeing Zayn walk out of tribal, so as soon as they’d made it back to camp, he was pulling Louis down the beach and climbing into his lap.

It’s not the Louis isn’t enjoying it, because he is. But it’s sort of hard to get in the mood when he can hear one of the camera men rustling in the bushes not ten feet away from them. When Harry moves his kisses down his neck and starts sucking on his collarbone, Louis can’t hold back a moan, eyes fluttering shut and mouth falling open. He just has the clarity of mind to send a finger in the direction of the camera crew. Because really? It’s not like they can actually air any of this, can they?

“Harry.” Louis gasps, but Harry doesn’t seem to hear him, too intent on expanding the purpling mark on Louis’s collarbone. “Harry.”

“Mmm?” Harry hums in reply, finally pulling back and assessing his work with heavy-lidded eyes. “We need to stop.” Louis tilts his head in the direction of the crew, willing Harry to catch on.
Instead, Harry leans forward for a sweet kiss, and how can Louis deny him? When he pulls back, Harry looks him right in the eyes and says, “I don’t care.”

Louis doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry when Harry twists his hips, giving them both the delicious friction that they’ve been so careful to deny themselves. “Harry-”

“Lou,” Harry says back, laughter on the edges of his voice and a twinkle in his eye.

Louis sighs. “Come on, H. I don’t want them watching this. Or worse, airing it.” He brushes a stray curl off of Harry’s forehead and wraps it around his fingers. “I want this to be just for us. Don’t you?”

Harry leans forward so that his forehead is resting on Louis’s and whines, “I guess.”

Louis laughs roughly, kisses Harry’s cheek, and then pokes his side. “We should get back. Don’t want to worry Niall.”

Harry rolls his eyes. “He’s probably fast asleep. Probably didn’t even notice we’d left.”

As they both stand, Louis can tell Harry’s having a little sulk. He draws him in and whispers in his ear. “Only two more days, babe.” Harry bites his lip and nods, eyes going dark. Louis can’t help but add, “Then I’m going to ruin you.”

Harry’s eyes flutter. “Don’t tease, Lou. S’not nice.”

Louis chuckles and kisses Harry’s temple. “Sorry, love, but I think if anyone’s going to be labelled a tease here, it’s Mr. ‘Let me bend over every time my bum is in Louis’s eyeline’ Styles.”

That forces a giggle out of Harry. “Oh, you caught that, did you?”

“Kind of hard not to, babe.”

“Heh. Penis jokes.”

Louis rolls his eyes. He’s in love with a dumb boy. His dumb boy.

He leans up for one last chaste kiss before they start the trek back to camp together. And if Louis keeps kicking up sand in hopes that it might blind one of the crew members following them, can anyone really blame him?

“I mean, I kind of knew since, like, the beginning that I would only make it to the number three spot. I’ve made my peace with it, you know? I’m just ready to go eat some real food now. Maybe crack open a beer. Or ten… [laughs]” - Niall, Chabogamoga

DAY 39

With Niall gone, it’s like they can pretend they’re the only ones on this beach, and they’d definitely been taking advantage of the alone time in ways that Louis knew the producers didn’t approve of.

But as much of a relief as it was to finally be able to let his guard down now that he is out here with someone he trusts completely, there are still things to think about. Mainly — the final tribal council tonight.
As much as his priorities have shifted in this game from Day 1, Louis is so close to the million now that he can almost see the new house that he’ll be able to buy for his mom and his sisters. But first he has to convince the people he was responsible for voting out that he deserves the money more than Harry and...he just doesn’t know if he’s going to be able to do that.

So Louis worries because that’s what he does, but he tries to keep it from Harry. He doesn’t want to worry him unnecessarily — especially since he seems so intent on enjoying their last day here. He thinks he’s gotten away with it, too, until Harry attacks him from behind with his massive limbs until he’s got him cocooned. “Stop worrying, you big worrier.”

Louis leans back into the embrace and rolls his eyes. “I can’t help it. I just keep thinking about tribal tonight and—”

“Lou,” Harry says softly and turns him so they’re facing each other. “It’s out of our hands now. You know most of them have already made up their minds, and you can definitely charm the ones who haven’t into giving you their vote anyway. So there’s really nothing to worry about.”

“Why does it sound like you aren’t even going to try to convince them to vote for you.” Louis narrows his eyes at Harry and steps back. “You deserve it just as much as I do. I don’t want you to just—”

“I know, Lou.” Harry says rolling his eyes. “I’m not just gonna roll over and play dead. I know I’ve got a fighting chance, but anyone with half a brain on the jury is going to vote for you over me. You’re the mastermind here.”

Harry pinches Louis’s side, but he squirms away and shakes his head. “Give yourself more credit than that, H. If anything, most of the jury hates my guts because we outplayed them. No matter how many times we say that we made decisions together, you’re still the sweet, innocent one.”

Harry opens his mouth to argue, but Louis cuts him off. “No. That’s a good thing. You did such a good job playing this game, seriously. If I were on the jury, you’d have my vote.”

“Stop it, Lewis. You’re making me blush.” Harry swats at him playfully before pecking Louis on the nose. “How about we just agree to disagree on this one.”

Louis leans in and kisses him properly because boy, did he get lucky when he found Harry.

“Just don’t throw me under the bus at tribal.” Harry mumbles against Louis’s lips, and if this were even ten days ago, a comment like that would have sent up a bunch of red flags for Louis. But now? Louis just chuckles into the kiss.

They aren’t playing each other. Maybe they never were. One of them is going to walk away from this with a million dollars and the other is going to walk away with a millionaire boyfriend. Sounds like a pretty sweet deal to Louis.

“Going into this tribal council, I know that a lot of people are gonna be mad at me. I just gotta hope that they respect the way I played the game enough to give me the million dollars.” - Tommo, Chabogamoga

“Yeah, I’m worried that the jury is going to see me as a, like, coattail-rider or something, but at this point, it’s kind of out of my hands. I played a good game and I had a great time doing it, so I guess that’s enough for me.” - Harry, Chabogamoga
So the final tribal was...rough to say the least. Harry really hadn’t expected people to go after Louis like they had — well, both of them really. Tom had referred to Harry as ‘the lesser of two evils,’ which was shitty to hear.

Harry’s thought that because he’d gotten to know these people and enjoy their company that they would be considerate enough to view Harry and Louis in the light of the game, but he was wrong. Which sucks.

But it was definitely worse for Louis. Harry hadn’t wanted to leave him when they’d arrived at the housing for the contestants, but Louis had assured him that he’d come find Harry once they were both showered and fed. After all the time he’d spent with him, Harry knew when Louis needed space to sort through his thoughts, so he let him go with a kiss and a comforting smile.

