It Just Don't Feel Right

by ilikemovies

Summary

Zayn has been in One Direction for five years, but he's decided to find his own way. He needs to break the news to the boys, and their unexpected reactions lead to an eventful night that might leave one of them dead.

With one of them in hospital and undeniable hostility between the remaining members, can One Direction overcome the night's events or will this prove too much for their friendship? It seems that everything that can go wrong, will go wrong, and the boys no longer have each other to help them through it.

Does it ever drive you crazy,
Just how fast the night changes?

Notes

Hi guys. So, basically I was sitting at home when I heard about Zayn leaving One Direction, and then the whole Naughty Boy thing happened. It got me thinking, I wonder what the other boys' reactions were when Zayn told them.

The story unfortunately ran away from me and it took a completely different turn to what I expected. It also ended up a lot longer than I originally planned and it seemed like the focus was shifted off of Zayn leaving the band, but I tried to focus back on that.

I'm quite proud of this because it is my first One Direction piece and I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. All medical information I've used in this story has been obtained from my countless years of watching Grey's Anatomy so it's probably inaccurate but oh well.
Also, I need to edit the story, the format got seriously messed up during publishing so all the paragraphs mushed into one. It will be edited within the next day or so.
Chapter 1

Zayn has decided to leave One Direction after four years of unimaginable success. It's his job to break the news to the boys, but their reactions are not what Zayn thought they would be, and it turns out his decision to leave the band might result in something so unbelievable that his life will never be the same.

Zayn is shaking. His hands tremble more viciously with each passing second. He's pacing up and down outside the hotel room door. The other boys are inside, oblivious to the terrible news Zayn is about to share with them. He takes a deep breath, running an unsteady hand through his long, black hair. Slowly, he opens the door and steps inside the room. The sound of Niall's unmistakable laughter and Liam's unforgettable voice hits Zayn as he quietly shuts the door behind him.

"Zayn!" Louis yells as Zayn walks towards the king sized bed where all four boys are sitting like twelve year old girls at a sleepover.

Zayn nervously rubs the back of his neck with a clammy hand as he takes a seat between Louis and Liam.

Liam is smiling broadly and he looks at Zayn as he says, "You just missed the..." He trails off as he notices the forlorn expression painted across Zayn's bearded face. "Zayn, what's up?"

Zayn is aware of the four pairs of eyes boring into him but he can't bring himself to look up, to meet their gazes. No one says a word as they wait for him to build up the courage to say what he came to say. Finally, he looks up through tear-filled eyes, the other boys going tense at the sight of his tears, and he says, "It's been a good four years."

Cautiously, Louis replies, " Fucking amazing."

"Yeah,"

"Zayn," Niall whispers, his voice filled with concern and anxiety. Zayn dares to lock gazes with Niall, regretting it immediately as the bubbly Irish flashes one of his trademark grins. Zayn doesn't smile back, and Niall's grin drops as he fiddles with the hem of his blue shirt nervously.

"Zayn, you're scaring us, mate. What's wrong?" Harry says, his gravelly voice barely above a whisper.

"I love you, all of you." Zayn continues, ensuring he makes eye contact with each and every one of them. He can see the tears forming in Harry's green eyes, he can see the way Louis is curling his hands into tight fists. It only makes him more nervous.

"We love you," Niall responds, earning a round of simultaneous agreement.

"And I love what we've accomplished. I love the fans."

Harry shakes his head, burying his face in his hands as though he knows what's coming. He can't possibly, though. Zayn holds back tears as he feels Liam wrap a hand around his bicep. He taps Liam's arm gratefully, and Liam only tightens his grip. It grounds Zayn. Louis turns to Harry, gently tugging Harry's trademark flannel shirt. Harry looks up and he shares a comforting smile
with Louis.

Zayn takes a breath. Then another, deeper this time. He counts to three as he wills his pounding heart to slow down. He lets a single tear slide down his flushed cheek.

"But I can't do this anymore," he says, "I can't be part of One Direction anymore. I'm sorry."

"What?" Liam gasps as his hand drops from Zayn's arm. He grabs his black cap off of his head and drops it into his lap as he furiously runs his hands through his hair as he so often does when he's confused.

"Zayn?" Niall asks, his voice shaking as he stares at Zayn questioningly, waiting for Zayn to say he's joking. Zayn wishes he was.

"I'm sorry, but I just need to do what feels right for me and for the band." Zayn mutters, dropping his head.

"Stop fucking about, Zayn. It's not funny." Louis says firmly, using a hand to guide Zayn's gaze towards him. Once their eyes have made contact, Louis frowns and narrows his eyes, silently asking Zayn if he's serious. Zayn nods almost imperceptibly and Louis drops his hand and rips his gaze away.

"I love you guys, I really do," Zayn mumbles, his voice thick with tears and his vision blurred by unshed ones. He fiddles with a loose strand of his black jeans.

"Then why are you leaving?" Niall asks, wiping a tear from his cheek with his shirt. Zayn feels his heart break at the sound of Niall's pained voice. He feels like hugging the boys and telling them it's going to be okay, but he can't. Now is neither the time nor the place for that.

"I'm just not happy. I can't get used to the paparazzi and the hysteria and the noise. I just..."

"You need your privacy." Liam says quietly, the first real response he's had to Zayn's news. Zayn looks up at him. Tears are running tracks down his red cheeks, and his brow is furrowed in something Zayn can't quite decipher.

"Yeah," Zayn says quickly, "I've never been the kind of guy who likes being in the spotlight."

"You fucking prick," Louis yells, shoving himself off of the white sheets on the bed and storming towards the wall. He tugs at his hair furiously. "You asshole!"

"Louis," Zayn begs, standing up and walking towards him, "I know I'm an asshole and I am a prick, and I know this is not fair on any of you. I know it's not fair of me to do this to you."

"Fucking right," Louis screams. He tears himself away as Zayn grabs a hold of his shoulders, but Zayn refuses to let up and eventually Louis stops fighting and lets himself fall into Zayn. Zayn wraps his arms around Louis and hugs him, his heart beating so hard he can barely hear anything else over it. "You asshole." Louis repeats, his voice muffled by quiet sobs.

"In the beginning I loved it. I loved all of it: the concerts, the recording studios, you guys especially." Zayn begins as he and Louis step away from each other and he faces the room.

His gaze drifts to Harry. Harry is still sitting on the bed, his face turned away, his large hands
wrapped in the white sheets. He hasn't said a word. He hasn't moved. He's hurt. Zayn has seen Harry like this once in his life. Harry, the soft, affectionate, polite, patient one of the group who would never hurt a fly, suddenly turns into someone Zayn isn't quite sure of. He becomes introverted and detached. At least last time it happened, Zayn and Louis and Liam and Niall helped him through it; this time, it's the people who helped him last time that have made him like this.

"You don't love it anymore?" Niall asks. "You don't love us?" He also stands and he stumbles over to Zayn as his small frame is wracked with sobs.

Zayn grabs him and envelops him in a tight hug. Zayn feels Niall's sobs reverberate through his own slight frame.

"I love you guys! I will always love you guys, but I don't love the lifestyle anymore." Zayn whispers just loud enough for everyone else in the room to hear.

"You've been sick," Liam states as he stands and takes a hesitant step towards Louis, who's standing in the corner, tears falling down his face. Louis never cries, and the fact that he is now and it's because of Zayn hurts Zayn more than anything else ever could. "Is it because of this? Of all of this?" Liam gestures around him with his arms.

Zayn nods slowly. "I get stressed and I get anxious."

"You're always tired. You're always sore." Louis says, wrapping an arm around Liam. "Because of this?" Liam wraps his arms around Louis and they stand like that for a long time as Louis looks at Zayn, expecting an answer.

Zayn simply nods.

"But you've been like that for a long time," Niall exclaims, pulling away from Zayn. Zayn nods silently. "Why have you waited for so long?"

Zayn contemplates the answer. He debates telling them that he couldn't bare to break the news, to see them like how he's seeing them now. He couldn't bare to hear the disappointment in their voices, to see it in their faces. He wants to tell them that he couldn't face the fact that he would be the reason for their hurt. Instead, he just shrugs and wills away the tears in his eyes.

Liam staggers forward and slams into Zayn. They hug tightly for a long time, pulling away silently. When the hug is over, Zayn looks at Louis and Niall, and they nod at him, almost imperceptibly, but he knows that that means that it's going to be okay. Maybe not now, maybe not tomorrow, but soon. They will get over his departure and they will find it in their hearts to forgive him. But his thoughts go straight to Harry, who is still seated on the bed in the same position.

"Harry," Zayn says as he hesitantly walks closer, his arm outstretched. As his hand touches Harry's arm, Harry shoves it aside and jumps to his feet quickly. He takes a few steps back until his back hits the wall. His gaze bores into Zayn. His cheeks are streaked with tears, and his green eyes are dark with heartache and betrayal. He looks angry, but Zayn knows he's not - he's hurt, he feels abandoned, but he's not angry.

"Dont touch me!" Harry yells, sidestepping out of the way and towards the door.

"Harry!" Zayn yells after him as he hurries out of the door and down the corridor. Zayn follows him and screams after him as they rush down the hallway. "I'm sorry!"
Harry suddenly turns and faces Zayn, his face wet with tears and red with emotion. "You're sorry?" He repeats, his voice oozing with hurt. "Look, just... I can't... This isn't what - I'm not - You're... No. No. I'm sorry, I just... sorry." And with that, he turns and shoves the stairwell door open and jogs down, the heels of his boots slamming against the wooden flooring, the sound slowly fading as the door closes. Zayn is left staring at the doorway, unsure of what to do, unsure of who to turn to, and unsure of where to go.

One of the security guards steps forward, his hazel eyes filled with sympathy as he looks at Zayn. "Should one of us go after him?" He asks uncertainly, gesturing to the other guards with a muscular arm.

"I don't know," Zayn sighs, awkwardly picking at the tattoos on his trembling hands.

"No," Louis yells from behind Zayn. Zayn turns and watches as Louis sprints towards them, his jacket in one arm and Harry's in the other. He grabs Zayn's arm gently and says, "Zayn, you know Harry is just hurting. I need to go after him."

"I'll come with." Zayn says, already heading for the door, but Louis' grip around his arm stops him.

"No, just let me do it alone. Okay? I'll call you when I find him. He just needs someone to talk to."

"Mister Tomlinson, we should go with you," the guard says, following Louis out of the door. "If the paparazzi spot you and we're not there, it could be dangerous."

"No. We'll be fine." And with that, Louis is gone.

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Harry walks down the sidewalk with his hands shoved in the pockets of his skinny jeans. It's freezing - his nose is red with the cold. He's looking at the floor, his long hair concealing his face from view. No one recognises him.

His heart is thudding against his chest, his eyes are filled with unshed tears, and there's a lump in his throat that won't go away. He's not sure how he feels. He feels like he should be angry at Zayn, maybe even disappointed, but he's not. He's sad and he's worried. He doesn't care about the fame or the fact that they might lose it with Zayn gone, but he does care about the fact that one of his best friends - his brother - was unhappy for so long. He does care about the fact that he won't see Zayn every day, that they won't mess around at breakfast or tease each other on the bus. He does care about the fact that he was too selfish to notice that Zayn was suffering. And he cares about the fact that Zayn is choosing to leave. That's Zayn's choice and he knows that, but he feels abandoned.

"Harry?" He hears his name being called by an unfamiliar voice.

He looks up and his gaze travels towards a group of paparazzi running towards him, their cameras flashing, their notebooks at the ready. He looks back down and tries to turn away as he wipes the tears from his cheeks.

"Harry!" They call his name over and over and over. The voices pound at his head and make him feel cornered as he tries to hurry away, but the paparazzi catch up to him.

A blonde lady with a tight dress hugging her curvaceous figure pushes her way towards Harry and
holds a microphone in his face. He tries to move away but he's suddenly surrounded by paparazzi. His chest feels tight as he backs away, only to knock into another cameraman.

"Harry, how are you feeling about Zayn leaving One Direction?" The blonde shouts over the sound of the camera flashes and desperate attempts to get Harry's attention.

Harry can't hide the shock; his face scrunches up and his brows furrow. "How do you know that?" He asks, hugging himself as he feels his chest constrict.

"Everyone knows! It just got announced on the One Direction Facebook page." Another interviewer offers, his frizzy red hair blowing in the wind.

Harry frowns and tries to maneuver his way out of the crowd surrounding him, but his attempts are fruitless. The paparazzi just tighten the circle around him. They're screaming his name and asking him questions and shoving him and he feels like he's stuck.

"Please," Harry begs, "Please let me go."

His begging goes unnoticed as the reporters continue fighting for his attention. One reporter grabs his arm and Harry rips it away as he stumbles back. Another reporter tugs on Harry's hand and he pulls it out of the man's grip. Harry tries to stay calm but he can't breathe and his heart is beating against his ribs so hard that it hurts.

A short reporter with greying hair and a firm face loops an arm around Harry to get his attention. Harry staggers to the side and trips over a cameraman's feet. He falls flat on his face, pain piercing his head as he feels blood stream out of a scrape on his forehead. Hands grab at him to pull him to his feet but he scrambles away from them desperately.

Over the din, Harry hears a familiar voice and he almost cries in relief. It's Louis calling his name.

He sees Louis trying to shove through the crowd but he, too, gets surrounded. Louis shoves at the reporters and calls Harry's name, telling him it will be okay. Harry staggers to his feet and pushes through the crowd, stumbling as he tries to regain his balance. The camera flashes disorient him and he stumbles around aimlessly as he tries to gather his bearings. The flashes blind him and the voices deafen him.


Harry tries to get his muddled brain to understand but he can't manage it. It's only as he feels himself impact with the car that he realises what's happening. His shoulder slams into the windscreen and he hears a sickening crack. He's flying through the air suddenly, everything moving in slow motion, before he lands on the tar road. His body slams against it, hard. Pain lancets up and down his body, crippling him.

He feels hands grabbing at his face, clammy palms and thumbs gently rubbing his cheeks. "Harry?" He hears, the only noise in the deafening silence. He knows that voice. It's Louis. But he can't see - everything is black. He starts panicking and he tries to sit up, but agony tears through his upper body and he collapses back on the ground.

"No, no," Louis says frantically, "don't move, Harry. Don't move, you hear me."
Harry blinks as he tries to clear his vision. It's blurry, but it's better than nothing. He manages to lock gazes with Louis, though he can't get himself to focus. "Louis?" He cries, his raspy voice sounding foreign even to him.

"I'm here, Hazza, I'm here."

"Louis," Harry cries, fumbling for a hold on Louis' jacket. Louis grabs his hand and squeezes it tightly. His upper body is killing him, agony gnawing at his very essence. He can't distinguish the source of the pain. He's nauseous and he's cold.

"Fold his jacket up and put it under his head." Harry hears Louis instruct someone, but his vision is still too blurred to make out who he is talking to and what he's talking about. The flashes continue in the background, aggravating Harry's debilitating headache. "Have some fucking dignity, assholes. He just got hit by a fucking car and you're all filming and taking photos to get a bit of money!" Louis screams.

Harry feels bile rising up his throat and he frantically grasps at Louis as he tries to turn on his side. Louis seems to get the message and he helps him roll over. Harry is aware of the bile and vomit spewing out of his mouth, but he can't control it. When he's done he collapses back onto his back, his breathing labored and each breath sending stabs of pain through his chest.

"Oh shit!" He hears Louis curse, as he tries to focus back on the blue eyes. His vision is getting worse and he can feel his hands going slack. "Where the fuck is the ambulance?"

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Louis' hands are trembling as he cups Harry's bloodied face in his hands. Suddenly Harry starts grasping at him and his green, hazy eyes open wide as his pupils search the air around him desperately. Harry starts trying to turn over, his frantic, desperate gasps for breath punctuated by each movement. Louis gently nudges Harry onto his side, surprised at how much Harry is shaking under his touch.

Suddenly Harry is vomiting, his body wracked with dry heaves and convulsions. The cameras surrounding them are flashing relentlessly, forever capturing Harry Styles, badly injured and disoriented, in his moment of weakness. Louis helps Harry roll back onto his back, supporting his neck. Harry groans, his hoarse voice weak and pained. His face is scrunched up in agony and confusion, breaking Louis' heart. Louis shifts his gaze to the vomit soaking into the tar by Harry's head. The camera flashes illuminate the vomit, and it's then that Louis notices it.

Blood.

Harry's vomit is laced with blood. Louis' heart best quickens, his face dropping as realisation dawns on him. "Oh shit!" He yells, desperately attempting to shield Harry's deathly pale face from the cameras. "Where the fuck is the ambulance?"

Louis notices the sudden silence that hangs in the tense atmosphere. The cameras have almost stopped flashing, and the reporters have stopped screaming out questions.

Harry's eyes are drooping, his brow permanently fixed in a pained frown. Louis grabs Harry's cheeks in his hands and gently shakes him, whispering, "No, Harry. Stay awake. Look at me, okay, Hazza? Okay?"
Louis feels fresh tears forming in his eyes, a new lump forming in his throat. He can't believe what's happening. Just when he thought the night couldn't get any worse. Blood is streaming down the side of Harry's face, coming from gashes on his nose and cheek and forehead. The left side of his face is already swelling and bruising. Louis can't see what damage is hidden beneath Harry's shirt, and he's glad. The car hit Harry hard and fast, and the blood in the vomit revealed internal bleeding. Louis can't help but imagine black and blue bruises covering Harry's stomach and chest.

"Lou," Harry's pained cry snaps Louis from his thoughts.

"I'm here, I'm here, Haz." Louis whispers, grabbing Harry's hand and squeezing.

Louis hears sirens nearing them. His shoulders drop with relief. "Just a little longer, Haz. Hang on." Louis looks up and his gaze sweeps over the paparazzi who are watching he and Harry intensely. A select few are still taking photographs and videos, but most are staring in a stunned silence. Louis suddenly gets angry, standing up and ripping away from Harry as he steps forward, getting closer to the reporters and cameramen. He hardly hears Harry's desperate cries for his return. "Have you see enough?" Louis screams, "Have you got what you wanted?"

Louis' cheeks are red and hit with anger as he glares at the reporters. The last few taking photos suddenly stop. "Get the fuck out of here! Now!" Louis yells, quickly returning to Harry's side.

Some of the paparazzi respectfully leave, others stay and continue videoing. Harry grabs Louis' jacket with a weak, trembling hand and squeezes his eyes shut as tears fall from the corners. Louis wipes the tears away and grabs Harry's hand in his own. The world around them becomes blurred as Louis watches Harry's face go slack and his body go limp.

"No!" Louis yells desperately. The noise around him fades to a barely-there buzz, and the people blur into barely noticeable shapes. "Harry!"

Hands wrap around Louis' waist and pull him away from Harry's unconscious body. He struggles and fights against the grip, but he can't seem to break free.

"Harry!" He yells, clawing at the large hands holding him back.

Two paramedics rush through the gathered crowd, which Louis notices has grown. Now crying teenage girls and concerned parents have joined the crowd, the phone cameras flashing in the dark night. Louis wipes the tears from his burning cheeks and he goes slack in the arms holding him back. Slowly, he's lowered to the floor as the man holding him back lets go and rushes to help the other to paramedics.

The paramedics start prodding Harry, checking for spinal injuries. They secure his neck in a brace and quickly load him onto a stretcher. Harry remains unconscious throughout the procedure, earning horrified cries from the crowd. Blood has soaked into Harry's curly hair and it's sticking to his forehead and neck. He's pale and buries underneath the pale moonlight.

Louis forces himself to stand, almost collapsing as his jelly-like legs wobble beneath his weight. He runs after the paramedics as they clear a pathway and start racing towards the ambulance. They're yelling stuff at each other that Louis can't quite comprehend. The female paramedic has Harry's blood on her dark blue uniform.

"Is he okay?" Louis asks, desperately trying to grab someone's attention.
His question goes unanswered.

A hand wraps around Louis' arm, pulling him back. He stumbles as he pivots to face the person holding him in place. It's a reporter looking for a scoop. His glasses hang on the tip of his large nose.

"Louis," he says, "how do you feel knowing that Zayn has left you and the others behind, and Harry might die?"

Louis staggers back, stunned, as his brow furrows in anger. He feels anger coursing through his veins, adrenaline pumping through his body. He balls a hand into a first and swings without hesitation. His small fist collides with the reporter's nose, a loud crack heard over the noise of the black night. The reporter drops to his knees, holding his bleeding nose in trembling hands. Blood slips through his chubby fingers. Louis contemplates helping him to his feet, but ultimately decides against it. He looks up at the furiously flashing cameras and says, "You fucking pricks have no conception of privacy, huh? Well get this: next time one of you dares to ask any of us about Zayn or Harry, a broken nose will be the least of your fucking worries."

He turns and runs towards the ambulance parked a few feet away. They're loading the yellow stretcher that Harry's lying on into the back of the ambulance. "Do I get to come with?" He asks, trying to see Harry over the broad shoulders of the youngest paramedic.

"No, sir," the oldest paramedic replies. He runs to the driver's side of the ambulance and opens the door. Louis shakes his head in disbelief, looking at the paramedic pleadingly. "We need space to work, your friend isn't in very good shape."

"He, uh..." Louis stammers, following the paramedic back to the back of the ambulance as he watches the other two paramedics ripping Harry's shirt open. "He threw up and there was blood in it... in his vomit."

The driver paramedic repeats Louis' sentence to the others, and Louis hears the young paramedic say, "Possible internal bleeding. Blood in vomit."

The red-haired female paramedic replies, "Badly bruised and extended abdomen. Definite internal bleeding."

"Shit!" Louis yells, frantically trying to climb into the back of the ambulance even as the driver paramedic holds him back. "Please," Louis begs, "please."

A random man in a button-up shirt and black jeans runs towards the ambulance. He grabs the driver paramedic by the shoulder and says, "You should take this young man with you. If you leave him behind he will be surrounded by the media and screaming fans. He won't be safe."

The man winks at Louis secretively. Louis mouths, "thank you" as the driver paramedic sighs, resignation written all over his wrinkled face. The paramedic gestures towards the back of the ambulance and Louis squeezes in just as the doors shut. He sits in the corner, fumbling for a hold on Harry's bloodied hand as the paramedics work feverishly.

And Louis prays.