Now here Harry sits, freshly showered and eating a banana and a spoonful of peanut butter, on a bed that feels like a cloud, waiting.

Tribal being a bummer sucked doubly because it totally ruined the mood that Harry had been trying to maintain all day in preparation for his and Louis’s first night properly alone in an actual bed.

Harry’s a man of simple needs. And one of them is Louis’s dick.

So. Here Harry sits. Waiting.

Harry thinks he’s been beyond patient in waiting for this moment. He’s gone thirty-nine days without basic necessities, and now nothing is going to stand in his way.

Just as he sticks the majority of the banana in his mouth, Louis pulls back the sliding door to the room, coming through the white translucent curtains like some kind of a dream. But something about his appearance immediately has Harry sitting up, and it takes him a second to place.

“You shaved?” Harry’s voice sounds whiny even to his own ears, but. Harry has been dreaming about that stubble for the past few weeks, and to have it ripped away without warning moments before those dreams came to fruition...It was honestly cruel.

Louis shrugs like he has no idea of the crime he’s just committed against Harry’s fantasies and says, “Yeah. Just wanted to feel completely clean, you know? There was enough sand in the bathtub to make my own beach by the time I got out of there.”

And it’s not like Harry doesn’t have compassion for Louis’s cleanliness, but still-

“Next time, please consider my feelings before you shave. I was quite attached to that stubble.”

“Oh, were you?” Louis says, eyes glinting in the soft light of the room. Electric light — what a marvelous invention, Harry thinks.

“Yes, I was.” Harry pouts. “Now you have to make it up to me.”

Louis’s smirk turns feral, and Harry squirms a little under his gaze and counts his lucky stars that his stupid beard obsession seems to have distracted Louis from any game-related conversations that he may have otherwise tried to engage Harry in. Tonight is for fucking. They can sort out the rest later.

“And how do you suggest I do that?” Louis is slowly advancing on Harry’s bed, and the wait is torturous but in the best kind of way.
“Oh, I don’t know.” Harry sets down what’s left of his banana and peanut butter on the side table before sprawling back onto the bed and spreading his legs obscenely.

“God,” Louis stalls, sounding like he’s had the breath knocked out of him. “God. You’re so—”

He crawls up the bed and settles in between Harry’s legs. “So what?”

“So beautiful.” Louis’s gaze is soft, and it warms Harry from the inside out until he feels like he’s going a supernova.

“C’mere,” is all he can manage to say before he’s wrestling Louis down by the collar of his soft, clean shirt and bringing their mouths together in a kiss that feels familiar and yet altogether foreign. This kiss is different from every other they’ve shared on the beach because this kiss has the intent of going somewhere that had never been an option for them before.

Harry doesn’t waste any time removing Louis’s shirt and skimming down his bony sides to the bulge in his shorts. Finally.

He makes quick work of Louis’s shorts and flips them as he moves on to pulling down his boxer briefs. Louis’s breathless chuckle accompanies Harry’s sigh when his cock is finally on display, flushed, beautiful and all Harry’s.

“Someone’s a little eager.”

Harry sends him a sharp look before resuming his study of his new favorite thing. Objectively, no dick is pretty. But honestly, that doesn’t stop Harry from thanking God for His most beautiful creation, laid out before him.

He leans in and breaths just over the head and Louis’s accompanying moan is probably the best thing he’s ever heard. He starts to kiss a trail down Louis’s hips to his thigh and then back up again, torturing Louis a bit for the comment.

“I have been waiting for this since Day 18, Lewis.” Harry nuzzles his nose in the dip where thigh meets hip. “Now hush while we get acquainted.”

Harry’s always taken pride in his cock-sucking skills. In fact, he views it as an art form. He can’t help but think in this moment that every cock he’d ever sucked before now was in preparation to make this the Best Blowjob Ever. So he pulls out all the stops, and by the time he’s choking on Louis’s cock, deepthroating like a champ, Louis is promising him the world.


Harry could have guessed that Louis’d be a talker, but he didn’t think it would do this much for his own arousal. He’d given up any pretense of not rutting against the bed around the time Louis had moaned, “Baby.” So.

When he pulls off to catch his breath, he’s so desperate for it, he can’t help but beg a little. “Please, Lou. Fuck me. I need it. I need you. It’s been too long — I can’t—”

There are honest-to-god tears in Harry’s eyes at this point, and he’s not even sure if they’re from having his throat fucked or from how desperately he wants this.

Louis’s right there, though, brushing away the tears and kissing his temple, whispering roughly. “Yes. Anything. baby. Anything for you.” He pulls Harry up so they’re on their sides, noses brushing, and places a tender kiss on his swollen lips. “How d’you want to—”
“Don’t care.” Harry gasps against his mouth. It feels like he’s always breathless around Louis.

His heart skips several beats as he feels Louis’s fingers trail down his side and down to the swell of his bum. Just as Louis’s fingers are right where Harry wants them, he feels Louis freeze.

“What?” Harry manages around a moan.

Louis draws his hand away and Harry makes a grab for his wrist because no way is he stopping now-

But then Louis’s grabbing his face and forcing him to look him in the eye and Harry sees genuine guilt in dismay there, which is enough to turn at least some of his brain functions back on.

“What?” He repeats, dreading the answer.

Louis closes his eyes and sighs. “I don’t have any lube. Or condoms for that matter. Do you?”

Well, shit.

Harry’s up and off the bed in seconds, tearing through the little gift basket left by the accommodations.

“Babe?” Louis asks warily from the bed. “What are you-”

“There’s gotta be some somewhere in here.” Harry knows he sounds frantic, but he is so, whatever.

“They can’t — they wouldn’t — There has to be!”

He’s so busy digging that he misses Louis getting out of bed and crossing to hug him from behind.

“It’s alright, gorgeous.”

“No, it’s not!” Harry has tears in his eyes now, and he feels so so stupid because why hadn’t he thought of this sooner. But also, he just feels deeply tired like this was the final thread holding him together after having to put on a brave face and keep it all together for thirty-nine days. And now he’s done.

Louis gathers him into his arms and guides him back to the bed whispering, “Sh, baby. I know. It’s going to be okay. I promise.”

And that just makes Harry cry some more because he knows he can and Louis won’t judge him for it. That he’ll take care of him and hold him and love him, and that — that makes Harry cry for a whole different set of reasons.

By the time Harry’s calmed down from his episode, he can hardly keep his eyes open. It just not fucking fair.

“It’s not fair.” He mumbles into Louis’s chest. “I just wanted you to fuck me.”

For some reason, this startles a laugh out of Louis. Harry does not think this is a laughing matter and he tells him so.

“Sorry, love.” Louis says with put-on gravitas. “It’s just — I imagined this very differently in my head. You know, rose petals and scented candles and romance. What you deserve. And you’re all ‘right here, right now, however you want it’.”