For the first time in a long, long time, Louis prays.
"I'm trying, Zayn, I swear I am. I just..." Liam trails off, his forefinger and thumb twiddling the short strands of beard hair on his chin. He's sitting across from Zayn, his legs crossed and his back arched. His brown eyes watch Zayn intensely. "I don't get it."

"Me neither," Niall says, his speech muffled by his hands as he buries his face in them.

The television is on in the background, the news playing softly in the tense and silent room. Zayn gulps nervously and turns his attention to the news as he searches for the right words to say. A head of curly hair suddenly attracts his attention and he fumbles for the remote on the bed, turning up the volume. Niall and Liam look up, too.

"... Hannah managed to catch up with Harry Styles only hours ago, shortly after the news of Zayn's departure from One Direction was announced. However, the evening took a scary turn for the worst when it seemed the media attention became too much for the twenty-one year old singer to bare. Hannah will be joining us to describe the harrowing ordeal." A slender woman in a black dress reports on the television.

Media footage of Harry surrounded by almost twenty reporters and cameramen grasping at him and screaming his name and flashing their cameras at him incessantly is playing to the right of the lady reporter's head. Liam and Niall have moved to Zayn's side in an effort to get closer to the television.

Suddenly the screen splits in half and a blonde lady in a figure-hugging dress, who must be Hannah, is shown standing in the chilly night air. In the background fans and other reporters have gathered. Zayn's heartbeat speeds up and he anxiously bites at his fingernails. He can feel something is wrong, though he can't tell what.

"So, Hannah, what exactly happened there tonight?" The lady on set asks, genuine concern in her husky voice.

"What the fuck are they talking about?" Niall spits, narrowing his eyes as he glares at the screen.

"Wait, shhh." Liam snaps, grabbing the remote from Zayn and turning the volume up even more.

"Well, Jill," Hannah replies, "Harry Styles, one fifth of the world wide sensation, One Direction, was spotted walking down the very sidewalk I'm standing on only a couple hours ago."

The screen suddenly cuts to footage of Harry walking down the sidewalk sullenly, his head hanging, his curly hair hiding his face from view. Someone from behind the camera recording him calls his name and he looks up in surprise, before pivoting on his heels as he wipes at his cheeks in the dull moonlight. He's suddenly hurrying away, but the camera and other cameras and reporters catch up to him. The screen cuts back to Jill and Hannah.

"How did he seem? Was he affected by the news of Zayn Malik's departure?" Jill asks, tucking a strand of black hair behind her ear with a small hand.

"He seemed tearful, Jill. Very upset." Hannah replies, shaking her head in sympathy. "It seemed he was so upset that he was disoriented!"

The screen fades to footage of Harry as Hannah's voice narrates the video. Harry's being pulled and
shoved, his face is twisted in pure confusion and terror as he tries desperately to stumble away from the paparazzi. Zayn's blood boils and he curls his tattooed hands into tight fists. Suddenly Harry trips and he lands on the concrete sidewalk, his head snapping back as his forehead is sliced open and blood oozes from a gash above his eye. His face is scrunched up in pain.

"They can't do that!" Liam screams angrily, chucking the remote at the wall opposite him. It lands on the floor, the batteries flinging out of their compartment.

"Poor Harry, injured and seemingly disoriented, was helped by his best friend and fellow bandmate, Louis Tomlinson." Hannah continues, just as the footage shows Louis struggling to make his way to Harry before he eventually gets surrounded and cornered off himself. Harry staggers to his feet unsteadily, looking as though he's about to cry. He stumbles about for a while, rubbing at his eyes and squeezing them shut as though trying to clear his vision. Suddenly the screen is filled with a bright light that silhouettes Harry's slender figure.

The screen cuts to Jill back at the studio who hesitantly states, "The following footage is graphic and younger viewers, sensitive viewers, or squeamish viewers are advised against watching it. Please take our warnings into consideration."

The screen returns to a paused image of the footage obtained by Hannah's cameraman, this time with no narration. The footage continues playing and Louis can be heard yelling, "Harry! Move, Harry! Right now, Hazza! Move!"

Harry's body connects with a car that speeds at him from behind. He slams into the windscreen, smashing it, before flying in the air and landing a good six or seven feet from the car, a crack is heard as his ragdoll body slams into the tar road. Zayn flinches and turns away, his heart racing, sweat beads forming on his upper lip. He shakes his head in disbelief. Niall stumbles back and collapses onto the bed. Liam stays still, barely even daring to breathe as he stares at the screen.

"Louis Tomlinson immediately rushed to Harry's side where he ordered someone to call an ambulance as he fashioned a pillow from his jacket and placed it under the head of a badly injured and bloodied Harry Styles." Hannah continues as the footage shows Louis cupping Harry's bleeding and swelling face in trembling hands. Harry's entire body is trembling, his right hand grasping frantically for Louis as he gasps for air painfully. "It truly was a touching moment."

"A touching moment? Are you fucking kidding me?" Zayn screams, slamming his fist down on the small wooden table he's sat at. Liam flinches at the loud sound.

The screen fades back to Jill who says, "How badly was Harry hurt?"

It returns to footage of the accident, displaying Harry falling to his side and vomiting violently. The camera zooms in to the blood-laced vomit, and Zayn covers his eyes in horror. "There was suspected internal bleeding, definite broken bones, possible spinal injury. Who knows, Jill. But it's definitely serious. Mister Styles lost consciousness shortly before the ambulance arrived, and Louis' reaction was simply heartbreaking." Hannah replies, shuddering dramatically.

"If it was so heartbreaking then why did you continue filming?" Liam cries, his face twisted into an awful grimace of anger.

The footage reveals Louis struggling to get to an unconscious Harry as a well-built, middle-aged paramedic holds him back. He's screaming Harry's name and crying, his slight frame wracked by trembles and sobs. Zayn can't watch anymore and he stands and starts pacing the room, his entire
body numb with shock.

"This is all your fault!" Niall yells angrily, pointing at Zayn as he stands and walks towards him.

"My fault?" Zayn repeats, furrowing his brow in anger and confusion.

"You're the reason Harry was out there in the first place and you're the reason he was upset! None of this would have happened if you weren't so selfish!" Niall stabs his finger into Zayn's bony chest.

Zayn shoves Niall back and screams, "Don't blame me for this! This isn't my fault!" Though Zayn isn't quite sure he believes that himself. He'd been thinking the same thing only moments ago. "I didn't want this to happen. I didn't mean for it to go down like this." That part he does believe wholeheartedly.

"Hey!" Liam snaps firmly, "You two fighting isn't help anything." Liam pulls Zayn away and gently guides Niall back to the bed. He turns and faces Zayn as he says, "We need to get hold of Louis. We need to find out which hospital they took him to."

"So what do we do?" Niall asks, flashing Zayn a quick apologetic look. Zayn purses his lips and shrugs. "Do we call Louis or do we call all the hospitals nearby or do we ask hotel management?"

"I think let's try Louis first," Liam says quickly, already dialling Louis' number on his cellphone. His hands are trembling so much that he struggles to hold the phone in his hands. Zayn runs a hand through his tangled hair and continues pacing.

"What if he dies? What if he doesn't make it?" Zayn stutters, his shaky voice thick with fear.

"Zayn, you're not s - " Liam tries to reassure him but Zayn cuts him off quickly.

"That car hit him hard. You saw it."

"No, Zayn. You're not allowed to think like that. Not when we haven't even had chance to fucking find out where he is or what's wrong with him!" Liam screams aggressively, the first time his facade has cracked the entire night. The first time his calm exterior has ever faltered in five years, actually.

Liam holds the phone to his ear as Zayn reels, his cheeks going red with embarrassment and anxiety. He can hear the phone ringing. It rings and rings, but Louis doesn't pick up. Liam hangs up and says to Niall, "You try."

Niall pulls out his own phone and tries. Louis doesn't answer again. He looks at Zayn silently. Zayn tries to call, attempting to convince himself that nothing is wrong and that he's unnecessarily freaking himself out. He fails at convincing himself, especially as he watches tears roll down the others' cheeks, the sound of a shrill ringing in his ear.

No. Fucking. Answer.

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Louis sits alone in the waiting room, staring at the white tiled flooring between his sneaker clad feet. His elbows rest on his bouncing knees heavily, his eyes stinging as he continues to stare
unblinkingly. He looks up at a group of friends hugging each other tightly and he feels isolated. He's surrounded by dozens of grieving families in the emergency waiting room, but he's never felt more alone. He dismissed the duty of calling the boys because he was angry at Zayn and angry at them - why? He isn't sure and he doesn't care. But now, watching two men hug each other comfortably he knows he needs his friends more than ever.

People keep sneaking curious looks at him. Some people recognise him - mostly the teenagers and young adults - and others find him vaguely familiar. Those that don't know who he is hardly even give him a second thought.

He hesitantly pulls out his phone and gulps when he sees the words "seventeen missed calls" written across his screen. He ignores them and calls Niall. Niall picks up on the first ring, his voice filled with both relief and worry.

"Louis?"

"Niall," Louis says, unable to stop himself from crying as he hears the familiar and comforting voice on the other end of the line. "You guys need to come, now. Please."

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Half an hour later Liam and Niall and Zayn rush in through the ER doors. Those who were unsure of who Louis was suddenly perk up, recognising him when he stands up to greet his band members.

He falls into Liam's warm embrace and lets sobs rack his entire body. He feels hot and cold at the same time. He spots Zayn standing just behind Niall but he can't bring himself to hug him. He's not sure why but he blames Zayn for Harry's accident. He collapses back into his chair as the other three take seats beside him. The people waiting in the room have enough decency to offer privacy by turning their backs and returning their attention to their own problems.

"What happened?" Liam asks, shrugging off his thick jacket. It's only then that Louis realises that he still has his jacket on, stained with Harry's blood.

"He was... He was, um," Louis can barely speak as he unsteadily rips off his own jacket. He ditches the effort and curls in on himself as he starts crying again. He feels arms wrap around him and he doesn't care whose they are, he just knows he likes the feel of them around him; he feels safe.

"They were surrounding him and he just, I don't know. I guess he was confused and the camera flashes were bright and they were screaming - it was so loud. It just happened. And then he..."

Louis shakes his head and trails off. The arms release him and Niall gently squeezes his hand to offer some support. Louis suddenly straightens up as he realises what's been bugging him. "We need to call Anne. I need to tell Gemma. Do you think they know? Who would've told them?" He rambles anxiously, "oh God. What if they saw it on the telly before I told them?"

"Louis, relax," Liam says, sounding tense and agitated himself. He gulps and dries the sweat beading on his upper lip with the back of his hand. "I'll do it."

"No," Louis shouts quickly, pulling Liam back to his seat as he stands. Louis pulls out his own phone with a shaky hand and says, "I should do it. I was there."

He slowly stands, hardly feeling the pat of support on his back that Niall offers kindly. He stalks to
the corner of the room where no one is sitting and he uses the out of order vending machine as cover as he dials the number and calls it.

There's no answer for the first three rings and Louis finds himself hoping there won't be one at all. But there is.

Anne answers after the third ring, her voice bright and cheerful.

"Louis! How are you?"

"Hi, Anne," Louis mutters uncertainly.

Anne has known Louis for half a decade. He's been at her house more times than he can remember. She's looked after him when he's been sick and away from home more often than he'd like to admit. She knows him almost as well as his own mother does, and it's because of this that she knows immediately that something is wrong. Louis isn't sure whether she can hear it in his voice or whether it's mother's instinct, but she knows. It only makes it worse as he shares the heartbreaking news.

"Louis, honey, what's wrong?" She asks, her smooth voice oozing concern. She suddenly sounds tense, and Louis can't bring himself to answer her. "Louis?"

"Anne," Louis whispers, "there's been an accident."

There's silence on the opposite end of the line and Louis covers the mouthpiece as a desperate sob involuntarily escapes his trembling lips. Eventually, Anne replies, "What happened?"

Her voice is so even and calm. It unnerves Louis and calms him at the same time. He nibbles his bottom lip, looking at Liam for support. Liam catches his gaze from across the room and smiles supportively, albeit sadly. Louis nods and says, "Harry is in hospital."

"He's where?" Anne gasps.

"He was hit by a car and he's in the emergency operating room. I don't know what his actual injuries are 'cause his doctor hasn't come out yet, but I think it's bad."

"Oh my god," Anne whispers. Louis hears Gemma in the background begging Anne to tell her what's wrong. He hears Anne crying despite the fact that she's covering the mouthpiece, and he can picture the shock on her pretty face as she contemplates the situation. "Where are you?"

Louis rambles off the address, kneeling on the ground as his legs suddenly become too weak to support his meagre weight.

"Lou, I'm on my way with Gemma, but you need to call me the minute you hear any news."

"I will, Anne," Louis promises, "but the doctor will probably let you know. You're Harry's next of kin."

"Stay strong, Lou. I'll be there as soon as I can. Give the boys a kiss for me and ask them to pray for Harry. I love you."

"Love you, too." Louis whispers as he hangs up and unsteadily rises to his feet.
A doctor wearing bloodied green scrubs bursts into the room. He searches the room with a sweep of the eyes, his gaze landing first on Liam and Niall and Zayn before travelling to Louis. The doctor recognises them. He stares at Louis and whispers, "Styles?"

Louis nods as he watches the movement of the doctor's mouth. The doctor blinks in understanding and gestures for Louis to get closer and take a seat beside the others. Louis rushes to them and sits just as the doctor kneels down in front of them. The doctor is a middle-aged man with kind blue eyes that remind Louis of Niall.

"Well," the doctor begins, "first of all, I'm Doctor Ryan. It's unfortunate meeting under these circumstances but I assure you that your friend is in excellent hands not only under my care but under the hospital's care, too. This hospital has first class facilities."

"How is he?" Louis snaps impatiently.

"He's in critical but stable condition in ICU. Before I get into the details, I need to know who his next of kin are as only they are consented to access and appropriately spread Mister Styles' medical condition."

Louis, looking down at the doctor from his position on the uncomfortable metal chair, says, "That will probably be his mother, Anne Cox. She's not here right now, but I mean, we're as close to family as he's got in this part of the country." Louis gestures to the space around him with a flick of the wrist. The others nod emphatically in exaggerated agreement.

"There is a Cox on the ID documents, but there's also a Tomlinson listed as an emergency contact. Provided Misses Cox isn't here but Mister Tomlinson is, I am legally obligated to share Mister Styles' medical status with his emergency contact that is present."

"I'm Tomlinson! And anything you tell me you can just tell these lads." Louis gasps, leaning forward in his seat. There's a heavy feeling at the pit of his stomach. He feels like he's about to vomit. His head is pounding. There's already a lump forming in his throat.

"Any information shared will be shared with Misses Cox via telephone conversation." The doctor states informatively.

"Could I rather do it? I think she should hear it from me, instead."

The doctor nods before searching for a chair with a simple twist of the neck. There's one a few feet away and he pulls it up. He leans in and Louis, Zayn, Liam and Niall lean in subconsciously. Louis can feel Liam and Niall's hushed exhales on the parts of his arms that aren't covered by his jacket sleeves.

"Mister Styles was brought into the ER in critical condition - "

"What do you mean by that?" Niall asks, tugging at his blonde hair nervously. His hoodie is creased and damp from the rain outside.

"Mister Styles had severe internal injuries and multiple broken bones. We almost lost him on the table."

"What exactly were you doing to him on the table?" Liam questions, his voice deep and hoarse with panic.
"Let him finish." Zayn and Louis mutter at the same time, barely acknowledging each other as they focus wholeheartedly on the doctor.

"When Mister Styles was brought in we performed CAT scans, MRIs and x-rays," Doctor Ryan continues, his fingers looping together to form a giant fist hanging between his knees. "The scans revealed hemorrhaging in his abdomen and upper torso. Mister Styles was bleeding internally from massive trauma to the intestinal tract and a hole in his right lung caused by one of his broken ribs puncturing his lung during impact."

"Fuck," Zayn gasps. Louis glances at him, still angry at him but able to relate nonetheless.

"The scans also revealed complete fractures to the third, fourth and fifth ribs on his right side." Doctor Ryan explains, shifting in his seat as he points out his own ribs. He further elaborates, "What seems to have happened is that Mister Styles suffered the fractures during initial impact but the broken bones shifted when he landed on the asphalt, causing his ribs to move out of place, in turn puncturing his lung. His lung collapsed as a result and we needed to perform surgery to drain the lung of fluids and to repair damaged vessels and tissue."

"Did it go smoothly?" Liam asks, and Louis can't help but smirk slightly at Liam's levelheadedness.

"Fortunately," Doctor Ryan says, smiling. His smile fades as he continues, "but the tears in his intestinal tract took far longer to repair and there were some unforeseen complications. However, we managed to close Mister Styles up without further scares."

"So he's okay?" Louis asks hopefully.

"Not quite," Doctor Ryan sighs.

"Why not?" Louis challenges, his eyes narrowing uncertainly.

"Mister Styles also suffered multiple fractures to the head of his humerus, as well as the clavicle, scapula and ball-and-socket joint," Doctor Ryan says, using his right hand to gesture to the different parts of his left shoulder in order to help them to understand. "The bones were shattered upon impact and unfortunately will require extensive surgery and eventually physical therapy for six months after the final surgery."

"The final surgery?" Louis exclaims, his small hands tightening into fists in his lap. He can feel his face going red as he tries to remain calm. He can't keep his thoughts from travelling to Harry, lying on the tar road, all those broken bones causing such severe pain.

"There will be a minimum of three surgeries required: one to get a better, clearer look at the full extent of the damage, one to place a plate on his clavicle, and one to rebuild his scapula." Doctor Ryan says patiently. "Of course, more may be required once we know the full extent of the breaks."

"Okay," Liam says softly, urging the doctor to continue.

"Mister Styles also suffered a broken nose," the doctor sighed, gesturing to his small nose with his hand. Louis unconsciously grabs his own nose, watching the doctor intensely. He feels Zayn glance at him but he doesn't return the gaze. "And a fractured cheek bone. Now, unfortunately, not
much can be done about those. We did have to reset his nose, but it should heal with minimal visibility."

"That it?" Louis snaps sarcastically, tearing his gaze away and staring at the dirty white wall over Doctor Ryan's shoulder. He sits back and folds his arms defensively.

"Any questions?"

"When can we see him?" Niall asks, wiping tears from his blotchy cheeks with the sleeve of his jumper.

"Give him a couple hours. He's on a lot of pain medication and he's asleep in recovery. When he wakes up he's going to be very sore and very confused; you can be there for him then, because he will need you. We were unsure of whether you want him in a private room?" The doctor asks, standing slowly. The boys stand with him and shake his hand as he speaks.

"Private. Of course." Louis says without hesitation. "We'll pay the extra."

"Okay," Doctor Ryan says, stepping back. He turns to Louis and says, "It will be a long painful recovery, and he'll need all the support he can get."

"Of course," Liam replies immediately, his hand resting on Louis' small shoulder for support.

"When will he get out?" Zayn asks, nibbling on his thick bottom lip with perfect teeth.

"Not for a good week or two."

"Thank you, Doctor." Liam sighs sadly. He sits back down, followed by Niall and Zayn.

Louis follows Doctor Ryan to the door and says softly, "I'm going to call his mum now. Can I tell her that he'll be okay?"

"He's not out of the woods yet," Doctor Ryan warns, gently grasping Louis' bony elbow in his large hand, "He's breathing with the help of an oxygen mask and he still has a chest tube in. I'll talk prognosis when his mother is present. The next twenty-four hours are critical."

"But will he be okay?"

Doctor Ryan pauses for a painfully long moment, and Louis feels his heart skip a beat as he fears the worst. He has to stop himself from lashing out as the doctor considers his answer. "Eventually. But not right now." Doctor Ryan responds carefully.

"You'll do everything you can to make sure he's okay as soon as possible?"

"Of course."

"Please," Louis begins, glancing at the other people in the room to ensure his privacy before continuing, "don't spill any details to the press. We would like this to be kept private."

"Absolutely," Doctor Ryan agrees, "but I must insist that you do the same. Mister Styles needs to rest in private without the added stress of public image."
Louis nods and pats the doctor on the arm gratefully before turning and walking back to the boys. He pulls out his phone to call Anne, his hands trembling. Just as he dials the number, Liam grabs his arm and says, "Louis, look at the screen for two seconds."

Louis glances up just in time to see the footage of him punching the reporter with the big nose, and the yellow, flashing headline, "Louis Tomlinson sued for physical assault on same night of Malik's departure and Styles' possibly fatal accident."

"Ah, shit." He curses, chucking his phone across the room angrily.

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Liam watches the phone shatter into shards of glass and metal as it thumps against the wall and crashes to the ground. He turns to Louis, his heart racing. His gaze sweeps over Zayn, who has his face buried in his hands, his shoulders tense and rigid.

They still haven't had chance to properly discuss Zayn's decision to leave One Direction. Harry's hasty and immature exit made sure of it. Though Liam knows that the emergency waiting room is neither the time nor the place for that conversation.

"You hit a reporter?" Niall asks, stealing the words from Liam's mouth.

"I... yeah," Louis responds, choking on a furious sob. "It just happened."

"You shouldn't have done that." Zayn interjects, glancing up for just long enough to catch Louis' gaze. Zayn is tearful again and Liam contemplates the fact that this is the most he has ever seen Zayn cry in half a decade of friendship.

"Excuse me?" Louis snaps harshly, leaning closer to Zayn.

"I'm just saying - "

"Just saying what, Zayn?" Louis yells, earning curious glances and glares from other waiting relatives and friends of patients. "Like you're one to fucking talk."

Liam is aware of a young teenage girl with running mascara and untidy hair recording the exchange. Her iPhone in a pink cover is videoing the entire conversation, and she's hardly even trying to be discrete about it.

"What's that supposed to mean, Louis?" Zayn screams back.

They both stand and step closer to each other. Their noses are almost touching and their hands are balled into tight fists at their sides. Niall watches nervously, his bloodshot eyes darting between them frantically. He's sitting right between their legs. He desperately shoves them away and scrambles out of the way, searching for solace at Liam's side.

"Like you are the master of knowing when to do what! Why the fuck do you think Harry was roaming the streets in the first place? Because your selfish ass decided to quit the band!" Louis shoves Zayn, his small hands connecting solidly with Zayn's bony chest.

Zayn shoves Louis back roughly, getting ready to shout a response, but Liam has had enough. He gets between them, violently pushing Zayn back into his seat and shoving Louis into the seat
beside Niall. He stumbles back furiously as he glares at them, his nostrils flaring. "This is not the time or place to talk about that!" He yells.

"Well, it clearly needs to be spoken about." Louis mutters angrily, glaring at Zayn. Zayn averts his gaze as he sits back and folds his arms.

"You're right, it does. We thought we were okay with it, but clearly we're not. Clearly you're not, Louis. We thought you were, but you're not. But that can be discussed in private. Right now, we're here for Harry - nothing else."

Silence fills the room and Liam turns back to see the same teenage girl still recording. He considers asking her to stop, until he realises that he doesn't care anymore. Whether the public sees what just happened or they don't, Liam doesn't care. There are bigger things to care about, and there are far more important things to worry about, despite what management says. He sits down beside Louis and leans back, his attention focused on the clock hanging on the wall opposite him. He counts the seconds that go by, waiting for the doctor to call them into Harry's room. The only problem is, each passing second seems like an eternity.

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"I need to be the one," Louis says, "I need to be the one to wait with him. At least until Anne and Gemma get here."

Doctor Ryan nods in understanding, his lips pursed thoughtfully. He says, "I'm by no means implying that only one of you may stay in his room the entire time. Feel free to come and go as you please until he wakes up, as long as only one visitor is in the room at a time."

"Understood." Liam says quickly.

The doctor walks away and Liam, Zayn, Niall and Louis are left alone in the bleak corridor outside Harry's room. The blinds of the window looking into the room are closed. The white walls and fluorescent lighting worsens Louis' already terrible headache. There's an unspoken tension hanging in the air around the boys, and Louis waits impatiently for someone to get whatever the feels they need to get off their chest out in the open. No one says a thing.

Louis sighs in frustration and decides to break the awkward silence. "Zayn, I got it, I did," he says harshly, "when you told us in the room I kinda related, actually." His words are kind but his tone is harsh, and he reels at the hurt look plastered across Zayn's puffy and pale face. There have been a lot of tears - not only Zayn's. "And I don't know why, I really don't, but the second this," he points at Harry's room as he speaks, "happened, I blamed you. I don't know why. I still blame you. It's not fair, but I need time."

"Louis," Zayn cries, his voice hoarse with emotion. Surprisingly, Niall hesitantly steps forward and holds Zayn's shoulders in a show of support. Zayn leans into Niall's touch. It seems Louis isn't the only one who can't quite decide what he's feeling. There's been too much happening for any of them to comprehend fully; emotions are inconsistent and unexpected. "I didn't mean for this to happen. I didn't want to hurt you like this."

"I know," Louis responds, "which is why I don't really understand why I'm blaming you. I just am. I'll get over it and you need to let me work through it on my own."

Louis reluctantly squeezes Zayn's arm comfortingly as he pivots on his heels and hesitantly pushes
open the wooden door leading into Harry's room. It squeaks with each inch it opens. Louis suddenly remembers Harry's blood staining his denim jacket, and he shrugs it off hurriedly, handing it to Liam wordlessly. He takes a deep breath and steps into the room, closing the door behind him.

The room is brightly lit, a small window revealing the cloudy night sky above and busy street below. A single light shines from the roof, illuminating the furniture. An old green couch stands a few feet across from Louis. Next to it is a door that leads into a small bathroom with a shower, toilet and sink. The shower has a built-in tiled bench. Opposite the couch is the hospital bed. Louis stops dead in his tracks as his gaze lands on Harry.

Harry lies in the bed, surrounded by beeping machines. A heart monitor and an IV drip stand and machines Louis hasn't seen before. Wires and tubes and needles are pinned to Harry's body. Harry looks small and frail surrounded by the machines and stands and tubes. It scares Louis more than he's willing to admit.

Harry's curly hair hangs limply around his pale, bruised face. The curls are still damp from sweat and blood. Harry's face is swollen. His right eye is bruised and swollen completely shut, and his nose it misshapen and blue. A single strip of medical tape covers the bridge of his nose. Butterfly bandages dot his cheeks and forehead where he received stitches.

His left arm is held in place against his chest by a complicated sling. A hospital gown is pulled up loosely over his upper body, probably only there to offer him some privacy. His shoulders stick out above the neckline. His left shoulder is terribly misshapen and is covered in different shades of red and blue and purple. The gown covers his chest, which Louis finds he's grateful for - he can't imagine what his chest looks like with the broken ribs and test tube, or his stomach after the surgery. The test tube is sticking out from beneath the gown, a reddish-pink liquid resting in it, almost unmoving.

Adhesive pads stuck to Harry's torso monitor his irregular heartbeat. An oxygen mask is secured tightly around Harry's face. The clear plastic fogs and clears with each exhale and inhale. It's the only visible sign that he's still alive - he looks like a corpse in movies.

Louis stumbles towards the bed, his ears ringing as he collapses into the white plastic chair beside Harry. "Ah, shit," he groans, "fuck."

He rests his chin in his hand and watches the uneven rise and fall of Harry's chest. And he waits. He waits for those eyes to open.

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"Do you guys also blame me?" Zayn asks suddenly, disrupting the silence.

Liam and Niall frown questioningly. Zayn gulps turning away as he feels fresh tears form in the corners of his eyes.

"What?" Niall asks.

They all look slightly worse for wear. They have bags under their puffy eyes. Their faces are blotchy from crying. Their hair is untidy and unstyled, not that they care.

Liam's phone starts ringing and he curses under his breath as he reads the caller ID. He glances at
Zayn and Niall and says, "It's management. They're probably phoning about Harry."

"Or Louis and the reporter?" Niall offers casually.

"Or you, Zayn." Liam says, smiling sympathetically.

"No, not about me." Zayn argues, shaking his head. He pulls off his jacket hastily as he suddenly gets hot.

"Why do you say it like that?" Niall asks. His tone is friendly and nonchalant, though Zayn suddenly feels guilty.

"They knew already."

"They knew?" Liam questions, ignoring his phone as he shoves it back in his pocket. He stands and tosses Louis' jacket onto the metal chair. The buttons hit the metal and the sound of ringing reverberates through the corridor. Nurses and doctors hurry by, oblivious to their presence. "How did they know?"

"I told them."

"When?"

"Last month."

"They've known an entire month and you decided to tell us tonight?" Liam yells, shaking his head in disbelief and staggering back. Niall inhales sharply and leans away from Zayn, his gaze tearing away as he curls his hands into fists and slams them against the chair. "Don't you think we deserved to know before they did?"

"Zayn, you've planned this for an entire month already?" Niall asks, his voice as shaky as he looks.

"I needed to tell them," Zayn begins, suddenly unsure of his reasons. All he knows is that he told them first, but he's not sure why. He just did and he can't change that now.

"No! You needed to tell us! You needed to talk about it with us!" Liam yells, pointing at himself then at Niall. His face is red with anger and his eyes are wide. Liam never screams and the fact that he's doing it right here and now makes Zayn realise just how much he's fucked it all up.

"We should've had our say, first, Zayn." Niall agrees, somehow unphased by Liam's screaming.

Zayn isn't sure why but he feels offended by Niall's statement. He stands and steps closer to Liam. They're the same height, and he can feel Liam's hot breath fanning over his face as he squares him up. "Your say?" Zayn shouts, spit spraying from his mouth as he puts his weight on his right foot and crosses his arms defensively. "Your say in my life? So what? You want to have a say in how I run my own life? Is that what you're saying 'cause it sure fucking sounds like it."

"Don't turn this on me!" Niall yells back, standing up and glaring at Zayn. His voice bounces off the walls and travels down the corridor, earning the focused attention of the nurses and doctors by the reception area. "We have a say when what you decide to do with your life affects our lives!"

"Management decides whether I leave the band or not, and that's only because I'm bound to them
legally. You guys do not decide for me!"

"When did you become so selfish?" Liam screams.

A nurse comes running towards them, but they barely even notice her. Niall shoves Zayn and screams, "What happened to being a team, Zayn?"

"How dare you make it sound like I don't care about you boys." Zayn yells, shoving Niall back.

Liam breaks them up roughly and shoves them further apart. He turns to Zayn and shouts, "We aren't making it sound like anything, Zayn. You did that all by your fucking self!"

"Hey!" The nurse's shrill voice draws their attention and they turn to face her. She stops a few feet away from them. She straightens out her colourful floral scrubs and says, "You are disturbing the peace. Either you sit down and shut up or you leave. Your choice. There are patients in critical condition on this floor, including your friend, and they need their rest."

The boys reluctantly sit down in their seats, behaving like scolded puppies. The nurse narrows her eyes and drops her voice to a whisper as she nears them. She snaps, "One more word and I will personally kick you out, and I'll do it out front so the crowd of reporters can film it. Got it?"

"Reporters?" Zayn asks, furrowing his thick eyebrows.

"Yeah," the young nurse replies, "there's dozens of them. They're interviewing anyone they can get their hands on."

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A low groaning catches Louis' attention. His head snaps towards Harry, his blue eyes going wide in anticipation. The heart monitor starts beeping faster and the lines lose all uniformity. Louis springs up as Harry's fingers start twitching. The doctor rushes in, followed by numerous flustered nurses.

"You need to leave." One of the nurses states flatly, barely glancing at Louis as she fiddles with the buttons on the heart monitor.

"No," Louis argues, "Doctor Ryan said I could stay so you can actually piss off."

"She's right," Doctor Ryan mumbles, his attention focused on Harry's breathing as he holds a stethoscope to his chest. Harry groans and his face twists into an awful grimace of agony. Doctor Ryan loops the stethoscope around his neck and whispers something to the male nurse, who nods silently and hurries out of the room. "You can come back in once he's awake, but I need space to ensure your friend is okay."

"I'm not leaving." Louis says angrily, deliberately folding his arms and squeezing as far into the corner of the room as he can. The rude nurse gently steps forward and wraps an arm around his waist. Louis struggles weakly, but he has no fight left in him and he allows himself to be escorted out, albeit reluctantly.

The door shuts behind him as he is gently pushed into the corridor. The other boys stand up frantically, their bodies going tense as they rush towards Louis. Liam wraps an arm around Louis' shoulders and hugs him tightly. "What's wrong?" He whispers in Louis' ear. "Is Harry okay?"
"He was waking up, but I'm only allowed back in when he's awake." Louis sighs, gingerly lowering himself into one of the chairs. His body is stiff and sore from hours of crying and trembling and pacing and not knowing. He stares at the door, waiting for his name to be called. The boys are talking to him but he can't hear them.

"Louis," Liam whispers harshly, trying in vain to grab Louis' attention.

"Lou," Niall whispers, his clammy hand resting on Louis’ back. Louis unconsciously leans into the touch, closing his heavy eyes and taking a shaky breath. "There are reporters outside."

"I don't give a fuck. Let the media waste their night away." Louis snaps, looking down the corridor as he hears the clicks of high heels. He finds himself hoping it's Anne, but he's disappointed to find it isn't. He looks away and pinches the bridge of his nose, warding away a headache induced by the unnatural lighting in hospitals.

"And management called..." Liam adds.

"To talk about what? About Harry or about Zayn?"

"I don't know, but it might've been about the lawsuit." Liam suggests, purposely leaving out the fact that management already knows about Zayn's departure - weeks before even they did. Zayn looks at Liam appreciatively over Louis' back. Liam smiles, feeling unnatural and false.

"I have bigger shit to worry about. We all do." Louis mutters under his breath.

The door opens slowly, creaking. Louis shoots up before the others, stepping forward as the same female nurse who kicked him out calls for him. He rushes in, turning to Liam and Niall and Zayn and silently communicating that he will let them know how Harry is.

The door shuts behind him, and Louis glances at the bed. The doctor and a nurse are covering Harry from view. The nurse who let him in grabs him by the shoulders and says, "He's in a lot of pain and he's confused, but he's asking for you. I'm assuming you're Louis?"

Louis nods. The nurse keeps talking to him but the words are a blur. He rips himself out of her grip and staggers towards the bed, feeling like the world is moving in slow motion. Slowly, he rounds the bed and he looks at Harry.

Harry's bed is positioned so he can sit up slightly. He looks at Louis and his face suddenly crumples. His green eyes fill with tears - or at least the one that can open does. The oxygen mask has been replaced with a nasal cannula.

"Lou," he cries.

Louis lets his own face crumple in raw emotion, and he rushes forward and collapses into the plastic seat beside the bed. He lets his head fall onto Harry's right shoulder and he allows himself a minute to collect himself before he looks back up. He cups Harry's bruised, tear-stained cheeks in his hands and he just looks into Harry's eyes for a long time. "Hazza, you fucking scared us." He gasps.

"I'm sorry," Harry sobs, barely able to lift a hand and cup Louis' hand in his own.

His skin is hot beneath Louis' touch. Doctor Ryan steps back, catching Louis' gaze and gesturing that he will return later to discuss Harry's condition. Louis turns back to Harry as the nurses and
doctor leave the room hastily.

Louis sits back in the chair and watches Harry. Harry lifts his right hand, shaking with the effort, wincing with the pain, and he wipes away his tears. Louis wishes he could take away all the pain, but he can't.

"Is Zayn here?" Harry asks, his gaze shifting to the sunrise shining through the window behind Louis. The sky is littered with black and grey clouds broken by rays of bright red and yellow. It looks scary and beautiful simultaneously.

"Yes." Louis replies, standing up and getting closer.

"Is he still leaving?"

"... Yes."

"You know," Harry says, "I hoped it was all just a dream." His voice is hoarse with emotion and pain. He coughs, his face scrunching up in agony as his right hand wraps around his ribs and he tries to curl in on himself instinctively, only to straighten out when the movement pulls on his stitches and pushes on his ribs.

"You and me both." Louis replies, trying to sound strong despite his heart breaking and shattering as he watches Harry suffer. "You need some water?"

Harry nods, his eyes squeezed shut. He's become sweaty and shaky, and Louis panics. As though his thoughts are answered, the door opens and the male nurse who left in the beginning rushes in with a large cup of ice chips and a spoon. He silently hands them to Louis before leaving again. "Oh, I'm supposed to feed you." Louis laughs.

"I can do it myself," Harry says, barely laughing as he leans back and gulps. He shifts in discomfort, unable to find relief from the pain. He does smirk, though.

"With a useless arm and your poor excuse for coordination? No, I don't think so."

They giggle, but the happiness is short-lived as Harry starts coughing again, ending in him groaning in agony and clutching at his chest again. Louis feeds him a few spoonfuls of ice chips, the water soothing Harry's cracked lips. Louis places the cup on the bedside table and says, "I called your mum."

Harry nods, closing his eyes and trying to get comfortable. His brows are furrowed as he lifts his right hand and shakily feels the nasal cannula and bandaging on his nose. "Is she okay?" He asks.

"She's driving down with Gemma overnight. She'll probably be here soon - she left like six hours ago."

Harry takes a ragged breath and his face goes taut as he tugs at the cannula again. He opens his eyes and searches the room frantically until his gaze lands on Louis. He grasps for Louis desperately, and Louis can't help but liken the situation to the scene of the accident. "Harry, what's wrong?" He asks, trying to remain calm as he presses the call button continuously.

"Lou!" Harry cries, tears forming in his hazy eyes. His lips are turning blue.
"Harry, what's wrong?" Louis screams, his hands squeezing Harry's tightly.

"I can't... Lou, my chest f-feels tight. I can't breathe." Harry gasps, his eyes squeezing shut.

Doctor Ryan rushes into the room and Louis gets shoved aside as nurses surround the bed. "No!" He yells. "No, no, no!"

He struggles to reach Harry, trying in vain to get through the wall of nurses separating them. Louis feels the tears slipping down his cheeks and his heart is pounding so fast and so hard it hurts. "Harry!" He yells as he sees the nurses flatten the bed and remove the sling holding his left arm against his chest. Doctor Ryan pulls down the hospital gown covering Harry's torso, revealing terrible black and blue bruising along Harry's chest and abdomen. Thick bandaging is taped over the surgical incisions on his chest and stomach. The chest tube looks alienlike in Harry's chest.

"It looks like complications with his right lung," Doctor Ryan says loudly, "sounds like a second pneumothorax. Possible infection. We need to take him into surgery and remove the chest tube, open him back up again."

"Harry!" Louis cries as he's restrained by a pair of strong, hairy arms. He fights valiantly. "Harry!"

Harry's bed is hurriedly wheeled out of the room, the nurses and doctor shouting at each other and tugging at Harry. Louis tries to run after them, but he's kept back. He can hardly see through the tears in his eyes.

He gets guided outside by someone he can't seem to focus on. Once outside, he looks at the boys, tears in his eyes, his breathing fast and unsteady. And he drops to his knees. Surprisingly, it's Zayn who's at his side first, and he lets himself fall into Zayn's arms as they rock back and forth on the floor. Louis mutters "No, no, no. He has to be okay. This can't be happening."

"It'll be okay, Louis." Zayn whispers, sounding so sure and so confident. His certainty is exactly what Louis needs. "Harry will be okay... we will all be okay."

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"It's been a fucking hour and they haven't even told us how it's going!" Louis yells, tugging at his hair and growling furiously.

"Calm down, Louis, they'll let us know." Niall offers, leaning his head against the wall tiredly. It's been almost twenty-four hours since they've gotten any sleep, and almost half of those hours have been spent in a hospital, waiting to find out if their friend - no, their brother - is going to be okay.

"You don't know that, Niall." Louis spits, stopping his pacing for just long enough to shoot Niall a threatening glare.

"God, I was just trying to help." Niall retaliates, looking wounded as he shrinks back in his seat.

"Well, don't."

"Jesus, guys, when did we start turning on each other?" Liam snaps, angrily watching Louis. They're all irritable because they're tired and they're worried and they're all still unable to process Zayn's news.

"Ask Zayn," Louis says, smiling sarcastically, "he seems to know all about turning on his friends."
Zayn looks up from his seat, his jaw dropping at Louis' harsh words. Louis watches him, daring him to challenge, daring him to start a fight. Zayn simply shakes his head and looks back down at his lap where his hands are fiddling with his shirt. Louis sighs and leans against the wall, tapping his foot impatiently, seeing Harry's pained expression wherever he looks. He feels like crying, but he doesn't.

He glances up the corridor, watching a nurse leave a room with dirty bedsheets in her gloved hands. He glances down the corridor, his gaze settling on a doctor and nurse quietly conversing in the corner. The doctor is holding a file and they seem to be debating about the patient. The nurse keeps pointing at a point in the file, but the doctor keeps shaking his head and pointing at a different point in the file.

Louis lets his gaze wander, letting it land on a pair of scuffed white trainers coming around the corner. His gaze travels up the legs and finally settles on the face. His heart seizes as he goes stiff and pushes away from the dirty wall.

It's Anne and Gemma.

He runs towards them, meeting Anne halfway and wrapping his arms around her tightly. She squeezes him back, her hand holding his head against her shoulder like a mother does her child. New tears run down Louis' flushed cheeks - tears of relief and tears of absolute panic. Tears stream down Anne's as she whispers soothing words in Louis' ear.

"Anne, thank God." Louis repeats over and over as he tightens his grip on her. He's shaking and he feels like his legs are too weak to hold him up.

"Lou, where is Harry?" Anne asks, pulling away from him, but keeping her hands on his arms.

"He's... Um, Harry's in surgery." Louis stutters, stumbling over his words.

Anne's jaw drops and she steps back, turning to Gemma and embracing her tightly - almost urgently. "What happened?" Anne asks, releasing Gemma and leaning against the wall for support. Gemma wraps an arm around Louis, resting her head on Louis' shoulder. Her fluffy beanie tickles his cheek. "Last time we spoke he was out of surgery and in recovery."

"There was a complication." Louis says, leaning into Gemma's comforting touch.

"What kind of complication?" Gemma asks, wiping tears from her blotchy cheeks. Louis raises a shaky hand and wipes away her tears with his thumb, kissing her on the forehead. She rests her head on his shoulder and takes a deep breath. Louis feels like he's with family.

"I - we don't know."

"They haven't told you?" Anne exclaims, shrugging off her thick black jacket.

Gemma takes off her own jacket. It's the denim one of Harry's that Louis has worn so many times before. He takes it from her and squeezes it in his hand like it's a lifeline. Gemma smiles sadly, her gaze focused on the jacket. Louis is squeezing it so tightly that his knuckles have turned white against his red skin.

"No, they haven't told us anything." Louis whispers, shaking his head. He's aware of the nurses
watching them, but he doesn't care. "It was so scary, Anne. I tried to help but he couldn't breathe and I..."

"You were there?" Gemma gasps, her hands coming up to cover her agape mouth.

"Yeah," Louis mumbles, a lump forming in his throat.

"What about the driver?" Anne asks.

Louis thinks back, trying to remember the accident. He vaguely remembers the driver climbing out of the car and desperately trying to check on Harry, but Louis was so focused on Harry that he didn't even pay attention to the driver. He doesn't know where the driver ended up. He shrugs and mutters, "I'm sorry, I don't know."

"That's okay, sweetie," Anne whispers, nodding and smiling like she always does when Louis is worried or confused or sad. It calms Louis' nerves and he manages to take a deep, grounding breath. "Has the doctor spoken about Harry's recovery?"

"Not yet, he was waiting for you. But Harry's hurt bad and he's in pain."

"How bad is the pain?" Gemma asks, her hand wrapping around Louis' wrist.

"Bad." Louis answers honestly, his brow furrowing in concern as he remembers Harry's short-lived consciousness.

"Are the others here?" Anne asks, straightening up and smoothing out her clothing. She wipes the tears from the corners of her bloodshot eyes and tries to fix up her unruly hair. The effort is useless; no matter what she does, she still looks like a frantic mother.

"Yeah," Louis replies, pointing to the others with a shaking hand, "over there."

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"Unfortunately," Doctor Ryan begins, "Mister Styles suffered a second pneumothorax. The force of his cough forced one of his broken ribs to displace and the jagged end pierced his lung." He illustrates the action by poking his palm with one of his fingers. "And, as I'm sure you can imagine, Mister Styles' lungs were already under pressure."

They are sitting in Harry's empty room. Harry is in recovery, and he will be brought through in a couple hours. Anne and Gemma and Louis are squished together on the couch, holding hands tightly. The other boys are standing around the couch, their shoulders touching, no one moving as they find solace in the comforting contact.