Harry snorts. “You big romantic dork. And don’t pretend like I was ever anything but a sure bet.”
He yawns, suddenly tired down to his very bones. Louis yawns moments later, and they both laugh at the ridiculousness of it.

“Maybe we should save this fuckfest you’ve got planned until we can both keep our eyes open, hmm, babe?”

All Harry can do is nod because unfortunately without lube or condoms, they’re pretty much fucked anyway (and not in the way Harry would like).

He feels Louis press a kiss to the crown of his head and feels as much as he hears him whisper, “Love you.”

Harry just manages to mumble out, “Love you, too,” before he’s drifting off without the sound of waves to lull him to sleep for the first time in ages, but the steady sound of Louis’s beating heart does the job just as well (if not better).

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! x.

If you're enjoying it, you can find the Tumblr post here.

You can follow us at lookatyourchoices and winingandcrying.
And the winner is...

Chapter Summary

Dating without surviving.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

>>>>> H <<<<<

At first, being home again after over a month of living on a beach as part of a game show to win a million dollars on reality TV is just as jarring as it sounds like it might be. Though technically this had been his second time on the show, he’d made it so much farther this time that the experiences didn’t really compare.

He’s started to think of his life in terms of Pre-Game and Post-Game. That had been his plan all along anyway — When he’d been offered a place on Survivor, he’d decided to use it as an opportunity for change regardless of how far he made it. He’d quit his job as a PR assistant before leaving for Panama; he’d been working too many hours for too little money at a firm with no room for advancement, and hadn’t been sure if he wanted to stay in that field anyway.

The convenient thing about being a finalist is that since the winner of Survivor isn’t announced until six months after filming ends, Harry has a built-in period of time where it would really be impractical for him to make any major life decisions. There’s a 50/50 chance he’s won a million dollars, and he can’t pretend that money wouldn’t make a huge difference in which options are available to him. The wait is also the most inconvenient thing about being a finalist — sometimes it feels too much like being in limbo.

Luckily, Harry has a very ‘go-with-the-flow’ approach to change, which makes it easier for him to accept that his life is going to be in flux for the foreseeable future. But he’d also like to think that he’s a relatively sensible person, so when his exit therapist tells him there are certain things he can do to make sure he doesn’t feel too unanchored, he listens.

He’d given himself a little less than a week to recuperate at his mom’s house, growing used to eating regular meals and sleeping regular hours. Then he’d returned to Philadelphia, Dusty in tow, and picked up a job at a local bakery. He establishes a routine that’s similar to the one he’d had before going on the show: running each morning, attending yoga twice a week when he can afford it, walking to the farmer’s market on Saturday mornings, marathoning BBC specials via text with Gemma. He knows he’s likely to feel isolated after over a month of being surrounded by people 24/7, and when that happens he makes plans to meet up with any of his numerous friends, or at the very least goes somewhere he can get lost in a crowd.

All of that is fine; a month and a half after he’s returned from playing the game, he’s had barely any trouble transitioning back. No, his major concern is how much he misses Louis, and how much he knows Louis misses him.

They’d had a talk right before leaving Panama to reiterate that they were on the same page: They both wanted a relationship after the show and that they wanted the relationship to be a priority. The
exit therapist and been adamant about learning to untangle 'real feelings' from 'game feelings,' and
Harry guesses that’s a reasonable thing to say to two people who fell in love over the course of a
thirty-nine day reality show. But regardless of how it happened, Harry’s in love with Louis and
there’s no changing that now.

Both of them were confident that what they had wasn’t just a product of the intensity of the show,
but still — they meant too much to each other to risk ruining everything by trying to move things too
quickly. They’d agreed to do the long distance thing for the time being, and Harry had been all for
that at the time. It had made sense. And the first three weeks hadn’t been that bad.

For them, being apart means communicating through every form of social media they can get their
hands on. Gemma and Lottie have a group message solely for the purpose of mocking them
relentlessly, but Harry’s never been happier, so he can’t find it in himself to care.

Originally the plan had been to slowly but surely incorporate each other into their daily lives, to make
sure they could fit back into their own lives before seeing if they could fit into each other’s. They
started off with a few texts a day, a phone call every few. But as far as Harry had been concerned, it
was pointless to talk less when they made each other so happy. It didn’t take much to wheedle Louis
into admitting he felt the same.

Because it’s not that Louis has become Harry’s life; it’s that Harry gets to share his life with Louis.

Harry sends snapchats of dogs he sees on his runs, and Louis sends snapchats of him and his
coworkers messing about. Harry live texts The Bachelor and Louis live texts Game of Thrones, but
they always wait so they can watch at the same time. Harry makes endless Spotify playlists of all the
indie shit he listens to and Louis changes Harry’s ringtone to his weekly favorites. Harry pins recipes
he wants to try and Louis instagrams pictures of his best attempts at them. Harry can forward Louis
travel deals to places he’d like to visit and by the end of the day Louis will respond with the top five
things he’d want to do there.

Harry can call and vent about something stupid that happened at the bakery, and Louis will listen
without ever making him feel petty for complaining. Harry can ask Louis’s advice on anything and
Louis will be honest with him, but support and respect whatever decision he makes. When Harry is
panicking about what the hell he’s going to do with his life, he could tell Louis he’s moving to South
America and Louis would tell him that if that’s what Harry wants, he’ll help him do it, and then
makes Harry laugh until he forgets what he was scared of in the first place. And the best part is that it
goes both ways.

A month and a half in, Harry doesn’t like thinking about where he’d be if he hadn’t gone on
Survivor. A month and a half in, Louis sends Harry one of his old t-shirts because Harry complains
that the one he stole when they were packing at the hotel doesn’t smell like him anymore. A month
and a half in, Harry knows that while sharing his life with Louis is great, building a life with Louis
would be even better.

Adrenaline pulses through Louis’s veins as he steps off the plane. For a second, it’s almost like
being back in the game, the way his body responds to the anticipation of seeing his boy again after so
long.

It’d been two months before Louis could scrounge up enough money and beg for a few days off
work to go visit Harry, but now he’s here and he can’t stop smiling.

He rushes through the terminal to get to baggage claim, and he’s in so much of a hurry that he almost
misses his phone vibrating in his pocket. He wrestles out just in time to see that it’s Harry and answer
with a massive grin on his face. “Hey!”

“Hiiiiiiiiii.”

Louis’s face is going to split with the force of his smile, he swears.

“Where are you?” Harry asks.

“I’m just getting off the escalator to baggage claim.”

“Oh good.” Louis hears some rustling on the other end.

“Harry?” No reply, and still more rustling. “Babe, where are you?”

He’s about to hang up and call back when he hears pounding footfalls coming up behind him and

“Louis!”