"We opened Mister Styles up and removed the chest tube. We had to drain his lung of all fluids and place another test tube so as to accommodate the new puncture," Doctor Ryan explains, "however, the surgery was difficult due to the fact that Mister Styles' lung was already so damaged."

"Is he okay?" Anne asks, choking on a sob. Louis gently rubs her back in an offer of support.

"Mister Styles will be okay, provided no other complications arise," Doctor Ryan says hesitantly. "We did manage to complete the operation without any further complications. However, the second pneumothorax drastically affects recovery time."
"What exactly is Harry's recovery time?" Gemma asks, frowning.

"I assume you've been made aware of the extent of Mister Styles' injuries?"

"Yes." Anne replies, gently squeezing Louis' hand.

"Well, then you're aware of his future shoulder surgeries?"

Anne nods, raising a manicured hand to wipe away threatening tears.

"Those were originally scheduled for the next few days, but Mister Styles will not be strong enough for further operations so they have been postponed till next week. In regard to his shoulder, Mister Styles will require two months of absolute rest - which means no movement of the shoulder - which will be followed by four to six months of intense physical therapy twice a week. After the initial physical therapy, Mister Styles will be advised to continue less frequent therapy sessions for another six months. These therapy sessions will ensure that he regains seventy-five percent movement of his left arm."

"What do you mean seventy-five percent?" Louis asks, his heartbeat picking up its pace as he leans forward and his shoulders go tense.

"Mister Tomlinson, you must understand that the damage to Mister Styles' shoulder is extensive, and, upon closer examination in the surgeries, we might find that it's worse than originally thought. Worst-case scenario is that Mister Styles loses twenty-five percent usage of his arm due to the severe muscle and tissue damage as a result of the bone damage. However, please understand that Mister Styles can regain one-hundred percent usage provided the damage isn't as severe as the scans imply." Doctor Ryan tries to explain calmly, but Louis only huffs angrily in response.

The thing is, Louis isn't angry at anyone, but he is angry. He's angry and he's upset and he's worried. He never thought that he could be this worried about anyone, but the night's events have proven just how much he loves Harry.

"That doesn't sound very promising..." Anne gulps, burying her face in her hands.

Doctor Ryan sighs in resignation and says, "Please remain hopeful. Mister Styles needs the support."

"Please stop calling him that. He's only twenty-one. Call him Harry." Gemma mumbles.

Doctor Ryan nods and continues, "Harry will require a month of complete bed rest in order to allow his ribs time to heal. The breaks are bad and the night's event have only proven how unsteady the bones are. Any overzealous movement could result in another pneumothorax, and I'm not sure Harry's body would handle it."

"A month is a bit extensive, don't you think?" Liam asks, frowning. Louis agrees. Harry is a busybody. He hates sitting at home and doing nothing. He always has to be out and he always has to be busy.

"It may seem like it, but I'm not sure you're understanding the severity of his broken ribs." Doctor Ryan says, reaching for a yellow folder in the shelf by the door. He pulls out one of the x-rays and holds it up to the light. The x-ray reveals Harry's mess of a shoulder and his broken ribs. Doctor Ryan points at the shoulder and says, "You see these?"
He points at the different sections of shattered collarbone and random bone fragments. His joint is a mess of tiny pebble-like shards. "This is the damage done to his shoulder. His clavicle is separated into five different bone fragments," he says, pointing to each one, "and these bone fragments are from his scapula as well as his humerus and joint." He points to the random shards. "They are imbedded in his muscle."

"Shit." Zayn says, gulping loudly.

"And it's all your fucking fault." Louis mutters.

Anne leans in and looks at Louis sternly. She narrows her eyes and says, "Not now, Lou." Louis nods and blushes like a scolded child.

"You see these," Doctor Ryan continues, undeterred, pointing at Harry's ribs. There are three broken ribs. The top two broken ribs are completely snapped in two, and one of them is completely misaligned. The third broken rib has two complete fractures and is severely out of alignment. "These are his broken ribs. This top, rib three, pierced his lung on impact resulting in his original pneumothorax. Unfortunately, nothing can be done for broken ribs. They cannot be wrapped or immobilized as that would prevent their ability to expand during inhalation and that could result in multiple complications: pneumonia, collapsed lung, um... fluid build up."

"So you just left them all skew like that?" Niall exclaims.

"No," Doctor Ryan says quickly, "we realigned them."

"So then why did he get a second pneumothorax?" Gemma asks, placing a hand on top of Niall's, who's leaning forward on the arm of the couch.

"It seems the force of Harry's coughing forced this bottom rib fragment," he points at the middle fragment of the broken rib, "to displace and puncture his lung."

"Fuck." Louis gasps, closing his eyes as he remembers Harry gasping for air desperately as his lips turned blue from lack of oxygen. A gentle tap on his back grounds him and he opens his eyes again and focuses on the doctor.

The doctor places the x-Ray back in the folder and places it back into the shelf. He says, "Now, with regard to Harry's pneumothorax, a minimum of three weeks of minimum strain will be needed. No exercise will be allowed for two months - when Harry's lungs and ribs have had ample time to heal. Then he may start with walks and work his way up."

"He's not gonna like that." Liam says, earning laughs of agreement.

"Well, he's going to have to." Doctor Ryan shrugs. "Now, Harry also suffered internal bleeding. He may not bend, lift his legs, or stretch his arms for a month to ensure correct healing of his intestinal tract. However, the pain from his ribs should prevent him from doing any of that in the first place."

"Was that supposed to make us feel better? Cause it didn't." Louis snaps, earning a few laughs despite the fact that he isn't joking.

"Harry also suffered a severe concussion," Doctor Ryan continues, ignoring Louis' irritable comment. "He will suffer from severe nausea and headaches for a couple weeks, but pills will be prescribed to decrease the nausea and pain. Nothing can be done for his fractured nose and
cheekbone. The only unfortunate thing is that Harry's breathing is already severely impaired by the pneumothorax and broken ribs, and his broken nose will prevent him from breathing through his nose, which means he will have to breathe through his mouth. Unfortunately, after his second pneumothorax, Harry is unable to breathe on his own."

"What?" Anne yells. "What does that mean?"

"Harry has been put on a ventilator. This will help him breathe for the next twenty-four hours, after which we will remove it and replace it with an oxygen mask. The ventilator is uncomfortable but Harry cannot manage without its aid."

"Will it be painful for him?" Gemma asks, her voice sounding as shaky as she looks.

"No," Doctor Ryan replies hesitantly, "because Harry has been placed in a medically induced coma for the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours."

"He what?" Anne gasps, raising trembling hands to cover her agape mouth as a desperate sob slips from her lips. Louis wraps his arms around her and pulls her into his chest as she starts trembling violently.

"I know this is a lot to take in," Doctor Ryan says defensively.

"Fucking right." Louis says impatiently, resting his head on top of Anne's. Anne relaxes in his embrace.

"But it was the only way we could ensure Harry would make it through the next day without further complications. If one was to arise, his body would just be too weak for him to survive it."

"I never knew it was this bad." Liam says, hardly making an effort to wipe away his tears. Niall wraps his arms around Liam, finding more comfort in it than Liam.

"It's bad, but I'm hopeful." Doctor Ryan says, arching his eyebrows supportively. "I suggest you all go home, shower, and get some rest. You need to be fresh when Harry wakes up."

"Which will be?" Gemma asks, almost intimidatingly.

"In the next two days, depending on when his body responds. He will start showing signs of waking up two to three hours prior. We will call you the minute he shows the first signs."

"No, it's fine, Lou," Anne says, kissing him on the cheek as she uses the card for Harry's room to open the door. She was handed all of his belongings before they left the hospital. "Gem and I will be fine. And besides, we're right next door to you, so if we need something we'll call. Okay?"

"Okay," Louis sighs, leaning against the doorway as Anne and Gemma walk into the room, "promise me you won't hesitate."

"We promise." Anne says, nodding emphatically. "Now go and get some rest. You look like you're about to collapse."

Louis laughs weakly and pushes off of the door frame. He closes the door behind him and sighs heavily as he steps into the hallway. The other three boys are huddled together, talking quietly. Louis watches them silently. Liam looks at him and says, "Louis, we should talk about Zayn's
choice to leave."

"You know, I really don't want to talk about it, but you guys can knock yourselves out." Louis says, deliberately avoiding eye contact as he makes a beeline to his bedroom door.

As he's about to open the door Zayn says, "Louis, we need to discuss it."

Louis' blood boils. He pivots on his heels and stalks towards the boys angrily. His footsteps are heavy and sluggish against the red carpet. He stops only inches away from Zayn and yells, "You wanna talk? You wanna discuss it?"

"Listen, we need to have a calm discussion about this." Liam says, placing a hand on Louis' chest.

Louis shoves him off aggressively and screams, "Let me tell you what I think, Zayn. I think you're being a selfish fuck and you're only thinking about yourself. You haven't given us a second thought because who the fuck cares, right? As long as you're happy."

Zayn shakes his head furiously and shoves Louis. Liam tries to get between them but Louis pushes him back so hard that he falls onto his back, taking Niall down with him. "You think I don't think about you guys? You think I only care about myself?" Zayn shouts, spit spraying from his mouth.

Louis laughs maniacally and tosses his bloodied jacket onto the floor. "Yeah," he yells, "that's what I think, Zayn."

"Well, you're wrong! That's all I've fucking thought about lately - you guys!"

"Then why are you fucking leaving?"

Niall jumps up and tries to pull Louis away. He wraps his arms around Louis and tugs him to the side, but Louis only shoves him off and elbows him back onto the floor. Niall scrambles back to his feet, looking to Liam for direction. Liam tries the same with Zayn, but the result isn't any different.

"Because I can't live like this anymore!" Zayn yells.

The security guards run forward, ready to break Zayn and Louis apart, but Liam blocks their path and says, "No, let them sort it out."

They look at him uncertainly before hesitantly turning and reluctantly walking back to their rooms. They keep glancing back at Louis and Zayn, and when they get back to their rooms they leave the doors open, just in case they're needed.

"You think this life is easy for any of us?" Louis retorts, shock written across his haggard face.

"I didn't say that." Zayn screams.

"Then what are you saying, Zayn? You're a fucking selfish coward."

This seems to be too much for Zayn and he tackles Louis to the ground. Louis shoves him off viciously and pushes him onto his back. Liam and Niall get in between the two boys and Niall pulls Zayn away as Liam pulls Louis away. Louis struggles against Liam's grip, accidentally elbowing him in the face. Liam drops Louis and cups his eye in his hand. Niall drops Zayn and rushes to Liam's side. He helps Liam sit up, pulling his hand away and revealing an already
swelling eye.

Louis stands quickly, unsure of what to do. "Shit, Liam, I'm sorry." He says, watching as Niall helps a dazed Liam to his feet.

"Look at what you did!" Zayn yells.

Louis' jaw drops and he turns to Zayn, ready to pounce again. "Yeah, and look at what you did to Harry!" He remarks harshly.

"Enough!" Niall screams, his arms wrapped around Liam's waist to keep him upright. Liam is still holding his bruised and rapidly swelling eye in shaking hands. "You two are acting like children! I don't fucking care where you go, but you need to not be around each other right now. Grow up and handle this like adults, especially you, Louis."

He turns and leads Liam to his room, whispering in his ear. Louis watches them go, shocked into silence. Zayn growls at Louis, spins on his heels, and marches to his room. Doors are slammed shut angrily, leaving Louis standing in the hallway alone. He stalks to his room and slams his own door shut.

He slides to the floor, bringing his knees to his chest, and he rocks back and forth, staring at the floor. He doesn't cry; he has no more tears. Slowly, unsteadily, he rises to his feet and he staggers towards his bed. He collapses onto it and he fumbles for the television remote. Early morning sun shines through the window and warms Louis' skin.

He turns on the television, lying back as he kicks off his shoes. He sits up suddenly as the big-nosed reporter who he punched appears on television. He's being interviewed. The headline running along the bottom of the screen states, 'Reporter punched by Louis Tomlinson suing for assault.'

The reporter's nose is swollen and bruised, and his eyes are slightly bruised. The interviewer, a young woman with curly red hair and big green eyes, asks, "So, Lester, what exactly happened?"

"I simply asked Louis Tomlinson a question about Harry - 'cause you know Harry was hit by a car - and Zayn - 'cause you know he left the band - and he hit me! He broke my nose so I'm suing him for my medical bills." Lester says, swinging his arms in the air and exaggerating his statement by punctuating carefully selected words.

Footage of Louis hitting Lester is played, the interviewer narrating the events. Louis zones out as Lester speaks, but his attention is caught again when the interviewer starts talking to a popular reporter who Louis recognises from the accident. The interviewer says, "According to reports, Louis Tomlinson hit the reporter completely unprovoked."

The reporter, a young, tall man with chiseled features, pulls a disapproving face and says, "Listen, what you've got to understand is Louis Tomlinson wasn't in the best space to begin with. He just found out that his best friend was leaving the band and he just witnessed his other best friend get hit by a car. I was there and I'm telling you, Harry Styles was badly hurt and watching him get hit wasn't easy, even for me... I hardly know him at all. Imagine how Louis felt."

"Oh, yes," the interviewer says, frowning in genuine interest. "And you saw Louis hit the reporter?"
"Yeah," the reporter replies, looking into the camera to emphasise his point, "and let me tell you, it wasn't unprovoked."

"Well, that's what the reporter is claiming, and now he's suing."

Louis sighs and tosses the remote across the room. He watches the batteries bounce across the carpet and roll under the bed.

"Look," the handsome reporter replies, shaking his head, "there's footage of the incident. There are witnesses. The reporter provoked Louis and he asked for what he got. All I'm saying is that any legal action is going to end badly for the reporter. If I were him, I'd tell him to drop the charges. Seriously, if anything, it's only going to have a negative impact on him."

"Thank you." Louis whispers, holding a pillow over his head as he closes his eyes and turns on his side. His whole body aches and his throat is dry and his eyes sting. He's exhausted and he's emotionally drained. He contemplates checking on Liam, but decides he should give him some time to relax first.

He starts drifting off, but his attention is grabbed by another news reporter on the television. He shoots up, allowing the pillow to fall onto the floor. A popular news reporter with long blonde hair and too much makeup is saying, "One of our reporters managed to get an interview with a doctor, who prefers to remain anonymous, earlier today. The doctor gave us exclusive information on Harry's condition, and it's not good, folks."

"What the fuck? Who spoke?" Louis yells, picking up the lamp and throwing it across the room. The reporter continues, "It was revealed that Harry Styles, who was hit by a car yesterday, has suffered several broken ribs, internal bleeding, a collapsed lung, shattered shoulder bones, a concussion, a broken nose and a fractured cheek bone! He must be in a lot of pain."

The reporter fakes a sympathetic look as she crosses the room so she's standing beside a large screen. She smiles excitedly and says, "And not only were we treated to exclusive information on Harry Styles' medical condition, but we were also given an exclusive photograph of him right after surgery."

A photograph of Harry appears on the screen. It shows his swollen, bruised face. Louis stands up quickly, staring at the screen in horror. The photograph also reveals Harry's badly bruised and misshapen shoulder and his black and blue chest and stomach. His freshly stitched surgical incisions and chest tube are clearly visible. Louis' eyes widen in disgust and anger.

"Harry, who has been placed in a medically induced coma, is apparently in a lot of pain and will reportedly be out of action for as long as two months, maybe more!" The reporter says, smiling, revealing whitened teeth.

"You fucking bitch!" Louis screams at the screen.

"Speaking of which, One Direction announced on their official Facebook page that Zayn Malik is quitting!" The reporter continues, clasping her hands in front of her.

Louis yells angrily and he suddenly loses control. He picks up the television and throws it across the room. It smashes into the wall and the screen shatters into tiny shards of glass. The television hits the floor with a thud and Louis stomps on it furiously. He's seeing red and he's unable to stop
himself.

His door flies open, revealing Liam. Liam has a black eye, swollen so badly that his eyelids are closed. "Lou!" Liam yells, slamming the door shut behind him as he runs inside and heads for Louis. He wraps his arms around Louis and tackles him to the ground. He wrestles with him until he's firmly secured his grip around him. "It's okay, Lou, it's okay." Liam whispers in Louis' ear over and over and over.

"Liam, did you see the reporter?" Louis sobs, suddenly crying. His shoulders tremble as he cries inconsolably.

"I saw, Lou, I saw." Liam says, rocking back and forth with Louis practically in his lap.

"I'm sorry, Liam," Louis cries, pushing himself deeper into Liam's hold, feeling safe in his friend's arms. "I'm so sorry."

"It's okay, Lou." Liam says, also crying. He rests his head on Louis' back and they stay like that for a long, long time.

"What's happening? Everything is going wrong, I don't understand." Louis sobs, gasping for air and trying to calm down.

"I don't know why this is happening, Lou, but it'll be okay." Liam whispers. "Please, God, let it be okay."

"I just... I have this bad feeling." Louis whispers, shutting his eyes and letting himself relax in Liam's arms.

"What do you mean?"

"I feel like it isn't going to be okay." Louis says, grasping onto Liam like a lifeline.

Liam contemplates the statement, but finds he has no answer. Instead, he kisses Louis' head and rocks back and forth, trying to stop himself from crying, and trying to ignore the bad feeling settling in his own stomach.
"I just feel like I don't know what I'm supposed to do," Zayn sighs, leaning back so his head rests against the wall. He grasps the phone in his hand so tightly that his knuckles turn white.

"Honey, you have to do what makes you happy. You're not supposed to do anything except follow your heart." Patricia says, her soft voice and broad Manchester accent calming Zayn. Her voice is slightly static due to the bad reception, but the familiarity of it makes Zayn feel like he's back at home where he belongs. "You have to do what makes you happy."

"But that's the thing, mum," Zayn argues, squeezing his eyes shut as the noon sun bathes him in warmth, "what if what makes me happy makes everyone else, like, miserable?"

"Zayn, baby, what do you feel is right?"

"Like... I don't know."

"Yes, you do."

Zayn stands up and falls onto his bed, closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose to ward off an oncoming headache. He lazily picks up the wet towel he left on the bed after his shower and he throws it onto the floor. He lays the phone on the white pillow as he kicks away the duvet and climbs in between the sheets. Hesitantly, he picks up the phone again, sighing heavily.

"I feel like I'm doing the selfish thing by leaving the band." Zayn says, desperately wishing his mom was with him.

"Maybe you are," Patricia responds, catching Zayn off guard. He frowns and waits for her to continue, fiddling with the stitching on the sheet with his free hand.

His mother doesn't elaborate, so Zayn says, "I also feel like if I stay in this band longer I'm gonna, like, break down."

"You're not enjoying it anymore?" Patricia asks, and although her tone suggests it's a question, Zayn knows she's not really asking. She's seen his steady decline into unhappiness.
"No, I'm not."

"Not even the singing?"

Zayn turns and stares at the partly cloudy sky through his window. The sun catches his gaze and the brightness blinds him. He turns away and stares at the patterned wallpaper beside the bed. His gaze traces the beige floral patterns. "I like the singing, I just don't like everything that comes with it." Zayn replies, his voice heavy with emotion, his words slurring with tiredness.

"Listen, honey, you sound tired," Patricia begins, and Zayn can practically see the concerned look on her face.

"I haven't slept in a while with everything going on with Harry and stuff." Zayn says, suddenly realising just how tired he is. Even holding the phone to his ear takes monumental effort.

"What do you mean?" Patricia asks.

"Haven't you heard?" Zayn asks, sitting up and staring at the blank television screen in front of him. He imagines that most channels are filled with the news of his departure and Harry's accident.

"Heard what, Zayn?" Patricia asks, her voice suddenly panicked and frantic.

"He got hit by a car..." Zayn feels tears form in the corners of his eyes and he realises he can't go through the whole story again. He doesn't have the emotional capacity.

"He what?" Patricia yells, and he can hear his sisters asking her what's wrong in the background.

"Look, mum, can I call you back in a little while?"

"Uh, yeah, okay."

"Okay, love you." Zayn says, hanging up and letting his phone drop onto the floor. He collapses into the pillows and closes his stinging eyes. He sighs heavily and gulps to get rid of the lump in his throat. Before he knows it, he's drifting away, happily giving in to the welcoming darkness beckoning him.

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Harry is aware of pain. Just pain. It's lanceting up and down his body. He can't really tell where it hurts most, and he can't tell what exactly hurts, he just know he hurts. Everything hurts.

He can't see. There's black surrounding him. He feels like he should be panicked but he's relatively calm. He feels safe in the blackness surrounding him. But it's cold.

He tries to move his arm but he can't seem to bring his body to cooperate with his muddled mind. He tries to focus on the action, and suddenly the black around him disperses, instead replaced by a blinding white light. And he's standing in the middle of it.

He's aware of a constant beeping in the background. It's coming from nowhere. He curls into a ball and shields his eyes with his hands as the blinding white light gets brighter. He glances up and realises that the bright light has split into two bright lights getting closer to him with each passing second.
He stands and squints, staring at lights as he tries to ascertain what they are. And he realises suddenly. It's a car. He tries to move but his feet are sinking deeper into the black ground beneath him. He can hear Louis screaming his name frantically, and he looks around in a panic, searching for the face to match the voice. But it's not there.

Nothing is there.

Just white.

He tries to scream Louis' name, but when he opens his mouth nothing comes out. He keeps trying, and eventually a clear, gooey liquid starts oozing from between his lips. The car is coming closer. There are flashes around him, bright lights in the suddenly pitch black background.

Then the car disappears. The flashes disappear. Everything disappears.

Except the pain.

Pain overwhelms him. He tries to crawl to safety but each movement only worsens the pain. His face feels wet and he raises a shaky hand, pulling it away and finding it covered in red. It's blood and it's his.

He realises he's lying in a pool of red. It gets deeper and wider and he starts sinking. He tries to swim to the edge but every time his fingers graze dry ground, the pool of blood expands.

The beeping is getting faster and more inconsistent.

He hears his name being called and he looks up quickly, his gaze landing on Zayn. Zayn is holding out a hand, gesturing for Harry to grab a hold of it. Harry splashes towards him, reaching frantically for Zayn's hand, but each time he reaches up, he sinks.

His foot finds purchase on a rock in the pool of blood and he uses the rock to keep steady as he desperately reaches for Zayn's hand. Their fingers touch, but suddenly Zayn jumps back and pivots on his heels. He starts walking away, his back to Harry. Harry tries to call him but he still can't seem to get his voice to work. Zayn becomes a dot on the horizon.

He's suddenly wrapped up in a thick rope, hanging off of the edge of a cliff. The blood is gone. At the edge of the cliff, Niall, Liam and Louis are grabbing the rope, frantically trying to lift Harry to safety. They're slipping and falling and the cliff is crumbling from beneath their feet. Zayn is standing to the side, watching them, but not helping.

The beeping gets louder and louder. Harry blocks his ears, screaming as the sound gets even faster. Each incessant beep seems to crumble away at the cliff and Harry feels the rope give way. It snaps and he starts falling. He claws at the air but he can't stop his descent into the darkness.

When he lands, he finds himself in a bed. He's in a hospital bed. The pain is back and it's worse. The beeping is coming from beside him. He can't see anything, only blackness, but he's aware of the fact that his body feels heavy.

There's a tube shoved down his throat, and he gags on it. He tries to reach up and pull it out, but he can't move. He can't feel his body anymore. Suddenly, he feels his fingertips. He can't see them, but he can see the pulses carrying the message from his brain towards them.
The purple pulses turn red as they reach their destination.


The command repeats over and over and over again. Eventually, he feels his fingertips twitch. It's a small movement, but it's a victory.

Slowly, surely, he starts hearing other noises. Talking and beeping and footsteps and traffic. He can't distinguish the sounds, but he's aware of them.

His throat is on fire.

He wants water. He tries to say the word but he can't get the words out. Instead, he groans. It's a long, desperate groan, but it seems to get some reaction, because suddenly the indistinguishable noise surrounding him becomes louder and more frantic. Then it turns to complete blackness and he can't feel or see or hear anything anymore.

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Louis awakes with a start. He's lying in his bed, though how he got there is still a blur. The sunlight that he remembers falling asleep to has gone, instead replaced by moonlight. He realises it was his ringing phone that caught his attention.

He glances at the screen of his phone. There are innumerable missed calls. Some are probably from management, some are definitely from Simon, and some are undoubtedly from his mother and sisters. He contemplates returning the calls, but he can't bring himself to do it.

He ignores his phone and crawls out of the bed and to the shower. He rips off his sweaty, day-old clothing and turns on the shower, ensuring it's as hot as it can be. As the water heats up, he stumbles to the sink and starts brushing his teeth with trembling hands.

He staggers to the shower and let's the heat wash over his body. His stomach growls hungrily. He wonders where Liam is, his tired brain slowly remembering the events that took place before he fell asleep.

As he climbs out of the shower, his towel in his hands, he is startled by a persistent banging on his door. He sighs impatiently and wraps the towel around his waist, walking out of the steamy bathroom and towards the door.

"What?" He yells, fetching fresh underwear from a shelf in his cupboard.

"Lou, it's Gemma."

Louis' eyes widen and he hurriedly pulls on a shirt and a pair of tracksuit pants as he hops towards the door and rips it open. Gemma is standing in the doorway, bouncing on the balls of her feet. Behind her, Liam and Niall are standing in the hallway, yawning as they slip on their jackets. Anne is knocking on Zayn's door frantically.

"What's wrong?" Louis asks, turning and pulling on a pair of sneakers and fumbling for a clean jacket. His heart is thudding against his chest and he's barely able to shrug on his jacket. "Is Harry okay?"
"He's waking up!" Gemma exclaims excitedly, stepping back as Louis grabs his card and slams the door shut behind him. "We got the call ten minutes ago."

Louis smiles hopefully and hugs Gemma in relief. He glances at Liam, biting his bottom lip anxiously as his gaze lands on Liam's badly bruised eye. The swelling has gone down a little. He looks at Niall, expecting the cold shoulder, but Niall smiles and waves as he runs towards Louis and wraps his arms around him. Louis falls into the hug, revelling in the comforting embrace.

"Wait!" Louis suddenly yells as Zayn stumbles out of his bedroom, struggling to wrap a scarf around his neck. Everyone turns to him, even the security who have apparently stayed up and at their posts the entire day and night. "What time is it?"

Anne glances at her wrist watch and says, "Uh, it's four."

"What? Four?" Liam gasps, frowning.

"In the morning?" Niall asks, arching an eyebrow. All the boys seem to be thinking the same thing. Louis rubs at his eyes, trying to clear his thoughts. That means it's been just under twenty-four hours since they returned to the hotel.

"Yeah, in the morning," Anne replies, smiling. She's smiling but Louis can tell she's nervous and unsure of what to think. She leads the way to the stairwell, holding Gemma's hand tightly.

Louis and Zayn look at each other. They've had some time to cool off, and Louis realises he's not angry at Zayn about Harry's accident anymore, but he's still furious about Zayn's choice to leave One Direction. Zayn smiles, though it doesn't quite reach his eyes. Louis purses his lips and looks away.

"Lou?" Zayn whispers as they rush down the stairs, almost tripping.

"Not now, Zayn." Louis snaps, earning a concerned glance from Niall.

"Well, when?" Zayn asks, sighing sadly.

They shove through into the reception area, ignoring the curious glances from other hotel guests. Anne leads them towards a taxi waiting outside for them. The hotel is surrounded by paparazzi who are happily taking photographs and videos as they scream out questions. Some of the paparazzi notice Liam's black eye and they frantically try to grab his attention. Liam purposely avoids any and all eye contact.

All six of them clamber into the taxi, sagging in relief when the noise dies down as they close the doors. The taxi driver pulls away from the hotel, leaving a trail of desperate reporters in its wake.

"I don't know when, Zayn, but not now." Louis spits harshly.

He's aware of Anne watching him and he looks up to meet her gaze. She shakes her head and her brow furrows sadly. Louis looks down at his lap, his cheeks going red, unable to hold her gaze. He's never felt such unexplainable anger before.

"Listen, all of you," Gemma says loudly, grasping Louis' thigh in her cold hand. Her hair is in a
mess, and she has large bags under her tired eyes. "I understand that you have stuff to discuss, but right now... at least for now, Harry is our main priority. Once he's out of the woods you guys can have at each other. Until then, you need each other, even if you don't really realise it."

Louis sneaks a look at Zayn, and they make eye contact for just a second, but that's all that's needed for them to come to a temporary understanding. He takes a deep breath and nods, tapping Gemma's hand.

The taxi is bathed in darkness as it sails down the empty streets. The driver hasn't said a word, though he keeps glancing at them through his rearview mirror.

"Louis, management wants you to call them," Liam says, concern etched into his features.

Louis shakes his head and laughs bitterly, staring out the window. He runs his hand through his damp hair, purposely avoiding eye contact. "They can actually piss off." He spits harshly.

"You can't avoid them forever,"

"I don't need to avoid them forever, Liam," Louis snaps, glaring at the nosy taxi driver as their gazes meet in the rearview mirror. The taxi driver snaps his gaze away and focuses on the road ahead of him. "Just the next couple of days, is all."

Niall laughs loudly at Louis' remark, and for a second Louis feels like he's back in the worry-free environment he used to revel in whenever he was with the lads. On the radio, Louis is vaguely aware of 'Night Changes' playing, and he smirks at the irony. He's snapped out of his thoughts by Liam's voice.

"You have to be mature about this, Louis," Liam says, desperately trying to reason with him, but Louis will have none of it.

"Liam, no offence, but my last concern is whether management is happy or not, okay?" Louis says, rolling his eyes. He glances at Zayn and frowns, suddenly aware of something. "And besides, why are they focusing so much on me? I mean, like, not to start shit or anything, but isn't Zayn's thing or Harry's thing a bigger deal? I mean, shit."

"Yeah!" The taxi driver suddenly says, drawing everyone's attention.

They all look at him and Louis says, "Excuse me?"

"I mean, Zayn leaving was announced on your Facebook page. As in, officially, you know? It seems like a bigger deal, is all." The taxi driver says, shrugging nonchalantly.

Louis stares at the back of his head, his thoughts lost in the yellow and grey stripes on the taxi driver's beanie. His brow furrows and he asks, "What do you mean it was announced?"

"Oh, shit." Louis hears Liam mumble beside him. He ignores it, focusing his attention on the taxi driver.

"There was a whole message on the One Direction Facebook page. It basically just said Zayn was leaving and it sounds like you guys wrote it." The taxi driver replies, hesitantly, picking up on the tense atmosphere settling in the back of the taxi. His hazel eyes look at Louis through the rearview mirror.
"What do you mean it sounded like us?" Louis asks, leaning forward. His voice is deep and hoarse with sudden anger.

"It kept saying things like how you guys are supporting his decision... but using, like, 'we' and 'us' and stuff."

"When did this happen?" Louis asks, silently hoping that someway, somehow, Liam or Niall wrote it while they were at the hotel.

"Couple days ago," the driver replies reluctantly, turning a corner, averting his gaze, "before the... accident."

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Louis yells, startling everyone in the taxi. A million thoughts run through his mind, and he gets angrier with each passing second. He zones in on one specific thought. He turns to Zayn and screams, "Management knew before we did?"

"Louis," Zayn says, holding up his hands in defense, "I had to talk to them first. I'm bound to them by a contract."

"You're bound to us by fucking friendship! Don't you think that's more fucking important than a contract?" Louis shouts, jabbing himself in the chest with his forefinger.

"Louis!" Anne yells, pulling him back. Her voice drops and she whispers firmly, "Enough. You're disturbing the driver and you're making us all uncomfortable."

"I told them I wanted to leave, but they knew I wanted to tell you guys myself. They weren't supposed to announce it until I had spoken to you guys." Zayn says, disregarding Anne's desperate attempt to defuse the situation.

"That doesn't make it any better. You know what? Whatever." Louis says, sitting back and crossing his arms defensively.

"What do you mean whatever?" Zayn asks, frowning.

"As in whatever, Zayn. As in it doesn't matter." Louis spits, slamming his hands down on the leather seat. Anne and Gemma flinch, disappointment painted across their faces, though Louis isn't sure whether it's disappointment in him or in Zayn or in management or in the situation.

"Hey!" Niall snaps harshly, pushing Zayn back into his seat with a firm hand. "We will talk about this later. You heard what Gemma said. Right now, this is about Harry. Okay?"

"Yeah!" Liam agrees, narrowing his eyes and glaring at Zayn and Louis sternly. "Whatever we discuss as a band, we discuss when Harry is awake and well. Okay? He deserves that much. We all do."

Louis sighs and nods, rubbing a hand along his face. "Okay. You're right. Sorry." He mumbles, embarrassment evident in his rosy cheeks.

The taxi stops outside the front of the hospital, and a herd of reporters and paparazzi rush towards it, cameras flashing brightly. Zayn pulls off his scarf and holds it up against the window, shielding them from view of the cameras. The taxi driver turns in his seat and says, "Is there another
"Uh, yeah," Niall responds, facing the driver, "out back."

The taxi driver hurries away, turning away from the hospital and scurrying away from the media. "I'm going to go a long way so if they follow us, hopefully we lose them." The taxi driver says, his forehead crinkled in worry.

"Thank you." Gemma says, grasping his shoulder tightly.

He nods and smiles at her in the rearview mirror. "This is like a James Bond movie." He says excitedly, shrugging his shoulders.

"Yeah," Louis says, resting his head on Liam's shoulder. "Except not everyone is invincible in this version."

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"Anne, now that you and Gemma have both seen Harry, do you mind if I go in with him for a while?" Louis asks tearfully, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

"Of course, Lou. Go ahead." Anne says, smiling sweetly. She gently squeezes his arm and nods in encouragement.

Louis takes a steadying breath and slowly pushes open the door leading into Harry's room. Harry is lying on the bed, illuminated by the sunlight streaming in through the window. He looks deathly pale, his white skin in stark contrast to the black and blue bruising and deep red cuts on his face. Louis staggers closer, gulping nervously.

He drops into the same seat he sat in last time, and he grasps Harry's hand tightly. The doctor removed the ventilator a few minutes ago. According to Doctor Ryan, Harry is showing signs of waking up. Apparently his vitals are stable and there have been no problems since the last surgery. Harry is breathing with the help of an oxygen mask now, which is apparently a good sign: he's improving.

Louis wipes a single tear from his cheek and sniffs, wiping his cold nose with his sleeve. Harry groans, his brow furrowing slightly, but he goes still quickly.

"Hey, Harold," Louis says, rambling in the unsettling silence, "remember last week when the other boys went to that museum place and we didn't want to go so we went to that restaurant and we were the only customers?" Louis laughs as the memory replays in his head. "And we realised why it was empty when we tasted the food, 'cause it was shit. But you felt bad about not eating it so you forced it down and you spent the rest of the night throwing up in the toilet back at the hotel."

Louis wipes another lone tear from his cheek, laughing as he's overwhelmed by a sense of saddened nostalgia. He sighs and continues, "I didn't wanna leave you 'cause I felt so sorry for you so I sat with you the entire night and ended up falling asleep in the bath tub and you fell asleep on the floor, your arms wrapped around that toilet."

He fiddles with Harry's long fingers as he speaks, his own fingers grazing over the scrapes and gashes along Harry's hand. He holds the hand up to his forehead, squeezing it like a lifeline. He says, "And the next day the others wanted to go out for lunch but we couldn't bring ourselves to eat..."
out so we stayed in the hotel room and ordered room service and rented all those movies. We didn't
even watch the movies! We just spoke and arsed around all day while the movies played on the tv.
And my mum called and we got our phones all confused so you answered thinking it was your
mum, and she thought we were drunk so she called your mum and we got an hour long lecture over
the phone."

Louis laughs loudly, laying Harry's hand on the bed gently. He sighs, looking up at the ceiling and
smiling as he remembers all the stupid things he and Harry got up to in their five-year-long
friendship. His smile fades as he remembers the bad times they managed to fight through.

"Remember when management told us we couldn't travel in the same car 'cause of all of those
rumors, but we didn't give a shit so we tried to sneak into the same car and it ended with
management threatening to take us to court if we didn't do as they said?" Louis sighs, shaking his
head in disbelief. "Fucking management."

He glances around the room and looks at the sun rising in the cloudy sky. He takes a deep breath
and purses his lips in thought. Harry would love the sunrise. He would be taking photographs and
going excited. Louis smirks as he thinks of Harry getting excited over the smallest things. He's
definitely one-of-a-kind. Louis buries his face in his hands, thinking of a world without Harry - one
he's not sure he would be able to survive in.

Harry groans again, and Louis grabs his hand. He gently massages Harry's knuckles as he's done so
many times before when Harry's been sick or nervous or anxious. It always seems to calm him.

The door opens and Niall pops his head through, smiling at Louis comfortingly. "Lou, do you mind
if I grab a sec with Harry?" Niall asks, stepping into the room.

"Go ahead, Nialler." Louis says, standing up and gently smoothing the hair away from Harry's
forehead. He looks at Harry for a second before turning and walking out of the room on unsteady
legs. He gently pats Niall on the shoulder in a show of support.

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Zayn sighs loudly, clicking his long fingers as he stares at the floor absentmindedly. They've been
at the hospital for four hours, waiting for Harry to wake up.

His attention is caught by Doctor Ryan clearing his throat and standing above him. He looks up,
his gaze traveling over Anne and Gemma who are sitting in the seats opposite him. Doctor Ryan is
wearing green scrubs, and he's reading from a chart on a clipboard. He flips the pages quickly, his
gaze scanning over the contents.

"Okay," Doctor Ryan says, looking up and waiting until he has everyone's full attention. "Mist -
Harry is far more stable than he was last time you all were here."

"Oh, thank God," Anne mumbles, pressing her trembling palm against her forehead. She closes her
eyes and smiles.

Zayn smiles, too, his shoulders sagging in a mixture of relief and guilt. He glances at Liam, who
gives him a supportive look. Zayn nods and looks back at Doctor Ryan, who has yet to crack a
smile.

"However," Doctor Ryan adds quickly, instantly destroying the somewhat hopeful atmosphere that
somehow managed to settle in the corridor. "Harry is by no means out of the woods."

"What do you mean?" Gemma asks, frowning.

Zayn watches Louis lean forward in his own seat, burying his face in his hands. Louis looks tired; his face is pale and he has large bags under his eyes - though they all look a little beaten. Anne is shaking her head in anguish. Zayn curls his cold hands into tight fists of frustration.

"Harry is fighting an uphill battle. His body has suffered a severe beating, and his lungs are struggling to heal. By now, Harry should've been off of the oxygen mask and should, rightfully, only need a nasal cannula." Doctor Ryan explains, resting his hand on Anne's shoulder sympathetically.

His gaze settles on Liam and he frowns as he stares at his black eye. Liam looks away uncomfortably, subconsciously covering the bruise with his hand. Zayn nibbles on his thick bottom lip. He wishes he could have his mother with him, holding him and telling him it's going to be okay.

"So, what does that mean?" Zayn asks, tracing patterns on the metal chair with his finger. He can't bring himself to make eye contact with anyone in the room.

"It means that Harry's body isn't managing as well as we'd originally hoped."

"Managing what?" Anne asks, shrugging away from Doctor Ryan's touch. She glares at him as though this is all his fault.

"Managing the abuse it's suffered." Doctor Ryan responds, his voice oozing pity.

"Is he going to be okay or not?" Louis snaps, standing up suddenly. He hurries away and leans against the wall, taking deep breaths, his face crumbling in despair.

Zayn watches, uncertain of what to do. He wants to go to Louis and hold him and tell him it's going to be okay, but he knows any attempt to comfort Louis will be met with hostility. Instead he runs a hand through his long hair and looks at the white floor between his feet.

"Provided he wakes up within the next few hours, his recovery should be steady." Doctor Ryan assures them.

Zayn thinks about what it's going to be like for Harry when he's out of hospital. He's going to be in so much pain and he's not going to be able to do anything. The tour will definitely have to be put on hold. And with him gone, Zayn has a feeling that the other boys might fall apart if Harry can't stay. Harry is like the glue that keeps them together. Harry's sweet and soft and kindhearted and he's the one who makes sure that peace is kept when the others get agitated and irritable.

"And if he doesn't? What if he doesn't wake up?" Louis asks, narrowing his teary eyes as he stares at Doctor Ryan.

"I'm positive he will. He's showing signs of waking up." Doctor Ryan answers, nodding in a desperate attempt to emphasise his point.

"But what if he doesn't?" Gemma challenges. She's grabbing her thighs so tightly that her knuckles have turned white against her red skin. Her shoulders are tense and her back is stiff.
"We will cross that bridge when we come to it." Doctor Ryan says, politely. He steps back and turns on his heels so he can start walking away, but he's called back by Louis who rushes forward and grabs his arm. Louis turns him around so they're facing each other, and Doctor Ryan says, "Is everything okay, Mister Tomlinson."

"No, actually, it's not!" Louis shouts, his face going red with anger. Zayn has never seen Louis so frustrated before, and it seems that's all he's been for the last few days.

"What's the matter?" Doctor Ryan asks, pulling his arm out of Louis' grasp. He's a good few inches taller than Louis, and a good few pounds heavier, too.

"I saw the news and guess what. Someone in this goddamn hospital told the press about Harry's condition." Louis says. Anne grabs his hand and shoots him a firm glare, but Louis rips his hand out of her grasp and takes a step closer to the doctor.

"Okay..." Doctor Ryan mutters, frowning in what Zayn can only imagine is confusion.

Nurses glance at them from down the corridor, whispering amongst themselves. The nurses start walking towards them, but Zayn holds up a hand and they stop in their tracks, glaring at him. He shakes his head and looks at them pleadingly. They sigh, but reluctantly turn and walk away, whispering undoubtedly rude remarks to each other.

"I didn't tell them, if that's what you're insinuating, Mister Tomlinson." Doctor Ryan remarks, sounding wounded by Louis' accusation.

"I'm not insinuating anything, Doctor Ryan." Louis spits. His harsh tone contradicts his words, and Doctor Ryan shakes his head in surprise. "All I'm asking is who it could have been."

"Louis, this is not a conversation for right now," Niall says sternly, getting up and pulling Louis back. He shoves Louis onto one of the seats aggressively before returning to his own and looking at Doctor Ryan apologetically.

Louis huffs and crosses his arms over his chest, looking away and shaking his head furiously. Doctor Ryan stares at Louis in shock before his gaze quickly darts to Liam again.

"Are you taking painkillers for that?" Doctor Ryan asks, kneeling in front of Liam and gently prodding his swollen eye with a steady finger.

Liam flinches and cups his eye in his hand, his face twisted into an awful grimace. "No," he replies, shaking his head slowly.

"Do you have a headache?" Doctor Ryan asks, running a finger along Liam's swollen forehead.

Liam nods slowly, sighing. Zayn feels weighed down by the ever-growing guilt resting on his shoulders. He gulps and runs a hand through his hair again, like he does when he's nervous. His clammy hands feel hot against his cool skin.
Doctor Ryan pulls a small flashlight from his scrubs pocket. He turns it on and flashes it in Liam's eyes, holding them open with his thumb and forefinger. Liam flinches and turns away. "Does that hurt?" Doctor Ryan asks.

Liam nods hesitantly.

"Have you eaten?"

Liam shakes his head.

Doctor Ryan nods and says, "Follow my finger." He holds a finger up in front of Liam's nose, waiting until Liam is focused on it. He moves it slowly from side to side, then up and down, grunting and humming as he makes observations. "Your pupils are dilated and your reaction is sluggish," he says to Liam, "have you been experiencing any nausea or dizziness?"

Liam glances at Niall, who hesitantly nods in encouragement, placing a hand on Liam's back. "A little, I guess." Liam replies reluctantly.

"Okay, not to alarm you, but I think you have a mild concussion. Would you just come with me so I can conduct a few more tests?" Doctor Ryan says, extending a hand and helping Liam to his feet. Zayn frowns as he notices how unsteady Liam is on his feet.

Liam shakes his head and steps back, holding his hands up defensively. "No, no," Liam says quickly, "what if harry wakes up and I'm not here?"

"I will be alerted once Harry's awake, and I'll have to conduct a few tests on him before letting any visitors into his room. I promise you that you won't miss anything, but you need to get that head of yours checked out before you collapse." Doctor Ryan explains calmly. For the first time, Zayn notices how pale Liam looks under the fluorescent lighting.

"Wait, I'm coming with him." Niall says, standing up and looping an arm around Liam's waist.

"Of course." Doctor Ryan says, smiling. He steps to the side and turns to Anne and says, "I'll be back the minute your son wakes up."