He turns and Harry slams into his arms, knocking Louis back a few steps but he holds fast. And this,
more than anything in the past two months, feels like coming home.

“What are you doing here?” Louis says breathlessly into Harry’s neck.

Couldn’t wait to see you.” Harry murmurs back, smile tucked into Louis’s cheek.

Louis inhales, letting Harry’s scent wash over his senses, and says, “God, I missed you.”

“Me, too. You’ve no idea.” He mumbles back.

“I think I do.” They pull back just a little to smile at one another, and Louis quickly catalogues all the
differences two months have made in Harry’s appearance: his face is fuller, he feels more solid
around the middle, he looks well rested, and his hair is a little longer but a lot shinier now that it’s

Satisfied with his assessment, he realizes that Harry’s doing the same to him, but that his eyes have
stalled on the stubble on Louis’s cheeks. He smirks. “I haven’t shaved since I bought my plane
ticket.” Harry’s eyes grow darker, and Louis laughs a little as he says, “Don’t ever say I don’t give
you what you want.”

“You’re what I want.” Harry says lowly because he’s a cheesy fuck, but somehow that does it for
Louis because he’s reeling in his boy for a long, deep kiss. (Nothing too inappropriate for an airport,
though. Louis is a gentleman after all.)

When they pull back for air, Harry presses their foreheads together and whines, “Do we have to go
to my parents’ tonight? Can’t we go back to my place first? My parents will understand. My mom
already loves you.”

“Harry-”

“I’ve got...things I want to show you.” he says, moving his hands from the curve of Louis’s waist to
the swell of his bum.

Louis loves Harry’s eagerness. Really, he does. But he’s making it very difficult for Louis to be the
gentleman he wants to be. He’s in this for the long-haul, and that means there are parents that need to
be impressed.
“Babe, you know I want nothing more than to just be with you, but if we go to yours first, we might never make it to your parents.”

Harry pouts, but nods and steps away. “Okayyy. Fine.”

Louis pops up on his tiptoes to kiss his cheek before taking his hand and heading towards baggage claim.

“So what’s for dinner? It better not be rice.”

>>>>>

Louis is pushed roughly through the door and backed up against the wall before he even has time to look at Harry’s place. “Harry? What-”

He’s cut off by a, frankly, violent kiss. Harry’s bigger frame cages him in against the wall and Louis succumbs to the kiss. Harry starts yanking at Louis’s shirt and huffs against his lips. “No. No more talking, Lou. We’ve waited long enough. Please.”

Louis can’t exactly disagree. And after last night, when Louis had insisted on sleeping in the guestroom rather than with Harry, he does realize that Harry’s been very patient with him. It’s time for his reward.

“You’ve been so good, H. Been such a good boy for me.” Louis whispers in Harry’s ear in between kisses to his cheek and neck, hands wandering south to the zip of his skinny jeans.

“What do you want?”

Louis brushes the back of his hand over the growing bulge in Harry’s pants just as he gasps out, “You. Just you.”

“That’s not very specific, Harold.” He can’t help but tease him for that, even as he undoes Harry’s pants and slips a hand inside. Harry’s head falls onto Louis’s shoulder like he couldn’t possibly hold it up anymore. “Lou,” he whines, voice low and rough and desperate enough to spike Louis’s own arousal. He’s always had a thing for Harry’s voice.

“Come on, baby.” Louis whispers, wrist starting up a torturous rhythm. “Tell me what you want.”

Harry groans, but manages to mumble, “Your mouth. Your cock,” into Louis’s shoulder.

Louis ducks down to kiss the crown of his head before straightening up, tugging a disgruntled Harry with him. “Then you’d better direct me to your bedroom, sweetheart, because there’s no way I’m letting this go down in a hallway.”

Harry rolls his eyes, but he can’t hide his smile. He grabs Louis and kisses him as he starts to walk him backwards down the hall. In true cliché fashion, they begin to shed their clothes in between kisses as the walk. Harry only manages to stumble twice before Louis catches him, giggling breathlessly. By the time they finally tumble into bed, Harry’s naked and Louis is just in his briefs. (Because for as uncoordinated as he is, Harry is apparently an expert in undressing.)

Louis sits back for a moment to take in the sight of his boy on the bed. The last time they’d been here, they’d both been in a haze of sleep deprivation and high emotions, so Louis doesn’t feel he properly appreciated the sight. Harry is gorgeous. Everything about him. And he wants to be with Louis, of all people. It’s a little overwhelming.
Harry must read something in Louis’s expression because he sits up, cradling Louis’s face in his big hands. “Lou?”

Louis shakes his head and puts his hands over Harry’s. “How did we get so lucky, babe?”

He expects Harry to laugh and call him cheesy, but instead he looks into Louis’s eyes and says, “I don’t know, but I’m so, so happy we did.”

When Louis kisses him this time, it’s slower, deeper in a way that makes him feel content and desperate all at once, as he spreads Harry out on the bed and settles between his thighs. He kisses down Harry’s neck and chest, taking his time because, finally, there are no distractions. Nothing can take him away from his boy now.

He pays specific attention to each of Harry’s nipples because ever since the paint incident, Louis’s been curious to see just how sensitive they are. Harry doesn’t disappoint. After a few laps with the flat of his tongue, Louis’s reduced him to an incoherent mess. “Lou. Please — I. Lou.”

Louis presses his smirk into Harry’s sternum and continues his way down, nosing at Harry’s abs, nipping at his lovehandles, sucking a bruise onto his hipbone, until he reaches his destination.

Harry’s not even forming words anymore, just a symphony of moans and whimpers that drive Louis to adjust himself in his boxer-briefs. It wouldn’t do to come undone when he’s just getting started.

Without warning (mostly because he can’t help himself anymore), Louis licks a stripe up Harry’s cock, base to tip. Harry arches violently off the mattress in response, so Louis grabs his hips, pressing his thumbs into the laurel tattoos there, and holds him down. That seems to drive Harry even wilder, which is something Louis will definitely have to explore later. “Be still, baby.”

Harry struggles for a second longer before all the tension seems to leave his body and he sinks into the mattress. Louis’s perfect, beautiful boy. In this moment, Louis thinks Harry was made for him, if such things were possible.

He leans down to press a soft kiss to Harry’s lips as a ‘thank you’ and an ‘I love you’ and ‘I want you for always.’ He thinks Harry understands from the way his eyes gleam when Louis pulls back.

"Love you," Harry says quietly, small smile on his face.

"Love you," Louis replies.

Harry beams up at him at that. “Suck my cock now, please.”

Louis laughs delightedly and steals another kiss before doing as he's told.