"Thank you." Anne says, gently grasping his hand and giving it a squeeze. She wipes a tear from her rosy cheek and dries her hand on her black sweater.

Doctor Ryan nods and starts walking away, gesturing for Liam and Niall to follow him. Louis, Zayn, Anne and Gemma are left alone in the corridor, silently staring at the floor. No one says anything. There's undeniable tension between Louis and Zayn, but Zayn knows that he can't bring up his decision to leave yet.

"It doesn't rain, it pours." Gemma says, reading something on her phone. Anne taps her hand gently and nods, smiling sadly. Gemma shakes her head and looks up, catching Zayn's gaze. "No, look at this."

Gemma hands her phone to Louis. Louis skims over the writing on the screen hurriedly. Once he's done he laughs maniacally, and angrily passes the phone back to Gemma. "Are you fucking kidding me?" He screams to no one in particular. The nurses at the end of the corridor stare at them and carry on whispering.
"Hey!" Zayn yells, staring at the nurses. The nurses look at him, slightly taken aback by the fact that he noticed their rude staring. "No offence, but don't you have jobs to do? Or do you sit on your arses gossiping all day?"

The nurses gasp in shock, but it seems to do the trick. They all push away from the reception counter and separate, heading to different rooms and going in different directions. Louis chuckles, and Zayn smiles as though he's accomplished something.

"What does it say?" Anne asks, her gaze darting between Gemma and Louis.

Louis shakes his head, his smile dropping instantly. Gemma holds her phone up, revealing a photograph of Liam, slightly covered by Niall, but his black eye is on full display. The photograph is from their trip to the taxi from their hotel earlier in the morning.

Louis explains, "The article is about Liam's black eye." He makes eye contact with Zayn, sighing in frustration. Zayn realises that it's not frustration with him, but with the situation. 'Paparazzi are claiming that we all hate each other and are turning against each other and shit. Basically they're saying that the black eye is 'cause of a major fight between us four." Louis elaborates.

Zayn fiddles with the frayed black denim of his jeans. He gulps nervously and says, "They're not that far off."

Louis doesn't reply for a long time, forcing Zayn to look up and meet his gaze. Louis' face is crumpled in distress. "What do you mean?" He asks, his voice thick with emotion.

"I mean," Zayn begins hesitantly, "well... like, don't you hate me? And we were fighting. They're not that far off."

Louis shakes his head emphatically, wiping hot tears from his face. "Fuck it," he says, slamming his fist down against the metal, "I'm angry at you, Zayn. I'm pissed as all hell with you, but I don't hate you. I could never hate you. You're my brother, Zayn. We're family."

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Louis sighs in exasperation. He fiddles with a loose screw on the metal chair he's sitting on, willing his eyes to stay open. Liam sits beside him, holding a rapidly melting icepack to his swollen eye.

They've been at the hospital for almost seven hours, anxiously awaiting Harry's awakening. Louis taps his feet against the tiling, humming the tune to Change My Mind quietly. Louis glances at the door, his gaze quickly darting to Anne. She smiles at him and Louis hesitantly rises to his feet and sneaks into Harry's room, ensuring none of the nurses are watching.

Inside the room, Harry lies on the bed, unmoving. The midmorning sun shines through the window, making Harry's usually golden skin glow, only this time it's pale and bruised and scraped. Louis takes a deep breath, slipping into the seat beside Harry's bed.

He grabs Harry's hand, reeling at how cold it feels. He watches the oxygen mask fog and clear, fog and clear, fog and clear. The green hospital gown Harry is wearing covers his shoulder and chest, hiding the bruising from view. Louis finds he's glad he can't see the mutilated shoulder or colourful chest.
Taking a deep, calming breath, Louis leans down and whispers in Harry's ear, "I don't know if you can hear me, but you know we watched that movie where the person in a coma could hear what people were saying to her? I can't remember what it's called, but you know what I'm talking about. Anyway, I hope you can hear me, Harold. I know it hurts, and I know Zayn leaving sucks, but you gotta come back. You have to wake up. Like, now. I'm fucking dying here, Hazza, and I don't know what to do."

Slowly Louis pulls away and stares at Harry, knowing he won't wake up immediately but hoping he will. He stands and hesitantly walks back to the door, wrapping his small, trembling hand around the handle. He looks back at Harry, pausing, nibbling his bottom lip.

"Come on, Hazza. Please. Please." He says softly, taking a deep breath and ripping the door open.

Once he's outside he's met by Niall who smiles at him reassuringly. Louis manages a poor attempt at a smile back.

"I'm going to get us all coffee," Niall says, "why don't you come with me?"

Louis hesitates, glancing first at Anne and Gemma then at Liam. Gemma gently takes his hand and says, "Go, Lou, it'll do you good to go for a walk."

Her woollen jersey is pulled up to her long, slim fingers, and it feels warm around Louis' cold hand. He looks into her dark eyes, saying nothing at first, only nodding. "Okay." He says, looking back up at Niall and rushing to his side.

Niall pats his back and leads the way down the corridor silently. Once they've turned the corner and walked past the reception desk where the nurses like to gossip, Niall stops and turns to Louis. There's sympathy and empathy and relatability written across his fair features. His usually bright eyes are dull and heavy, filled with what Louis can only imagine is anxiety and, in a morbid sense, dread.

Niall opens his mouth to say something, but snaps it shut quickly and purses his lips, frowning. He shakes his head and carries on walking, ensuring his pace matches Louis'.

"You good?" Niall asks as he presses the metal elevator button on the white wall. He rocks on the heels of his feet, his arms crossed over his chest.

Louis looks at him in uncertainty. He considers the question, his fingers running along the stubble that's started growing on his sharp jawline. Eventually he nods and says, "Yeah."

"No," Niall says, stepping into the elevator and stepping to the side to make room for Louis.

For the first time in a long time Louis has nothing to say. The elevator is filled with a heavy silence as Louis waits for Niall to explain his question. Niall leans against the metal wall of the elevator and clears his throat. His gaze is cast downwards.

"I mean, Louis, you and Harry are best friends." Niall says, shrugging.

"You're all my best friends," Louis replies, pulling the sleeves of his grey jacket over his hands.

"Yeah, I know, but you and Harry have this weird special bond. Like, you guys clicked straight
Louis nods, remembering the time he met Harry at the X-Factor auditions. He smiles, happily replaying the memory.

"And with Zayn leaving -"

"Stop." Louis warns, holding up a hand and shaking his head emphatically. Niall gulps anxiously. "I don't want to talk about that right now."

"Louis, you're gonna have to talk about it eventually." Niall pleads, his brow furrowed.

The elevator dings and the doors open. Niall hesitantly steps away and walks out the door. Louis pushes his way out as a group of rowdy teenagers shove into the elevator. A few of the teenagers recognise he and Niall and attempt to move closer to them, but another teenager holds them back, her small hand resting on the tallest one's shoulder. She says, "Leave them alone. They're probably here for Harry and the last thing they want is a bunch of teenagers asking for autographs."

Niall and Louis nod at her appreciatively and she smiles at them, her rosy cheeks going redder. They continue walking through the corridors, following the signs directing them to the small restaurant inside the hospital.

"Look, we're here to get coffee, not to have a therapy session. Okay?" Louis sighs, shrugging silently.

He and Niall stand in line at the counter, keeping their heads down so as to avoid recognition. A television is mounted on the white wall above the granite counter. The volume is turned down but Louis recognises the channel as one of those celebrity gossip shows. The restaurant is loud and busy, and hardly anyone pays any attention to them.

Once they reach the counter, Louis' attention fall on the story being reported on the television while Niall orders the coffees. The perky barista with nerdy glasses excitedly takes the order, grinning wildly. A photograph of Louis and the boys flashes on the television screen, and Louis strains to hear over the noise. He nudges Niall with his elbow and jabs his chin towards the television. Niall squints at the screen.

"Turn that up, will you?" Louis asks frantically, gently patting the barista's arm.

She hurriedly turns up the volume and Louis leans forward on the counter, his heart thudding. A thin lady becomes the focus of the camera and she smiles falsely as she reports, "Unfortunately, it appears things are looking a little shaky for our boys, as rumours are going around that not only is Zayn Malik leaving One Direction, but the band is, indeed, splitting up."

"What?" Niall exclaims, throwing his hands up in the air in resignation.

"Shhh." Louis snaps, frowning.

"Earlier today, in the wee hours of the morning, the remaining One Direction boys were seen hurrying out of the hotel they are reportedly staying at." The lady continues, straightening her purple blouse as she steps to the side. Beside her, footage of Louis and the others rushing out of the hotel starts playing. The lady frowns dramatically, her thick makeup threatening to crack. "Harry's mum and sister were spotted with the boys. They were all probably on their way to see Harry, who
"Who the fuck is feeding them this information?" Louis yells, slamming his hand down against the counter. The barista flinches and gasps in surprise.

"It was practically impossible to miss the new battle scar Liam Payne was donning!" She says, holding her hands up in the air and bending her knees. "It has been reported that the boys got into a scuffle and it ended badly - at least for poor Liam."

"Reported by who?" Louis shouts at the television, his face going red in anger.

"Louis, it doesn't matter!" Niall scolds, resting a hand on Louis' shoulder. Louis sighs and nods slowly, hunching his back.

"And, that's not too hard to believe considering footage of a heated argument between the boys was uploaded onto YouTube." The lady continues, her shrill voice getting louder as she becomes more excited. Beside her, poor quality footage of the fight between Louis and Zayn in the waiting room is playing. It shows Liam violently shoving them apart and yelling at them. Louis narrows his eyebrows and turns, burying his face in his hands and shaking his head.

"Lou," Niall whispers, "just calm down."

"Calm down?" Louis yells, his eyes widening in shock as he stumbles back and glares at Niall. The air is silent as other visitors watch curiously. Some phones are being held up, recording Louis' every little move.

"Lou," Niall tries again, but Louis cuts him off.

"No, Niall, this is not alright!" Louis yells, pointing at the screen angrily. "Harry is hurt and he's in hospital and all the world cares about is finding the next piece of fucking bullshit to report! No one gives a shit about Harry or his family or us. If they did then we wouldn't be watching bullshit stories like that on tv." Louis shakes his head and glares at the phones around him, videoing him, cornering him. "What about privacy? Huh? Don't we deserve privacy?"

He glares at the phones, daring the people to keep filming. They do. He takes a step forward, narrowing his eyes when a few girls take a frightened step back. "My best friend is in hospital, in a coma, in pain, and all I want to do is be able to be there for him and work through this. All Anne and Gemma and the other boys want is to be able to get through this and be with Harry. But we can't do that!" He pauses, glancing at Niall. Niall is watching him silently, tears streaming down his red face. He nods in encouragement, attempting to smile. "We can't do that because of you! Because everywhere we turn people are watching us and recording us! The media won't leave us alone and everything they see manages to somehow turn into some made-up bullshit story!"

Niall hesitantly steps forward, looking into Louis' eyes pleadingly and resting a hand on Louis' shoulder, pulling him back. Louis, his breath shaky and his entire body trembling, reluctantly takes a step back, still watching the cameras furiously.

Surprisingly, Niall says, "Listen, all we're saying is that this is a hard time for us and it's a hard time for all our families... especially Harry's. We want - we need the space and privacy to work through this between ourselves and not have to worry about what stories the public is hearing."

Niall pauses, looking back at Louis. Louis gulps, unsure of how an argument suddenly turned into
an opportunity to get a message across. He glances at the people behind the phones, taking in their concerned expressions. His gaze lands back on Niall and he smiles, nodding supportively.

In the moment of silence when Niall and Louis catch each other's gazes, the room erupts in an explosion of screaming and yelling. The teenagers and adults and children are shouting out questions, some even daring to take a step or two closer.

Louis runs forward and yells, "Hey! Shut up! You got questions; I got answers." The room falls silent again, and Louis struggles to suppress his growing anger. "Here are your fucking answers: Yes, Zayn is leaving the band. Yes, I'm angry with him, but I can't speak for the other boys. Yes, Harry is in a coma. Yes, Harry is hurt badly. No, we don't hate each other. No, the band is not breaking up. Yes, we fought."

Louis is about to grab Niall's hand and rush out of the room, but a fleeting thought keeps him rooted in spot. He gulps nervously and says, "And for those of you wondering, Zayn's choice to leave upset us, and I know I'm angry and will probably remain angry for a long, long time. That said, Zayn is still my family and I will always love him. His choice was made for reasons he is not obligated to share. Now, I hope you all got what you wanted and now we can get what we want."

The room is filled with mumbles and mutters and whispers. Louis takes a deep breath, and says, "I want you all to go home and find a dictionary. When you find that dictionary, look up the word privacy: it's a good word, you'll like it. Once you understand what it means, know that you're violating ours. Then, kindly fuck off and leave us all alone."

With that, Louis grabs Niall's hand and drags him out of the restaurant. Niall struggles in his grip, breaking free as they step inside the elevator and the metal doors close in front of them. Louis punches in the floor number.

"The coffee," Niall mutters absentmindedly, thinking out loud.

"Who gives a fuck?" Louis replies, leaning back against the elevator wall. His hands are trembling and as he raises them to his face he allows himself to slide down the wall and curl up on the floor.

"Lou?" Niall asks, taking a seat beside him.

"Zayn deciding to leave us is him deciding to abandon his family." Louis whispers, his voice shaky. "He wants to leave us, Niall. He wants to do it, he doesn't need to do it."

"We don't know that. Maybe he needs to leave the band." Niall replies, subconsciously mimicking Louis' position.

"We need him."

"We can make music without him," Niall says, his voice muffled by his hands, but Louis can still tell it's thick with emotion. Slowly, Niall looks up and says, "I know you don't mean it like that."

"Who gives a shit about the music? Who gives a shit about the fame?" Louis says, resting his head against the wall. "We need him. We do."

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Zayn sits beside Louis, who has somehow managed to fall asleep in the uncomfortable metal
chairs. Hesitantly, he turns on his phone and opens Twitter, knowing he's making a mistake but doing it anyway. He waits patiently as his profile loads, quickly glancing across at Liam and Niall, who are eating a toasted sandwich.

Zayn's phone buzzes as Twitter alerts him of tweets mentioning his name. Thousands of tweets fill his screen, and, nervously, he scans through them. Most of them are fans expressing their distress at the news of his departure. Some of the tweets are fans' supporting his decision and pleading with others to understand. The rest are fans, and non-fans, expressing their disgust with both the situation and Zayn. It's these hurtful tweets that catch his attention.

Tweet after tweet after tweet insulting him and threatening him and shaming him. He takes a deep breath and wills the stinging tears in his eyes away, burying his face in his hands. His heart is pounding and there's a lump in his throat that grows bigger with each passing second. He angrily wipes the tears from his eyes and shoves his phone back into his pocket.

Liam catches his gaze, frowning in concern. "You good?" He asks, leaning forward in his seat. The swelling around his eye has gone down considerably.

"Yeah," Zayn lies, staring down at the floor between his sneakers. He swallows, trying to gulp down the lump, but it remains, and the tears spring anew.

Suddenly, Doctor Ryan races around the corner followed by two nurses. He hardly gives the boys a second glance as he kneels down in front of Anne and Gemma. They sit up quickly, their eyes going wide in panic and anxiety.

"Harry's heart monitor shows that his heart rate is increasing rapidly," Doctor Ryan states matter-of-factly, securing his stethoscope around his neck.

"What?" Anne asks, her voice rising in fear.

"Dont worry," Doctor Ryan reassures Anne quickly, "this means he's waking up. We want to go inside, ask him a few questions, ensure his sensory system is functioning correctly, and so on. When we're done, you may visit him."

Zayn stands quickly, stepping closer. He glances back at Louis, who is still sleeping. He debates waking him up, but decides he needs the sleep. Doctor Ryan and the nurses rush inside, where they seem to remain for a very long time. Zayn can hardly hear a thing over the sound of his own beating heart and frantic breathing.

It seems like an eternity later when Doctor Ryan and the nurses emerge from the room. Zayn glances at the time on his phone, ignoring the innumerable missed calls and texts. It's late afternoon, which means they've been at the hospital for more than twelve hours, waiting for this moment.

Zayn's heart drops as he notices the forlorn expression on Doctor Ryan's face. He immediately jumps to the worst conclusion, his hands trembling as he tugs at his hair and breathes harshly. Doctor Ryan gestures for everyone to take a seat, and Zayn reluctantly returns to his position beside Louis, who is waking up groggily. Louis shoots up as his focus lands on the doctor.

"How is he?" Liam asks, leaning forward in his seat.

Doctor Ryan sighs, sitting down beside Anne in the empty seat. He runs a hand through his
thinning hair and says, "He's awake, and he knows where he is and how he got here, which means there's no brain damage. He's a little foggy on the date and day, but that's to be expected. His sensory system is functioning as well as expected: he has feeling in his feet and he can move his legs and his right arm. My only concern is, the feeling in his fingers of his left arm seems to have deteriorated. He can feel and move, but not nearly close to the extent we would like. That, unfortunately, was also to be expected as the damage to his shoulder was so severe."

Anne inhales sharply, grasping Gemma's hand tightly. Zayn shakes his head, folding in on himself. Beside him, he can see Louis tensing, his hands balling into fists. Gemma is crying, holding onto Liam and Anne like they're her lifelines. Niall is staring at Doctor Ryan emotionlessly, as though he's having trouble processing the information.

Hesitantly, Doctor Ryan continues, "He's lucid, as I've said, but he's in extreme pain and he's experiencing severe nausea and dizziness. The nausea and dizziness are side effects of the coma, and will most probably subside by tomorrow morning, but we are giving him medication to ease his discomfort for the time being."

"He's in pain?" Gemma asks, trying desperately to hold back the tears that continue to spill down her rosy cheeks.

Doctor Ryan nods.

"So give him pain killers. Morphine or something!" Niall snaps harshly, drawing the attention of everyone surrounding him as they stare at him in bewilderment. He shrugs, frowning, and turns away from them.

"We have Harry hooked up to a morphine drip, which means he can dispense 100ml of morphine whenever he feels the need. However, there is a limit of three dosages per hour, and we have to keep an eye on the effect it will have on his body because he still has a severe concussion. Unfortunately, for now, there is nothing else we can do to relieve the pain." Doctor Ryan says, his brow furrowing sympathetically.

Anne nods, slowly, then asks, "Can we seem him?"

"Not yet," Doctor Ryan replies, pursing his lips.

"Why not?" Zayn asks, almost angrily.

"The nurses are removing the chest tube," Doctor Ryan replies, absentmindedly gesturing to his own chest to illustrate his point, "after which they will change his dressings and wash him."

"Why can't we wash him? I'm his mother, for God's sake." Anne spits, raising a trembling hand to wipe the tears from her cheeks.

"Harry is still covered in disinfectant from the surgery, and the blood that's managed to seep from his wounds needs to be cleaned very carefully. The nurses will be able to wash him and assess his condition. I understand your need to look after your son, because I'm a father, but the nurses are definitely the best people for the job. You will all be allowed in as soon as he's ready, but he will be tired and groggy. With any luck, he'll fall back asleep during the wash and rebandaging, and be fresh for your visit."

"Ha," Louis spits, "fresh." His tone oozes sarcasm and bitterness.
"How are you feeling, honey?" Anne asks, standing beside the hospital bed and gently grabbing Harry's right hand. She looks a mess.

Harry, pale and weak, gulps painfully, his breath still labored despite the assistance from the nasal cannula. He tries to shift in the bed that's slightly raised so he's in a semi-sitting position, but he ends up only grimacing and staying in his current position. Louis looks away, unable to watch Harry in pain. "I'm good," he replies, his voice raspier and softer than usual.

"Stop lying." Gemma snaps, sitting in the seat beside his bed. Liam and Niall are sitting on the couch, and Zayn is standing beside them. Louis is standing by the window, the heat from the setting sun warming his back.

"I need to throw up," Harry says, his face scrunching up as he shifts again, trying to find a comfortable position.

Louis spots the bowl on the bedside table and hurriedly picks it up and holds it under Harry's chest. Harry swallows thickly, pulling his hand out of Anne's grip and grasping the sheets tightly instead. Anne and Gemma and the boys look away as Harry vomits, throwing up nothing but bile and recently drunk water. Louis soothingly runs a hand through Harry's sweaty hair, trying to ground him as dry heaves wrack his injured body.

When Harry's done, Louis pulls the bowl away and gently wipes Harry's chin. Niall rushes forward and takes the bowl to the bathroom, where he cleans it. Louis steps away from Harry to give him some space, but Harry hardly seems to notice. He's so caught up in the pain that he probably hasn't noticed their presence.

Harry's right hand fumbles for the sling around his arm and chest, and his jaw tenses as he clumsily tries to pull at it. Louis watches him in horror, unable to look away, but unable to help. Anne gently pulls Harry's hand away and whispers, her voice shaky, "What's wrong, Harry?"

Harry tenses under her touch, biting his bottom lip, almost hard enough to draw blood. His heartbeat is erratic and irregular, and there are dots of blood on his hospital gown.

"Hurts." Harry gasps, sluggishly trying to rip the sling from his arm.

Gemma glances at the morphine drip, pressing the button frantically. She looks up at Anne, her eyes wide, and says, "He's used up the maximum dosage for the hour."

"What hurts, honey?" Anne asks, frowning and gently stroking Harry's forehead.

Harry's pale face is taut with pain, and his hair is damp with sweat. He gulps, his breathing seemingly difficult, and says, "This thing... hurts my chest." His words are halted and breathless.

"The sling is pushing against his broken ribs and stuff," Louis says suddenly, stepping forward. His blood is pounding in his ears. His chest physically hurts with heartache and sympathy. "Press that button that calls the nurses."

Gemma hastily presses the button, quickly returning her attention to Harry as he presses his head back into the pillows, the veins in his neck bulging. Louis watches helplessly, unsure of what to do.
A nurse rushes in, pushing between Anne and Gemma as she checks Harry's vitals and presses buttons on the heart monitor. She looks up, her gaze drifting over Anne and Gemma, who are close to hysterics, before landing on Louis. He's surprisingly calm and certain. Her brunette hair is tied up into a messy bun and she has large bags under her blue eyes.

"Sir, can you tell me where it hurts?" She asks kindly, focusing on Harry. Harry apparently doesn't hear her, his eyes squeezed shut and his top lip lined with beads of sweat. "Sir, where does it hurt?" She repeats, glancing at Louis.