He keeps hold of Harry’s hips as he mouths at the crown before taking just the head between his lips and sucking gently. He feels a blurt of precome hit his tongue, so he draws back and licks down the side of Harry’s cock, spreading it so that he’s glistening. He hovers there for a moment, breathing over him, and feels Harry shiver.

“’Nuff teasing, Lou. Please.”

Since he asked nicely...Louis ducks down and noses at Harry’s balls before lightly sucking them into his mouth. It’s like he’s exposed a livewire, because Harry goes wild with it. Louis drags his lips back and forth over him before kissing downwards. Luckily, Louis still has a hold of Harry’s hips because he might have a broken nose from the force of Harry’s thrust otherwise.
Louis chuckles and hums onto the skin there, loving the feeling of driving Harry mad for it.

“Please, Lou. Pleasepleaseplease.”

“Please what, Harry?”

“Touch me.”

“I am touching you.”

Harry growls in frustration right as Louis presses a finger to his rim. The growl fades into a groan.

“Yes.”

“Like that?”

He feels more than sees Harry nod.

“Lube?” It’s a loaded question after their last misadventure, but Harry seems to preoccupied to mind.

“Bedside drawer.”

Louis reaches over, having to shuffle a little bit to reach, and opens the drawer. He barks out a laugh at what he finds.

“H. Did you buy a family size bottle of lube and a year’s supply of condoms?”

“Wanted to be prepared after last time,” Harry shrugs, but there’s laughter in his eyes, too.

Louis loves that they can laugh together even in the midst of fucking. Relationship goal achieved.

He ducks down to kiss Harry once more before settling back in between his legs with the giant bottle of lube. Once his fingers are slicked, he presses one up against Harry’s rim again. This time Harry seems to deflate, like the pressure there is a great mental and physical relief.

Louis presses in slowly, cautious not to hurt his boy. When he gets to the second knuckle, though, Harry takes things into his own hands (or body, really) and rolls his hips so that the rest of Louis’s finger slides in. Louis stills, but Harry’s eyes are glassy with want and he starts to wiggle his hips some more. Giving in, Louis crooks his finger and Harry’s eyes fall shut, mouth gaping open in a silent ‘Oh.’

Louis begins to rub the pad of his finger against Harry’s walls, seeking the rougher texture of his prostate. When he finds it, Harry’s eyes pop back open, and he watches Louis through half-lidded eyes as he strokes over the spot repeatedly before whispering, “Another.”

Louis adds a little more lube before pressing his second finger in beside the first. It takes longer to get up to the second knuckle this time, both of them furrowing their brows in concentration, but once he does, Harry rolls his hips again, bringing both fingers fully inside.

Louis chuckles as he starts slowly thrusting his fingers in and out, stopping to rub at Harry’s prostate every so often. “You can’t just let me drive, can you?”

Harry shakes his head even as he rolls his hips down to meet Louis’s fingers. “No. We share that, really.”

Just because he can, Louis bends down and takes the head of Harry’s cock back into his mouth even
as he keeps his fingers going. He looks up at Harry from under his eyelashes as he sucks and their eyes meet. Harry tosses his head back with a groan.

“I guess — I can let you — take over,” Harry says, in between pants. "For now."

Louis hums and adds a third finger all at once and is met with a drawn out “Fuck” from Harry.

Louis spends a few more minutes making sure Harry is good and open and desperate for it before he gives one final swipe at Harry’s prostate and withdraws his fingers and mouth. Harry whines at the sudden lack of stimulation and screws his hips up from the sheets, seeking something that’s not there. Louis pets his torso and whispers, “I’ve got you, baby. How do you want me?”

Harry’s eyes burn darkly up at Louis for a moment, momentarily disgruntled like he’s being forced to choose between bananas, boots, and headscarves. Then he says, “Can I ride you?”

Like Louis’s going to say no to that.

He quickly extricates himself from his pre-come stained boxer-briefs, but when he goes for a condom, Harry slaps his hand away. “I wanna do it.”

Louis rolls his eyes but indulges him. Harry strokes him gently before lovingly rolling the condom down. When he’s done, he places a kiss right on the underside of the tip, and Louis can’t help but tease, “I think you like my cock more than you like me.”

Harry looks at him gravely. “I do. We’re eloping in the spring.”

Louis wrestles a giggling Harry so that he’s seated in his lap, and when Louis’s cock brushes against his hole, Harry’s giggles catch in his chest. Louis taps Harry’s hip and says, “Lift up for me, baby.”

Harry complies, and Louis grabs the lube to slick up. Before he’s really finished, Harry shuffles up on his knees and begins to lower himself down. Louis fumbles the bottle of lube, spilling a good portion on the bed, as he scrambles to get his hands on Harry’s hips.

“Baby, don’t rush.”

Harry doesn’t really acknowledge him as the head of Louis’s cock brushes against him, and he begins to sink down with a sigh, eyes closed, head thrown back, the most gorgeous thing Louis has ever seen.

Soon though, Louis can’t keep his eyes open against the onslaught of Harry’s tight little body surrounding him, taking him in. When Harry is finally fully seated on Louis’s hips, they both let out satisfied groans. Louis opens his eyes to find Harry looking back at him with so much raw emotion that Louis doesn’t think before he’s pulling Harry down for a searing kiss and threading his fingers through Harry’s curls. This changes the angle significantly enough that Harry’s clenching down hard on Louis’s cock even as he kisses him around their groans.

Then Harry starts to move, rocking back and forth a little at first and then more boldly once he finds a rhythm. Louis starts to thrust up with what little leverage he has, spurring him on. Quickly, it becomes a frenzy of grinding and thrusts and moans, and Louis can feel the familiar tingle at the base of his spine.

“H.” He warns roughly.

Harry just hums in response, riding his cock like a champ.
“H. Slow down or I’m gonna-”

“’M close, too,” Harry says, planting his hands on Louis’s chest and heaving his hips up and down more frantically.

Louis brings a hand to Harry’s cock, which is making a mess all over his belly. Louis is determined to get Harry off first, but as he grasps him, Harry twists his hips forward so that the back of Louis’s knuckles press into Harry’s tummy right where his cock is pressing into Harry’s prostate from the other side. They both gasp at the feeling, and if they weren’t frantic before, they definitely are now. It only takes a few more twists of Harry hips into Louis’s hand for him to shout and spill all over him. Louis pumps his hips up once, twice more with Harry clenching around him before he finds his release.

Harry collapses on top of Louis, not seeming to mind how oversensitive he must be at such an angle. When Louis gets his bearing about him, he moves to slip out, but Harry stills him. “Just — wait a second, yeah?”

Louis is slowly accepting that he can’t deny his boy anything. “Alright. But let me know if it starts to hurt.”

Harry nods into the crook of his neck, and they stay like that, come drying between them and lube sticky on the sheets, for another peaceful minute just breathing each other in. Louis thinks this is the most honestly content he’s ever been.

“I love you, Harry,” He whispers into the springy bits of curls behind his ears.

Harry sounds a little choked up when he replies. “I love you, Louis.”

They’re quiet for another moment when Louis asks, “So, was it everything you imagined?”

His teasing tone doesn’t seem to phase Harry, though, because he replies sincerely, “And more.”

They finally extricate themselves from the mess they made shortly after that, and when they’ve cleaned off and changed the sheets, they settle down to sleep, Louis spooning Harry.

“I haven’t been able to sleep as well without you.” Harry whispers into the dark.

Louis kisses the back of Harry’s neck and silently vows to never leave him if he can help it. “Me neither.”

They both leave the rest unsaid because those are problems for the future. Right now, they are together and they are happy. And it’s enough.

>>>>> H <<<<<

“Wait, guys, I just realized, isn’t Survivor on tonight?”

The five of them — Zayn, Niall, Liam, Harry, and Louis — are lounging around Zayn’s apartment, together again for the first time since leaving Panama after months of trying to coordinate their schedules. Zayn had insisted that this week was the only time he was free to meet up, so Niall had flown from Ohio, Liam from Kentucky, and Louis from Missouri.

Harry had taken a train from Philadelphia to La Guardia so he could meet up with Louis before they were expected at Zayn’s. Originally Louis’s plan had been to stay a few nights there and then head home, but Harry had convinced him to change his ticket. Now he's taking the train back to
Philadelphia so he can spend more time with Harry before going back to St. Louis.

When they'd arrived at Zayn's apartment, Louis had knocked on the apartment door with the air of a prisoner walking into their execution, and that was after he'd spent all afternoon trying every trick in the book to make them late. At first Harry had thought it was just Louis being grumpy about having to share Harry with other people during the short time they had together, which was something they’d both been guilty of in the past.

So Harry had waited until he heard footsteps approaching the door and then sprung into action, backing himself against the stretch of wall beside the door and pulling Louis in by the bum. Louis had made a noise of surprise, but Harry is nothing if not a very determined kisser. He managed to turn it filthy just in time for Zayn to appear.

“Ugh. Just come in whenever you’re finished, don’t forget to shut the door when you do.”

As soon as he was gone Louis pulled away, cackling delightedly at Harry’s antics. “You’re a menace.”

“Your menace, though,” Harry had said smugly.

Louis sighed. “It’s a tough job, but someone has to do it.” He yanked one of Harry’s curls for good measure before sliding their hands together, tugging Harry inside. “C’mon Harold. We have somewhere to be. Can’t stand here groping my bum all day.”

Harry had thought he’d snapped Louis out of it, but he’s on the floor leaning against Louis’s legs, so he feels Louis tense when Zayn mentions the show.

“Is it really?” Liam asks excitedly. “Which episode are they on? I missed last week because of a work thing.”

“Nine,” Niall answers quickly, already reaching for the remote. “S’the one where these two get separated.”

Louis looks skeptical. “Doesn’t it get tiring watching Harry and I dominate week after week? You already lived it once. I’m just trying to save your egos here.”

“How selfless of you,” Zayn says, an amused edge to his voice that makes Harry turn to see the expression on his face. He looks like he’s barely containing a smirk.

Louis darts a glare in Zayn’s direction and tries again. “This is the first time we’ve seen each other in months! We shouldn’t squander our precious time together.”

“It’s not squandering!” Niall says, indignant. “It’ll be fun!”

“Yeah, Tommo,” Zayn echoes, a wicked glint to his eye. “So fun.”

“Let’s take a vote on it,” Liam interrupts, voice reasonable. “All in favor of watching?”

Zayn, Liam, and Niall all raise their hands immediately. Harry waits a beat before slowly raising his own, because now he’s just curious.

Louis takes great, almost vindictive pleasure in live-tweeting commentary for every episode. The boy even has an alert that Harry gets every week from their shared Google calendar, even though Harry himself just watches with his family like a normal person. Louis doesn’t pass up opportunities to loudly trash talk the other tribe or other contestants very often. In fact, his new favorite catch phrase
is ‘You did that shit; I did that great.’ So turning down a chance to watch the episode live and lord his superiority over the others in person seems odd to Harry.

He feels Louis make a half-hearted attempt at kicking his back. “Taste of betrayal, Harold!”

Harry rolls his eyes, pushing himself off the ground so he can tuck himself into Louis’s side on the couch as Niall flips on the TV. “It’s only an hour, Lou. There’ll be time to make memories after,” he says, nudging up under Louis’s arm so that it curls around him while Harry clings to his middle.

Louis huffs crossly, but doesn’t put up much more of a fight as Niall turns it to the right channel.

The beginning of the episode isn’t that bad, but only a few minutes in they reach the tribe swap. They spare a few minutes to laugh at how stupid Mogo Mogo looks without their paint, and then at how creepily enthusiastic Tom is to talk with Louis. When Onscreen Jeff pulls out the urn with the new buffs, Niall leans across the couch and makes grabby hands at Harry.

Louis tightens his hold on Harry, shooting Niall a glare. “I’m getting really sick of everyone trying to steal my boy.”

“You see him all the time, Tommo!” Niall all but whines. “I haven’t seen him in months! Share!”

Harry sighs. He’s already comfortable and doesn’t much feel like moving, but it’s Niall, and Harry’s pretty sure it’s some sort of capital offense to deny Niall anything. So he stretches up, kissing Louis’s neck lightly in apology and mumbling “Sorry, babe” before wiggling out from under Louis’s arm.
He settles with his head pillowed against Niall’s chest so that Zayn is directly in his line of sight in the armchair across from him. When he checks in on Louis, he’s pulled his phone out, apparently unable to resist live tweeting without Harry physically preventing him by being in his lap.

The show returns from commercial break with a shot of the new Mogo Mogo at camp, everyone visibly miserable as they talk about missing Harry. He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t surprised; for some reason in his head he’d assumed that he’d sort of just stopped existing for them once he was no longer on their tribe.

It feels a bit like what Harry imagines secretly watching loved ones mourn at his funeral would be like. As bad as that sounds, it’s sort of sweet to see how upset they were.

“Guys,” Harry says, hoping his voice conveys how touched he is that they were thinking of him.

“We didn’t forget where you belonged, H,” Liam says earnestly, talking over Onscreen Harry, who’s showing the new Chapera around camp. “You were meant to stay with us. The producers just wanted more drama.”

Zayn shushes them as soon as the episode cuts back to the new Mogo Mogo. He leans forward gleefully as Onscreen Louis addresses the camera in a talking head.

“I care about him. It kills me to have him over there by himself. I know he’s tough, but. So much of the reason why he was having such a good time, and why I was having such a good time, was because of each other.”