"His chest," Louis replies, stepping forward, "the sling is pushing against it and he says it hurts." Louis crosses his arms over his chest, absentmindedly fiddling with the zip on his jacket.

"Okay, I'm gonna ask you all to take a step or two back and give him some space, please." She says, rolling up the sleeves of the white shirt under her green scrubs as she kneels down beside Harry's bed. Anne and Gemma step back and Louis leans against the window again, seeking comfort in Liam's steady gaze. The nurse slowly adjusts the bed so Harry is sitting more upright. Immediately Harry stops fussing over the sling, and his tense body relaxes slightly. His eyes remain closed.

"There," the nurses exclaims happily, smiling, "that should relieve the pressure on his chest."

Harry opens his eyes, his gaze locking with his mum's. "I need to throw up." He gasps, gulping miserably.

Anne grabs the yellow bowl and holds it under Harry's chin. He vomits, once again spitting up nothing but bile, and his face pales as he goes lax and falls against the bed again. Anne rushes into the bathroom, closing the door behind her, and cleans the bowl. Harry's eyes are still squeezed shut.

"He's vomited before, and he hardly opens his eyes," Gemma says, the last word of her sentence said in a higher pitch, giving the impression of asking a question without actually asking one.

"It's only his body's reaction to the anaesthetic and the coma; everybody has a different reaction. This is normal, so I wouldn't worry if I were you. And don't forget that the pain and concussion certainly affect the body." The nurse says, gently rubbing Gemma's arm and smiling comfortingly.

She steps closer to Harry, resting a hand on his uninjured shoulder, and asks, "Sir, do you feel nauseas?"

Harry nods slowly, uncoordinatedly.

"When you open your eyes, does the light hurt you head?"

Harry nods again.

"Is the room around you spinning?"

Another nod.

"Is your vision blurry?"
Harry doesn't respond at first, seemingly considering the question. His brow furrows and he replies, his voice hoarse and shaky, "Not really."

The nurse nods, stepping back. She looks up as Anne reenters the room and says, "For the moment I wouldn't be concerned. The symptoms Mister Styles is experiencing are normal side effects of all his body has gone through. He's still groggy and sore; all he needs is a good sleep and a good meal, which he will receive tomorrow morning, and he'll be good as new."

"Good as new?" Louis snaps, unable to help himself.

The nurse looks at him apologetically before ushering out of the room awkwardly, her gaze permanently cast downwards. Louis sighs and turns, staring out the window. He watches the cars whiz past on the street below, and he follows the pedestrians with shopping bags and cellphones in their hands. He traces the clouds in the red and orange sky, silently repeating the phrase he so often heard as a child: Red sky at night, shepherd's delight; red sky in morning, shepherd's warning.

"Louis, you have to stop taking your anger out on everyone else. I'm serious." Anne says, and Louis can feel her gaze burning the back of his head.

He sighs, pursing his lips, nodding, and says, "I know." He leaves out the part that he can't help it, that he is so angry that he can't contain it. He's angry at everyone and everything: Zayn, the person who hit Harry, the media, the doctor, the universe for being so goddamn unfair.

Harry groans as he tries - and fails - to reposition himself on the bed. Louis turns, facing him. The sunlight from the setting sun is shining directly into Harry's swollen eyes. Louis closes the blinds, watching as the rays of sun slowly fade away.

"Water?" Harry mumbles, his tongue clumsily tracing his chapped lips.

Louis turns away as Gemma fetches the cup of ice chips. He's not sure how long he stares out the window, but when Anne calls his name, he looks up at the dark night sky, lost in the stars. The sun is hidden beyond the horizon, leaving darkness in its place.

"I think we should go," Anne says, "Harry's fallen asleep again."

Sitting in the taxi on the way back to the hotel, an empty McDonalds box in his lap, Zayn silently scans the most recent hate tweets directed at him. There's semi-jovial, almost forced conversation between the others as they finish off the last of their meals and milkshakes.

A specific tweet catches Zayn's attention and he hesitantly opens it. The Twitter handle is not one he recognises nor is it related to One Direction.

'@zaynmalik move back 2 the shit place you belong and get blown up. U have no purpose, u fucking paki trash.'

The harsh comment momentarily stuns Zayn and his breath catches in his throat. His clammy hands wrap around his phone and he folds in on himself so his face is between his knees. He wishes for nothing more than his mum by his side, telling him it will all be okay, even if it won't. His reaction catches the attention of the others in the taxi, and he feels a hot hand on his back. He sits up, realising the hot hand belongs to Liam. He smiles weakly, failing at convincing the others that he's okay.
"What's up, Zayn?" Liam asks, frowning. His swollen eye looks painful and bothersome, and it prevents the frown from reaching across his brow.

"Nothing." Zayn lies, shrugging. He turns and stares out the window, taking a calming breath.

"You were on Twitter," Louis says, reading Zayn's pained expression. He always has been able to see right through Zayn. Zayn nods, his face crumpling in distress. Liam pulls him closer, wrapping a protective arm around his shoulders. Zayn reluctantly lets a tear slip down his cheek. "What did you read?" Louis asks.

"Just some comments," Zayn replies between halting breaths. Liam tightens his grip.

"Let me see," Louis says, reaching a hand out. Zayn shakes his head, gripping his phone in his hands. "God dammit, Zayn! Let me fucking see what this bastard said."

Zayn hands over his phone, happily relaxing in Liam's hold. Louis scans the contents of the tweet, his face going red as he hands the phone to Niall. Niall reads it, his jaw dropping. Anne and Gemma watch the boys, unwilling to intervene in fear of disrupting the communication between them.

"Who the fuck is this person?" Louis yells, gesturing towards the phone.

"They're not allowed to say that!" Niall comments as he hands the phone to Liam, who takes it in his free hand and reads it quickly, his jaw tensing angrily.

"I have an idea."

"What?" Liam asks Louis, calmly giving the phone back to Zayn. Zayn fumbles with his pockets and slips his phone back inside.

"No, wait, Zayn. I need your phone so I can find her name on Twitter." Louis says, quickly grabbing the phone and pulling his own out. He hastily types in the name. Once he finds a match he exclaims, "Found the asshole."

"What are you gonna do, Lou?" Zayn asks, unsure of how to react.

Liam reaches across and places a hand on Louis' leg. He shakes his head and says, "Just monitor yourself, Lou. Don't do anything that gets you in trouble." Liam is back to being the patriarchal figure in the group.

"I'm just gonna send him... or her a nice little tweet. And besides, we already have one asshole suing me, what's another one gonna do?" Louis says. There's a devilish grin on his thin, haggard face. Louis types the message out on his phone quickly as he chucks Zayn's phone back to him. Zayn catches it, barely, and quickly opens Twitter and finds Louis' account. "There. Done." Louis announces.

Zayn refreshes the page as Niall and Liam pull out their own phones and log into Twitter. A tweet pops up and Zayn reads it in a mixture of amusement and horror.

'@mynameisaname why don't you crawl back into the toilet you were raised in and kindly fuck off.'
"Oh shit," Niall says, laughing so hard that his face has gone red, "management is not gonna be happy."

"Louis, you didn't need to do that..." Zayn says, scratching his head uncomfortably, unable to look up and meet Louis' gaze. "What if you get in trouble?" Guilt rests on his shoulders, simply adding to the pile.

"I don't give a shit. Anyway, only we're allowed to be mad at you," Louis says, smiling. He rolls his eyes in what could either be annoyance or resignation and glances outside the window, avoiding eye contact. "You don't deserve that, anyway. Your choice is yours to make, and that doesn't make it wrong."

Zayn smiles, his face hidden behind his curtain of hair. That's the first real sign of acceptance Louis has shown since the incident. Louis catches his grin and adds, "But don't think that means I'm not fucking furious with you. It just means that some people need to learn their place."

"Bed sounds good right now," Niall mutters as he pulls off his scarf.

The boys are standing outside Niall's bedroom door. Anne and Gemma have already retreated to their bedroom. Liam nods, yawning loudly and stretching. "Couldn't agree more," he says tiredly.

"Wait one moment," someone shouts from behind Louis. It's a voice he recognises, and one the others obviously are familiar with, too. "No one is going anywhere just yet."

Louis turns, his gaze unexpectedly landing on Simon, who is standing in the corridor, his hands on his hips and his grey hair tussled. He looks unimpressed and tired, with large bags hanging under his hazy eyes. Louis half expects him to storm into one of the rooms, ranting and raving about their terrible public behaviour and Harry's unfortunate accident. Instead, much to Louis' surprise, he sighs, his shoulders slumping, and hurries towards them. He envelops them in a tight hug, his arms barely wrapping around the four boys.

"What are you doing here?" Niall asks. His hand rests on Simon's shoulder, as though Simon is the only thing holding him up.

"We need to talk," Simon explains, shrugging. "Whose room is it gonna be, boys?"

Zayn sluggishly stumbles to his bedroom and opens his door, stepping aside so as to make room for the others to walk inside. He glances at Louis, and Louis knows exactly what he's thinking, but he refuses to acknowledge it and instead just walks inside, his head down.

Once all of the boys are inside, Simon all but collapses into one of the chairs in the room. Zayn hurries to pick clothes up off of the floor, hastily shoving them into one of the cupboards. Louis sits on the unmade bed, pulling off his own jacket as Liam sits beside him. Simon stares at them as they all sit down. He makes sure to make eye contact with all of them, but his gaze lingers the longest on Louis.

"Liam," he says, quickly shifting his gaze, "what happened to your face?"

"You haven't seen the magazines?" Liam asks, bitterness hidden behind the jovial tone.
"Cut the bullshit. What really happened?"

Liam sighs, looking at the floor as he hesitantly replies, "There was a fight. That's all."

"A fight?" Simon asks. He frowns and his focus momentarily shifts to Louis. Louis almost cowes in shame. His cheeks go red and he purses his lips.

"It was no big deal. Seriously, Simon, it's over." Liam explains, and he nods as Louis watches him apologetically.

"Louis," Simon says, quickly snapping his gaze to Louis. Louis sits up, suddenly alarmed at the urgency in Simon's voice. "How are you handling all of this?"

"Excuse me?" Louis asks, unsure of what Simon's intention is. He's aware of the others watching him.

"Well, you were there when Harry got hit, right?" Simon asks. Louis nods silently. He squeezes his eyes shut as the memory of Harry being hit replays. "So that must be hard for you, having seen it and you two being so close and all."

Louis nods, narrowing his eyes. Simon leans back in his seat and looks at all four of them. There's a hint of disappointment in his eyes. "It must be hard for all of you. And with Zayn breaking the news on the same night... it must've been terrible, right?"

The boys nod, slightly uncomfortable with the over-the-top cheerfulness in Simon's voice. Louis glances at the boys beside him, pleased to see that they look just as unsure and confused as he feels. Zayn is nervously tapping his foot against the floor, creating a steady rhythm.

"That's no goddamn excuse!" Simon yells, making Louis flinch as he's taken off guard. "You're handling this all like fucking children!"

"Look, Simon," Liam begins, instantly slipping into his fatherly position in the group, "to be fair, a lot happened at once and the media isn't helping and we are only young - mistakes happen."

Simon glares at Liam so fiercely that Liam shrinks into the bed and shuts up. Louis can practically see the anger radiating off of Simon. "Don't give me that bullshit, Liam. You're old enough to know when something is appropriate and when it isn't."

"You're right," Niall says, his shaky voice seeming so loud in the tense atmosphere that fills the room. Louis gulps, looking at Niall. Niall purposely avoids Louis' gaze.

"Damn right I'm right. And you've been surrounded by media for five years. You should be used to it by now. Which means, Louis, that you can't go around punching every photographer who pisses you off." Simon scolds, pointing an incriminating finger at Louis.

Louis holds his hands up in the air in exasperation. He growls as he says, "That guy stepped way over the fucking boundary, Simon. I'm not going to apologise for that."

"That's his job, Louis, and you damn well know it." Simon says, his voice showcasing an equal amount of exasperation with the situation. "Now we have some nobody threatening to sue us 'cause he feels like it."
"I'm not gonna apologise, Simon," Louis repeats, shaking his head and folding his arms to signify a sense of finality.

"It's not that big a deal. I mean, we can afford a little lawsuit from that guy." Niall says. Louis nods appreciatively, happy that he's being backed up. There's a mumbled agreement from Zayn and Liam.

"I don't care about the money! You know how that must have hurt your public appearance as a band?" Simon shouts, slamming his fist down on the table.

Louis suddenly feels hot as anger bubbles inside of him. He leans forward, pointing a finger at Simon. He feels the others glaring at him, silently begging him to stop what he's about to do. Emotion takes control and he acts without thinking. "You honestly think we give a shit about what the public thinks about us?" He yells, his voice piercing to even his own ears. "And besides, we're not even a band anymore, are we?" As Louis says the words, he regrets them, but he can't stop himself. He's aware of Zayn flinching at his harsh words, despite the fact that he didn't intend for them to hurt him. He spoke without thinking and he can't take that back.

"What are you saying, Louis?" Liam asks, his voice strained with both betrayal and defiance.

"Zayn is gone! We are not One Direction without Zayn!" Louis yells, gesturing towards Zayn.

Zayn shakes his head and shouts, "Don't blame a break up on me! Just cause I'm leaving doesn't mean you guys have to leave, too."

"Where's the fucking logic in that?" Louis responds, barely restraining his anger. His cheeks are flushed and his entire body feels hot. His heart is pounding against his ribcage.

"Everyone shut up! I'm here to talk, not to listen to you guys argue. I've seen enough of the clips on YouTube already." Simon says, effectively silencing the room. Louis sinks back into the bed, averting his gaze as best he can. "Speaking of which, you need to learn when to pick your fights!"

"You saw the clip from the waiting room?" Niall asks. He's looking down at his lap, tracing patterns in his palm.

"And you and Louis in the cafeteria," Simon says. Louis hangs his head as he remembers his inappropriate outburst in the restaurant at the hospital. "I would say you shouldn't have done any of that, but you know that already, don't you?"

Simon cocks an eyebrow in disapproval as the boys nod silently. "I'm going to talk and you're all going to listen, understood?"

The boys nod again.

"You all need to accept the fact that Zayn is leaving. Be angry if you feel the need to be, but don't you dare blame Zayn for a break up and don't you dare make him feel guilty. It was his choice to leave and you need to accept that, just like I would expect him to accept it if any of you decided to leave."

"Let me guess," Liam says, interrupting Simon. Simon is about to protest but Liam quickly continues, "You knew he was leaving before we did."
Simon hesitates before nodding, sighing heavily. Liam nods, huffing bitterly. Simon narrows his eyes, leaning forward and glaring at Liam. Louis looks at Zayn and finds him staring out the window, tears shining in his bloodshot eyes. "He is legally obligated to discuss his departure with management and the record label before he discusses it with any of you." Simon says. Louis rolls his eyes, unknowingly catching Simon's attention. Simon turns to him and says, "You can't blame him for that."

"All I'm saying is friends discuss shit with each other." Louis spits, purposely catching Zayn's gaze. Zayn tears his gaze away quickly.

"You're going in goddamn circles." Simon sighs, leaning back in his seat. He covers his face with his hands in annoyance. Louis shrugs and returns his gaze to the floor.

"You're right," Niall says, reluctantly patting Zayn on the shoulder in an attempt to comfort him. Zayn smiles weakly.

"I know I am. And, Louis, I saw your tweet - which you obviously didn't think about before posting. I know you're not as mad at Zayn as you're making out to be. It's just unfortunate for him you're taking everything out on him." Simon whispers gently.

The words hit Louis like a sledgehammer. At first he wants to scream at Simon and blatantly deny it, but he realises that Simon is right. He glances at Zayn, catching him staring. Louis gulps as he takes in Zayn's pained expression. There's no sign of anger or blame, but guilt and distress are clear in his eyes. Louis feels a pang in his chest as he comes to terms with just how unfair he's been. Simon is right; Louis has been taking out his anger on Zayn. The accident and the media and the lawsuit have all been too much for Louis to handle, and Zayn has been the easiest target. Louis' hands are clammy and he tucks them under his legs.

"I'm sorry, Zayn," Louis mumbles, genuinely. The apology seems to catch Zayn by surprise as he does a double take, mumbling a barely-audible response. "I'm sorry, lads."

"Don't worry about it," Liam says, squeezing Louis' arm. Louis wipes at his cheeks furiously as hot tears stream down them. He can't bring himself to look up.

"I'm sorry, too, lads," Zayn says. His voice sounds as shaky as Louis feels. "I really am."

Louis nibbles his bottom lip, daring to glance up. "Don't be." He states simply, shrugging. He catches Liam's smile out of the corner of his eye.

"Well, now that we've reached that emotional milestone, I have one more thing to discuss," Simon says, his tone far lighter and calmer, "You need to stop ignoring your phones."

The boys look at each other again, cracking small smiles. Eventually, Niall laughs and the laughter spreads like a wildfire. For the first time in a long time, Louis laughs so loudly and so sincerely that his stomach starts hurting. It feels like a huge weight has been lifted off of his shoulders as he
gladly leans against Liam. His gaze temporarily catches Zayn's, and they nod at each other and smile. There's a sense of finality and understanding in the look and Louis realises that it's all going to be alright. He's still angry at Zayn, but he can live with it for a while, and he'll get over it soon enough.

"Get to sleep, you look like zombies." Simon says between fits of laughter. Louis is aware that things seem almost normal, only Harry is missing, and that's enough to ruin the rare moment of carelessness Louis was enjoying. He stops laughing, his face dropping. The other boys seem to register the same thought as the laughter quickly dies down into a heavy silence. Simon stands, pulling a room key out of his jeans pocket. "And call your parents. I'm not even joking." He says, smiling sadly.

As he opens the door he turns and faces the boys. He hesitates, squinting in thought, before he says, "And, just by the way, just because Zayn is leaving doesn't mean One Direction is over. The world hasn't seen the last of One Direction yet, I guarantee you that."

Louis smiles in a mixture of relief and comfort. He winks at Niall as they share an excited glance. "No matter what the media says." Liam adds, nodding emphatically.

"Exactly. Oh, and, before I forget, you four are going to be interviewed tomorrow." Simon says, grinning devilishly.

Louis shakes his head. He stands up and takes a tentative step closer to Simon. The others absentmindedly follow suit. Louis can't help but think about how lucky he truly is to have made such special bonds in only half a decade, bonds he thought were unbreakable. He might be wrong. Even though Zayn is leaving maybe they're still unbreakable in other senses. "An interview," Louis repeats, "when and where?"

"And why?" Liam asks, leaning against the wall beside Louis.

"It will be at the local radio station, but tv crews have been invited to film. It's tomorrow afternoon some time; I'll confirm by tomorrow morning." Simon explains, walking towards his door. He opens the door, turns around and says, "You're going to talk about everything. I told the interviewer to push the boundaries. Forget about what you've been taught and speak honestly, okay? About Harry, and Zayn and your futures."

"Our futures..." Niall repeats, almost sadly.

"Like I said, the world hasn't seen the last of One Direction. Now go to bed, and we'll talk tomorrow."
Louis is nervous; his palms are clammy and there's a thin sheen of sweat covering most of his body. His heart is thudding painfully hard against his bony chest. He's never been anxious about an interview before - then again, this is different. Harry's not here, and though Harry hardly ever spoke, he had a calming presence. He would often be the only one who understood Louis' snide comments or inside jokes.

Louis smirks and shakes his head as he shakily buttons up his black shirt. Harry - in all his twenty-one year old glory - is the most mature in the group a lot of the time; he's easily distracted, naive and innocent, but he's mature. Whenever Louis wants to do anything stupid, Harry's usually there to stop him. The thought evokes another smirk and shake of the head as Louis ponders the fact that everything really has gone to shit since Harry's been in hospital: Louis' temper caused a lawsuit; his compulsiveness caused a Twitter explosion; his irrationality caused a series of publicity damaging videos. If Harry had been conscious, none of that would've happened.

"Two minutes, everyone," one of the assistants calls from the doorway into the dressing room.

Louis looks up and catches his reflection in the mirror. He looks haggard and unkempt. His hair is a mess; there's large, black bags under his tired eyes; his complexion is dull and waxy. Sighing, he runs a comb through his untidy hair as his gaze locks with Niall's. Niall nods in encouragement and Louis manages a small smile in return.

"Alright, lads," Liam says, standing and walking to the centre of the room. His black eye looks darker and larger under the bright lights, though no attempt has been made to cover it up, under order from Simon. "I know we've been taught a lot of shit in the past about how to answer questions... Forget that shit. Okay?"

Louis smiles and stands. He claps his hand on Niall's shoulder and they share a quick look of amusement.

"Be honest. Be yourselves." Liam says, nodding emphatically.

"We will get fuckin' grilled by management," Louis sighs, shrugging.

Liam says nothing, and for a moment a deathly silence fills the room. The tense atmosphere is interrupted by a small voice coming from the corner of the room. Zayn stands and walks closer
slowly - almost uncertainly - as he says, "Fuck 'em."

Liam looks hesitant, reluctant to agree. After a moment of consideration, he says, "Exactly."

The boys smile and Louis cautions a look at Zayn. As their gazes lock, Louis offers a thin smile. Zayn smiles back, and they share a brief but vital moment of understanding.

"Alright, boys, you're up!" The assistant repeats, his bald head shining in the light.

Louis gulps and slowly turns his attention back to the boys. He shares an uncertain look with Liam. Before Zayn announced that he was leaving and before the accident, they would have shouted some silly rhyme as they playfully shook hands and cheered together, but today... Today it just does not feel right. Harry is gone; Zayn is leaving. Louis isn't even sure they can call themselves a band anymore.

"Let's go, boys," Liam says and he lightly lays a hand on Louis' back, guiding him towards the door.

Louis follows the others in a sort of semi-stupor. His thoughts are focused on Harry: is he awake? If he is, is he wondering why the boys aren't with him? Every time Louis thinks of Harry, the same image of his bruised and swollen face contorted in agony plays on his mind. When he sleeps, the image remains; when he's awake, the image replays... He can't escape it.

It's only as he almost trips over the microphone chord that he is snapped from his stupor and he realizes he's in the studio and the radio DJ and assistants are looking at him worriedly. He admits: the lads look a mess - tired, bruised, untidy. They've received more than their fair share of worried looks in the last few days.