The shot changes to one of the whole tribe, Louis holding up a bottle of wine and knocking it back after a quiet “Here’s to Harry.”

Harry tries very hard to keep the goofy grin off his face, but he can’t help it. Meanwhile, Liam, Niall, and Zayn are openly oohing and awwing, giggling at an unimpressed Louis.

It only gets worse after that. There’s a shot of Louis staring moodily out over the ocean; one of the unbearably soft look on his face when he first glimpses Harry at the immunity challenge and another of the devastation clear on his face when his tribe wins immunity, which startles a disgruntled “Oh my god, you were going to throw that challenge, I can’t believe you!” from Zayn, a “You were going to do WHAT?!” from Liam, and a heartfelt “Awwwww” from Niall.

The worst is when they cut to yet another talking head of Louis saying how much he misses Harry, but this time around there’s a small H visible on his hand.

“It’s for Harry,” Onscreen Louis explains, sounding close to tears. “Hopefully he makes it to the next challenge.”

This sends Zayn into such a violent fit of laughter that Liam actually has to leave to look for Zayn’s inhaler.

“You’re so, so, stupid” Zayn gasps for breath, clutching at his own chest. “I can’t believe it, you’re such a sentimental sap, oh my god.”

“It’s not stupid!” Louis says, a stubborn tilt to his mouth and eyes narrowed at them. “I love him!”

Harry is bright red at this point, fish-mouthing at the screen. “I…you…” He struggles to find words before finally settling on just “Louis.”

He’s overwhelmed with how endeared he feels. It’s just such a Louis move — Louis, who is
completely logical in everything up until his stupidly big heart overrides everything, and suddenly things like planning to throw an immunity challenge so Harry won’t have to go to tribal, or writing an H on his hand in charcoal, seem like completely normal reactions to what’s happening.

Harry loves him so much he feels like his whole heart is trying to inflate in his chest but there’s no more room for it to expand so even taking in air hurts, but somehow it’s still the best thing.

“No, but really, what were you hoping to achieve with that?” Liam is asking, apparently calmed enough that he sounds more bemused than hysterical.

“I see your point, Liam, but in the future I’d rather you fuck off,” Louis says dismissively.

Niall pats Harry on the back consolingly. “I’m sorry you’re in love with an idiot, Harry.”

Harry ignores him, raising his voice so it’ll carry over everyone else. “You’re my favorite human person and I love you stupid amounts.”

Louis looks up from where he’d opened his mouth to round on Niall, turning pink for the first time that night. His eyes soften, so, so blue, small smile crinkling them at the corners. It’s maybe Harry’s favorite of Louis’s smiles. “You’re mine too, sunshine.”

Everyone makes gagging noises, but Harry just grins to himself and closes his eyes, content to stay warm against Niall until the episode ends. At one point they’re on a commercial break and Harry looks up because Zayn’s clutching his phone to his chest, having some sort of coughing fit. Once Harry’s sure he’s alright, he closes his eyes and presses closer to Niall. He and Louis have three more days together before they’ll be separated again, but it’s three days with the love of his life, so all in all he guesses he’s pretty lucky.
don't get your briefs in a wad bro. just making up for lost time. we'll be there soon.

gross. i hate you.

then why were you worried about me???

you trapped me. i hate you.

aha x ! :)

........bro

BRO.

this is sad bro.
......dude

bro. shut the fuck up. stop laughing. this is important

i know how i'm going to propose to H

we met on the show. we found each other because of it.

......hoe DONT

no shhh this is the best plan in the history of plans !!

gonna propose to h at the reunion special!!!!!!!
oh my god.

I KNOW!!!!! H is gonna lose his mind im gonna sweep him off his feet so hard he'll never get down again

this is the most pathetic thing I have ever witnessed

sorry U jelly U didn't think of it before me

who the fuck would I be proposing to on the reunion ep of survivor lol

it's ok Z I know it's hard to compete with me & h
So Louis is gonna marry his boy. Well...first he has to propose, but then he’s going to marry his boy. No matter how stupid Zayn thinks he is.

But first he has to find the perfect ring. Where better to find it than New York City? The only issue is that Zayn is the worst partner-in-crime ever, doing absolutely nothing to distract Harry while Louis pops into ring shops. Louis has already had to use the excuse of needing to go to the bathroom twice in a thirty minute time span, so between that and his nervous/excited energy, Harry’s watching him with barely hidden concern.

Louis needs to find a new wing-man. His only problem is that both candidates — Niall and Liam — are way more likely to blab to Harry or get distracted by sightseeing than actually help him. So as per usual, it’s Louis against the world. (Normally, it’d be Harry and him against the world, but he can’t be involved in this for obvious reasons.)

Just as he sees another shop he wants to duck into, Harry tugs at his elbow. “Lou, are you feeling alright? Because I can take you back to Zayn’s place if you’re not.”

Even when Harry is totally unaware, he helps Louis way more than anyone else has all day. God, Louis loves him. That’s why he’s gotta lock this down.

Louis puts on his best acting face and says, “You know what, I’m not feeling very well. But I don’t want to ruin your day, sweetheart. You’ve never seen New York. Zayn can take me back to his place. Right, Zayn?”
Louis throws a look Zayn’s way, but he doesn’t catch on quick enough, “Actually, I-”

“All you have to do is drop me off. Then you can give the boys the grand ol’ tour.”

Zayn’s expression brightens after a few well-placed eyebrow moves from Louis, and he says, “Yeah. No problem, bro.”

Harry looks back and forth between them, worrying his bottom lip in between his teeth. “Are you sure, Lou?” He places the back of his hand to Louis’s forehead, and Louis feels a little bad for deceiving him. But it’s all in the name of romance, so. Not too bad.

“I can stay with you. You know, take care of you and all.”

“Nah, babe, seriously. I think I just need to sleep it off.” He kisses Harry’s cheek gently and whispers, “Have a good time. Love you.”

“Love you, too.” Harry still doesn’t look completely at ease, but he smiles and lets Louis go.

When he and Zayn have turned the corner, he kicks him in the shin.

“Ouch! Fuck, bro! What the hell?” Zayn curses, jumping up and down and holding his injured shin.

“That’s for being a shitty wing-man. Now, make it up to me by directing me to a good ring shop.”

He finds The Ring in an antique shop in SoHo. It’s a solid band with a delicate design, and it’s so Harry that Louis hadn’t even bothered to check the price before saying he’d take it. Honestly, Louis would work the late shift for the next year if it meant he could afford that ring.

Zayn rolls his eyes and mutters that Harry won’t care about a fancy ring, but Louis does. Only the best for his boy.

He can’t wait to pop the question and see the look on Harry’s face when he sees it.

Harry’s not stupid. He’s known something’s been off about Louis since they’d met at the hotel yesterday. Louis had tried to hide it, but Harry can still tell that Louis is full of nervous energy. They’re about to go onstage for the Live Results Show and Reunion at Madison Square Garden to find out which of them has won the million dollars, so Harry’d put it down to that, but...

Harry feels like there’s something else going on.

“There’s nothing else going on, Harry. I swear!” Louis protests, hands up defensively, and yeah. Something’s definitely going on.

“Fine. If you don’t want to tell me, that’s up to you. But I thought we were a team now.” Harry’s not above playing dirty.

“We are a team, babe!” Louis moves to touch him, but Harry takes a half-step back. Harry doesn’t miss the flash of hurt on Louis’s face, but he started it.

Louis’s running his hands through his hair in the way that he does when he’s frustrated. Harry almost scolds him for messing up his hair just minutes before they’re going to be called out for the show, but he doesn’t because he thinks thinks they might be having a fight. Which is weird because Harry
doesn’t think they’ve ever actually had a real fight. Disagreements? Sure. Debates? Of course. But fights? Harry struggles to remember a time that Louis has ever raised his voice at Harry.

Louis may be the type to jump into arguments with random people on the street, but before today, he’s always paused and handled things differently when it came to Harry. It’s one of the many reasons Harry loves Louis, his very own lovable asshole.

The thought makes Harry’s breath catch, because this feels different from any arguments they’ve had, and it’s right before such a big moment in both of their lives. Harry’s body sags with the weight of it just as Louis steps forward again, leaving enough distance between them to respect Harry’s space but close enough to catch and hold his gaze.

Louis looks tired, Harry realizes suddenly.

“Lou,” Harry pleads just a little bit. “Just tell me what it is, okay? You’re worrying me.”

Louis sighs and looks away before turning a little circle around himself as he begins to say, “I had it all planned out, H. It was going to be big and romantic and you were going to love it. But earlier I started thinking, like, what if you don’t want this yet? I mean, I’m pretty sure you do, what with all the magazine subscriptions that keep ‘accidentally’ ending up in my name. And the Pinterest board you added me to wasn’t exactly subtle.”

Louis has begun to pace, and Harry’s having a hard time keeping up with the words rapidly firing from his mouth. “But maybe you’re thinking in the future? But I’m thinking right now, and I’ve been worried because we’re always on the same page. So I should probably just check first. Yeah, that’s what I’ll do.”

For the first time in his little rant, Louis looks up at Harry, and when he does, there’s a determination in his eyes that wasn’t there before. He strides forward towards him and Harry is anticipating a kiss or a hug or something, but suddenly Louis is on his knees and Harry’s brain needs a moment to recalibrate.

"...Louis? What are you doing?"

Louis pulls a small black box out of his pocket, and it’s like Harry’s entire body short circuits.

“I’m asking you to marry me.” Louis says looking up at Harry with just a hint of nervousness. “I was going to surprise you during the live show, but I realized you might not like that, that you might not want the spectacle, so I’m giving you a choice-”

“Yes!” Harry can’t hold it in any more, he sinks to his knees in front of Louis and kisses him like it’s forever, because maybe it is.

Louis laughs a little into the kiss, joy overflowing between them. “Okay, fiancé. I’m glad to know we’re on the same page, but I need to ask...Do you want to still have the big grand gesture proposal live on TV? The show’s what brought us together, which is why I thought it was fitting.”

“You’re such a sap.” Harry says, happy tears in his eyes.

“But I’m you’re sap.” Louis says kissing his nose.

Harry leans back thoughtfully. “You really ruined your own surprise because you weren’t sure I’d like it?”

Louis shrugs sheepishly. “I mean, we never really talked about proposals. Weddings? Sure. Kids?
Definitely. But you never told me if you’d prefer private or public, so I wanted to check.”

"That's because I don't care, so long as it's you proposing." Harry’s smile is starting to hurt his face. “I've loved you since Day 18.”

Louis’s answering smile says it all. “I've loved you since Day 18.”

So Louis proposes to Harry again during the Live Reunion, complete with a heartfelt speech that has Harry — and their families, who're watching from the audience — in tears. He does it before Jeff reads the votes, which effectively takes the wind out of those sails (Louis tries not to look too pleased at the deflated look on Jeff’s face, but after surviving on an island for thirty-nine days, sweating and starving while Jeff presided over them, Louis can't really help it and Harry doesn't really blame him).

It's not like it really matters who won anyway. At this point, a million dollars would just be a bonus.

So when Harry wins by a one vote margin, it still feels like they won. And no matter how many times Jeff or the other guests try to get Louis to claim that he should have won, Louis refuses to budge. He just keeps repeating how much Harry deserved it and how proud he is of him.

Harry can’t stop smiling because this show has helped him find his teammate — not just in the game but outside it, too.

Reality TV shows are weird.

But Harry couldn’t be more grateful for that.

They get married in the springtime. Louis builds Harry a house for his wedding present, complete with a wrap-around porch and a swing Louis builds himself. For a while it’s just the two of them, Harry busy with law school and Louis with the new construction firm. But one day Louis comes home to find Harry cross-legged on the floor of one of their many guest rooms, surrounded by paint chips and nursery catalogues, and that’s that. Slowly but surely their home fills with the family they start together — four girls, two cats, and a dog, not to mention whoever’s in the guest room any given day.

Zayn visits in between modeling campaigns and stints at the children’s art program he’s started. He never says no when the girls wheedle him into painting their rooms while he’s there. At first Liam comes on his own, but after his season of The Bachelor he brings Sophia with him. He takes the girls hiking and mountain biking and camping, because for some reason Harry and Louis had children who are into that sort of thing. They don’t get to see Niall as often because he’s busy hosting his Emmy-winning cooking show (he’d beat out Jeff Probst for ‘Best Host’ in his first season, and he’s been lording it over him ever since), but he sends everyone their favorite meals on their birthdays and flies in to visit when his show isn’t filming.

Every day is a new adventure. One day, they’ll get an offer to be on The Amazing Race, and their moms will stay with their girls when they go. One day, Louis will return to Survivor and convince everyone to name the merged tribe after Harry’s childhood stuffed animal by telling them it’s a local word for ‘Strong.’

They’ll do endless piles of laundry, attend countless soccer games and dance recitals, host superhero and princess-themed birthday parties, have weekly Saturday morning pancake breakfasts, walk the
dog, go on date nights. It’s not always easy, but neither of them would trade it for anything. They have each other, and they have their family, and nothing — not even winning a million dollars — is better than that.

Chapter End Notes

To all of you who made it this far: you are brave souls and we appreciate you! x.

If you enjoyed it, you can find the Tumblr post here.

You can follow us at lookatyourchoices and winingandcrying.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!