The DJ is a pretty women with an Afro reminiscent of the seventies. She smiles at them sympathetically and says, "Sit down, boys. It's nice to meet you all."

Louis obliges as he lets his gaze wander. There are cameramen and reporters set up around the studio, watching the boys anxiously. With little books and recorders in hand, they look ready, and it unsettles Louis. He glances over the DJ's shoulder and spots Simon chatting with one of the assistants.

A thought pops into his head and he turns to Niall and whispers, "Don't you think it's strange that management hasn't sent someone?"

Niall seems to consider the question before replying, "Simon probably has something to do with that."

Louis smiles and shakes his head in disbelief. "That man isn't as hard as he likes to think." Louis says, leaning forward in his seat so that his elbows rest on the black table where the microphones and computer screens are.

The room is large and dimly lit, with bright red walls and black furniture, giving it an almost gothic feel.

"It's nice to meet you all. My name is Jessica, and I'm going to be interviewing you all today," the DJ says, smiling reassuringly. Louis is slightly tense despite her welcoming attitude. "Before we begin, are there any questions you would like me not to ask? Mr Cowell told me that I should push boundaries, but in a time as difficult as this, I'm not sure that's appropriate."

Taken aback by her respect for privacy - a quality Louis has never seen in a reporter - he is quick to
answer, "No, ask whatever you want."

"Are you sure?" She cocks an eyebrow and purposely makes eye contact with each of them.

"We're sure." Liam says, his voice carrying a tone of finality that seems to convince Jessica.

"Okay, everyone," the production manager says over the intercom, "we're on in ten," - the room starts quietening down, and Louis locks gazes with Simon, who nods firmly - "five, four, three, two..."

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, Jessica here. It is officially nine o'clock, which means most of you are at work, and others of you might still be on your way. Either way, here's a song to get your day started." She clicks a button and Story of My Life starts playing. The microphones mute automatically and Jessica starts hurriedly arranging a pile of papers. She glances up at the boys and says, "I'm going to start off with asking about Harry. Is that okay?"

The boys nod in unison.

Louis' heart is beating frantically in his chest and he's suddenly unsure of how to sit. He fidgets as the song comes to a close, unaware of the reporters watching him intensely.

The song stops playing and, as the microphones turn back on, Jessica announces, "That was Story of My Life by the biggest boyband in the world - One Direction. Now there's a name that rings a bell for all of us. For some - or, in fact, most - of us, we know and love them for their music. For some of us, we know them for their charity work and unique persona. And for others, we know them because of what has transpired over the last few days: the sudden announcement of Zayn Malik leaving the band; a shocking hit and run that left Harry Styles severely injured and in a coma; a lawsuit; rumors of a break up, and more!"

Louis has to suppress the urge to argue with her as she lists the events of the past few days. She's right; he knows that, but hearing someone else say it makes it seem surreal and offensive. He bites his tongue, though, as Simon shoots him a firm glare.

"I'm sure most teenage girls and boys, and young men and women around the world are wondering what the hell is happening. Am I right?" Jessica says, a hint of amusement evident in her soothing voice. "Well, just your luck, because we managed to get the remaining members of One Direction here for an interview."

Louis curls his small hands into fists at the implication 'remaining members' has. This time he's stopped by Zayn, who shakes his head pleadingly: don't cause any more trouble.

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"Now, I would love to say that this is going to be a reveal-all kind of interview, but - on the basis of basic respect and dignity - I'm going to respect the boundaries of a situation such as this. I will ask what seems appropriate and the boys will answer as they wish, when they wish." Jessica winks at Louis, clearly sensing his uncertainty and anxiety.

He smiles in response and says, "Thank you, Jessica. That's all we ask for, actually: respect and privacy." It's an innocent enough remark, but it carries a snide and snappy comment on the behavior of the paparazzi in the last few days. He hopes that gets the message across.

"And it's what you deserve," Jessica agrees as she glances down at the stack of papers on the desk in front of her. She runs a long, thin finger down the page until she finds what she's looking for. She looks up, takes a deep breath, and says, "Good morning, boys. It's so good to have you all on the show; I'm a huge fan!"
"Thank you for having us," the boys chorus, their voices flat and dull.

Louis glances over his shoulder as he hears the hushed whispers and scribbles of pens coming from the reporters. The flashing photographs are slightly off-putting.

"So, boys, Harry is in hospital. We all know what's happened to him; we saw the video, so I'm not going to ask you much about that. But I have to know: Louis, you were there," she pauses, waiting for Louis to confirm.

"Yeah," he replies halfheartedly. He runs a hand through his oily hair and gulps as the memory comes flooding back.

"What went through your head as he was hit?" Jessica leans forward on her elbows and her brows furrows in a mixture of what Louis assumes is interest and concern.

He sighs, contemplating his answer. He can't look her in the eye, opting, instead, to fiddle with the microphone stand in front of him. He pulls on the stand nailed to the desk. "Nothing," he answers, honestly, "I just remember being scared. I saw him vomit blood and I just remember thinking that the ambulance was taking forever; it didn't, but it just felt like it did. I wasn't thinking much else. It was too..." He wanders off, uncertain of the word he's looking for.

"Surreal?" Liam suggests.

Louis locks gazes with him and nods appreciatively. "Surreal." He confirms, with a serious frown.

"I'm sure. Now, I don't want to ask any more questions concerning the incident itself, as it seems to be too fresh." It's only as Jessica says this that Louis realizes that there are tears stinging in his eyes. He wipes them away furiously, upset that he allowed himself to cry in front of the cameras. "I wanted to ask you about his condition. The media has been receiving updates on his condition, and we've seen a few photos. He looks in pretty bad shape. Can you tell us exactly what his injuries are? From the horse's mouth, you know?"

"He has a fractured cheekbone, a broken nose (that they had to reposition), his entire shoulder is totally shattered - " Liam begins immediately, saying it as if rehearsed. Louis shakes his head miserably; they've said these words so many times to so many people recently that it almost is rehearsed.

"His collar bone, shoulder blade and joint are all shattered and there's, like, little fragments of bone stuck in his muscles now." Niall interrupts, using hand gestures to emphasize his point. There's a chorus of shocked gasps from the reporters.

"Oh, wow," Jessica mumbles, seemingly at a loss for words.

"Yeah, and he's got broken ribs and his lung was punctured twice, 'cause the ribs, like... stabbed it, so his lung collapsed." Liam says, eyes wide. Louis isn't quite sure whether it's just a general emphatic animation, or whether Liam is trying to hold back tears.

"He's in bad shape..." Louis mumbles, though it's more to himself.

"And he had a tear in his intestine which was bleeding internally, so he needed surgery for that." Zayn says, his voice strained and thick with emotion.

"It's a wonder he's still alive!" Jessica exclaims, regret written on her face immediately after the words spill from her mouth. Louis looks at her, not angry, but shocked as the realization of how close they came to losing Harry finally sets in. She covers her mouth with her hand and shakes her
head apologetically.

"We almost lost him - more than once," Liam sighs.

"I'm so sorry; that's terrible. I don't even know what to say." Jessica says, gulping. "And he's such a young man... I mean - wow."

"Yeah, he's too good of a guy for this to have happened to him." Zayn says, and Louis risks a glance at him. Zayn's eyes are wet with welling tears.

"I agree. And he's quite sporty isn't he? He gym's and runs and plays tennis, among other things, doesn't he? I'm guessing he won't be doing any of that any time soon." Jessica says. Louis takes note of the fact that the interview is flowing easily, like a conversation, and he attributes that to Jessica's genuine interest and concern.

"Yeah, he loved being busy." Louis says, smiling at the thought. He chuckles and exclaims, "I mean, if it weren't for him dragging me out to hike and sh - stuff... I would be a fu - a fatty!" Louis snaps his mouth shut, trying in vain not to swear every second word.

"He was quite active," Liam agrees, "but the doctor says it's going to take months before his ribs and stomach and lungs are healed. And then it's going to take even longer - maybe a year - for him to regain use of his shoulder, and even then, he might not regain full use of it."

There's a sudden silence in the room as the seriousness of the situation finally sinks in. The flashing of cameras comes to an abrupt stop for a moment and it seems as though everyone in the room has paused for a minute of silence and respect. The camera flashes start again, however, just as quickly as the stopped, and Louis sighs in frustration. He shakes his head, forcing himself not to say anything.

"Oh, my god," Jessica mumbles, her eyes suddenly shining in the dim lighting.

"I want to ask a question." Louis exclaims suddenly, unable to suppress the urge any longer. Jessica seems slightly taken aback, but she recovers quickly and nods. "Sure," she says, gesturing towards his microphone.

"Where is the media getting its information? How the fuck do they know about Harry's condition?" Louis snaps. It's only as Simon glares at him disapprovingly that he realizes that he's sworn on air. "And sorry for swearing." He adds, quickly.

"I'm actually not sure," Jessica admits, "I assumed it was one of the doctors at the hospital."

"Whoever the fuck it is, I'm asking them one thing: regain some dignity and respect Harry's privacy, okay? He's only twenty-one and he's in so much pain and he's confused and he's upset, and he deserves for his privacy to be respected. I swear to God, if any other private information is released to the media, I will find out who the fuck you are and I will sue you for everything you're worth. And that's if I don't off you first. Understood?"

There's another second of shocked silence as Jessica contemplates what to say next. Her eyes are wide in shock, and the boys are all staring at Louis with a mixture of amusement and concern; he's going to get into so much trouble with Simon and management for being so aggressive.

"Oh," he adds, "and sorry for swearing."

There's yet another moment of shocked silence before the boys all pack up laughing in unison.
Jessica hesitates, but she's soon smiling, too. The reporters, however, look angry and nervous as they scribble stuff down in their notebooks and mumble things into the recorders.

"Well said, Louis," Jessica says, smiling. She's being polite, but Louis can sense her uncertainty. "Now, there's something I've been dying to know, and I'm sure our listeners have too: what happened to the person who hit Harry?"

"You mean the driver?" Liam asks. As he asks the question he's watching Simon, frowning as he deciphers the sign language Simon is using.

"Yeah, the driver," Jessica confirms.

"He, uh..." Liam says, struggling to work out what Simon is trying to tell him.

Louis watches Simon intensely until he gets the gist of the message. There's awkward silence as Louis figures it out, broken by his exclamation of understanding. "We have footage," he begins, his uncertainty fading as Simon nods encouragingly, "and so we have his license plate. Whoever the asshole is, we will find him." Simon's approval falters slightly at Louis' poor choice of wording, but he smiles eventually. Louis nods in acknowledgement.

"Oh, good, I'm glad. You don't suppose he's listening right now?" Jessica has a cheeky tone punctuating her every word.

"If he is," Louis answers, and he tries to ignore Liam's sigh of resignation, though it is hurtful, "I want him to know that he's a fucking twat and that he's going to wish he had stopped and done the right fucking thing rather than just driven away."

Jessica's eyes widen and she glances around the room frantically, as though trying to apologize for his behavior.

"Sorry for the swearing?" Niall says into his microphone, and he turns to wink at Louis. The boys chuckle in amusement and Louis playfully punches Niall on the shoulder.

"Ah..." Jessica mumbles, fumbling with the papers on the desk. Louis finds it rather amusing that he's managed to throw her off track so greatly. "Alright, listeners. I'm sure you're all enjoying the, uh, interview," she says, gulping loudly, "but it's time for a break. We will return in just a moment to discuss more about Harry's accident and Zayn's sudden departure. Please stay tuned for the adverts. For now, this is Night Changes by One Direction."

There's an awkward moment of silence as she fiddles with the buttons and the microphones mute. Louis scratches his chin and tugs on his untidy stubble thoughtfully as he watches Simon approach, an angry expression etched onto his wrinkled face. He's snapped from his thoughts by Jessica, who's quietly chastising him: "Louis, I appreciate that you're upset, but you have to stop using that awful language!"

He turns to face her, face hot, and snaps back, "I thought you said we should be honest? Be ourselves? Well, my-fucking-self swears." He regrets his harsh tone instantly, but stubbornly tries to hide it as Liam shoots him a shocked glare.

"I know that it comes naturally to you to swear, but all I'm asking is that - " Jessica begins, but she's interrupted by Simon.

"Louis, one more swear word and you are out! Speak out of turn and you will leave this studio, got it?" Simon says firmly, his blue eyes sharp and angry.
Louis feels like a scolded child, everyone's eyes on him as he can do nothing but turn red and mutter under his breath. The cameras are flashing wildly, and he shakes his head as he realizes just how fickle the media are.

"Okay," he sighs.

"The studio producer has already threatened to have you kicked out. Enough." Simon adds, turning away as he shakes his head disapprovingly.

"I get it." Louis mumbles. He looks up and his gaze catches Zayn's. "What?" He snaps, too loudly. Zayn flinches and recoils as though he's touched hot coal, and Louis instantly regrets it. "Sorry," he whispers, unable to keep eye contact.

"Whatever, Louis." Zayn hisses dismissively.

"And, we're on in three... Two..." Jessica says, and she holds up a finger as the microphones turn back on and the room goes silent again.

Louis shifts in his seat and glances at the clock; he should be able to get out of the studio and be at Harry's side in hospital in two hours

"And we're back!" Jessica exclaims into the microphone. She's smiling again, as though nothing has happened. "So, boys," she says, "we've spoken about what happened to Harry, and I think I speak for everyone when I say that what happened was - and still is - terrible, and Harry didn't - and still doesn't - deserve it. But, now I want to focus on you four. How are you all handling it? Niall, let's start with you."

Louis smiles; she's finally figured out how to gain some sort of control in this interview.

Niall's eyes widen as he straightens and looks at the other three in surprise. "I, uh," he mumbles, stumbling over his words, "I - we are all very worried." There's a moment's hesitation as Jessica and the reporters wait in anticipation for him to continue, but that's all he offers.

"I can only imagine," Jessica sympathizes, nodding, "but how do you feel?"

"I'm..." Niall pauses and looks to the boys for support. It's Zayn who provides the comfort, nodding in encouragement. "I'm tired," Niall says, slowly tearing his gaze away. "I worry about Harry all day - and... And I worry about us. I'm so tired, but when I go to bed I just can't sleep; I sit up and think about Harry: alone and in pain. I mean, I wish you could've - " his sentence is abruptly cut short as his voice breaks with emotion. His eyes are wet but he's not allowing the tears to fall.

"Could've?" Jessica asks, pushing him to continue, but he doesn't.

Louis knows what Niall wants to say, though, so he continues instead, "Could've seen him at the hospital." He glances at Niall for confirmation, which comes in the form of a slow nod.

"What do you mean?" Jessica asks, turning to Louis as she abandons her ordered process.

"He was just in so much pain," Liam says, gulping loudly. Louis nods, biting his bottom lip anxiously. "And he was so pale."

"And is he lucid, now that he's awake?" Jessica asks, leaning forward.

"He's, uh, he's awake and he's lucid," Zayn answers slowly, choosing his words carefully, "but he's
struggling to focus on anything past the pain."

"Oh, really?" Jessica asks, shocked.

"Yeah, but, I mean, don't forget that he's had so many surgeries already and he's got fu - " Louis says, pausing just as he's about to swear, gaze locking with Simon's, " - so many broken bones and internal injuries. He's in a lot of pain. He was in a coma; he's got a severe concussion; he's on a lot of medication. He's nauseas and uncomfortable, but he knows who he is, where he is, who we are... You know."

Jessica nods slowly. She hesitates momentarily before she seemingly throws caution to the wind and asks, "This must be hard on you guys, too. You look bloody tired: bags, five o'clock shadows... The lot. Liam, you got quite a shiner there, which I won't ask about because whatever happened is your business... How are you all? I know it sounds like a stupid question, but, how are you - really?"

"Not good." Zayn answers, his voice thick with emotion.

"Not good? What do you mean?" She pushes, eyebrows lifting in interest.

"Just... Not good." Louis snaps, indicating for her to move on with his harsh tone.

Jessica turns to the side as the production manager signals for her to move on by pointing at his watch; they're running out of time. "Zayn, how do you feel?" Jessica asks, discreetly flipping through the notes in front of her. "You're leaving One Direction; Harry's in hospital... What are you feeling?"

Zayn pauses, glancing at Louis for a second, as though he's unsure of whether he should answer or not. Louis watches him, concerned and uncertain. "I feel..." Zayn responds, now purposely avoiding Louis' gaze, "responsible."

"Why?" Jessica asks, frowning.

Louis flinches and shakes his head in disbelief. He gulps and echoes, "Why?" He's unsure of why he reacts like he does, fully aware that he's blamed Zayn the entire time for what's happened to Harry, but he's always rationalized that his blame was misplaced because he was just angry at Zayn. Zayn isn't actually to blame.

"If I wasn't leaving One Direction - or if I had broken the news differently - " he pauses and makes eye contact with each of the boys, apologizing silently. Louis nods in acknowledgement, but isn't sure he accepts it. "Maybe Harry would be with us right now, sitting here, laughing. You know?"

"I know what - " Jessica agrees, but this time she's interrupted by Liam.

"You can't do that to yourself, Zayn. Things happened how they happened and asking yourself 'what if' is just going to destroy you." Liam argues, shaking his head emphatically.

There's a sort of hushed silence in the room as the reporters momentarily stop writing and recording, respecting the moment of sincerity and bonding.

"You cannot blame yourself, Zayn. You're as much to blame as any of us." Niall adds, smiling kindly.

"You aren't to blame. None of you lads are," Zayn says, frowning and shaking his head in a desperate attempt to stop the flow of tears.
"Exactly." Niall says, and Zayn smiles coyly.

"Shit," Louis blurs out in an attempt to lighten the heavy atmosphere, "what is this? A therapy session?"

There's a moment of hesitancy before the boys snort loudly and giggle at Louis' remark. Jessica tenses again as Louis swears, but he decides he doesn't care and he smiles proudly as he glances around the room and finds even Simon smiling at the lighthearted comment.

He sighs heavily, his happiness fading rapidly, as Jessica swiftly moves on: "Anyway, let's move on to your departure. What convinced you to leave the most successful boyband on the planet?"

Louis gulps and clears his throat angrily. He's offended by her phrasing: Zayn is leaving more than just a successful boyband; he's leaving his brothers, and that's more important than any level of success or wealth.

"I don't care about the fame or money," Zayn says, as though reading Louis' mind, "I care about the lads." He turns and looks at Louis as though he specifically intends this message for him. "I'm gonna miss them, seeing them everyday. I really am."

"Then why are you leaving?" Louis snaps, once again unable to bite his tongue. He's angry again, and he knows they've gone over this countless times before, but he's finally ready to listen. He's sweating in his button-up shirt - anxious and angry.

"We've spoken about this, Lou," Liam interjects, clearly trying to keep the peace. Louis glances at him, his gaze catching Jessica's concerned expression. He feels like it would be the right thing to do to tell her that nothing out of control is going to happen, but, he also doesn't want to lie when he's not sure. If this conversation goes the way it's gone every other time, someone will either get hurt or something will get broken. He decides to ignore her and turns to face Liam again, taking a grounding breath.

"I'm also interested, Liam," Niall says, defending Louis.

Zayn sighs, his gaze darting between the boys frantically as he reluctantly answers, "I need a break from the fame." It's a simple answer, and it's all he offers. Though it's only a few blunt words, Louis understands for the first time since Zayn broke the news - actually, truly understands, and sympathizes. Zayn's never been happy with living in the limelight, having his photo constantly taken, having his every move watched and judged. He's not happy, and he's sacrificed his happiness for the band for long enough.

The room erupts in a loud din as the reporters flash away viciously and yell out questions regarding Zayn's opinion on the fans and what his words mean regarding the fans and how will the fans feel. Louis sighs in resignation, shaking his head and burying it in his hands.

A harsh gesture from the production manager silences everyone abruptly, and Jessica seizes the moment to ask, "You need a break from the fame. We get it, but what about the fans? How do you think this makes them feel? Are you going to ignore them now and ignore all they've done for you?" Her words are harsh but her tone is kind, and Louis is perplexed at how to interpret her questions.

Louis turns to Zayn, interested in the answer as much as everyone else in the room. "I love my fans," Zayn begins, "and I really appreciate everything they've done for us as a band and as musicians. Without them, I wouldn't have been able to, like, share music with the world. I will always be grateful for the experiences I've had because of what they've done for us. I will always
have time for the fans, and I will always love them. But," he pauses, emphasizing his point, "I want time to be able to sit at home with my mum for more than just, like, two days at a time. It's mental that I've spent more time on a bus than with my mom in the past five years. I want time to be with my family, and not to be followed around with cameras all the time."

Liam leans in closer to his microphone and adds, "We all love our fans. I know it seems like everything is falling apart..." Liam trails off, looking to one of the boys for support.

"But you haven't seen the last of One Direction," Niall says, completing Liam's thought. The boys all share a knowing look, remembering the night they were voted off X-Factor and Zayn said those exact words.

"Never will," Louis jokes, but he hopes it's true. He prays it's true.

"Even without Zayn, is there still a One Direction?" Jessica asks, nibbling her bottom lip in concentration.

"It will never be the same One Direction. Ever. But there will always be a few lads from England and Ireland who want to make music that they want to share with the world." Liam answers honestly.

"Jesus," Louis sighs dramatically, "was that rehearsed, Payne?" His comment garners a round of amused laughter from around the room, even from Jessica. "Brought a tear to my eye, you poet, you."

Jessica laughs into the microphone as Liam playfully punches Louis. The laughter slowly dies down as everyone focuses their attention back on the interview. "How did you boys react when you found out?" She asks, nodding as the manager gestures that she has five more minutes.

"We, uh," Liam stutters, searching for the right words to say. He glances at Simon and the boys, looking for any sort of assistance.

"We were upset," Niall says, rescuing Liam. Liam, sighing in relief, leans back in the tall, black chair and nods. His dark blue shirt is drenched with nervous sweat under his armpits. "We... Well, I think we always had a feeling that Zayn wasn't quite... Uh, enjoying it as much as we were anymore. Like, we have the most amazing fans in the world and we get to share our music with everyone, but Zayn has always been... Private." His thick Irish accent punctuates each word, and Louis can't help but smile; though the words are quite heavy, Niall still manages to keep the atmosphere somewhat light.

"Yeah," Liam adds quickly, finding his groove once again, "we were sad. I mean, regardless of the band, we're losing a brother. These lads are my family and Zayn leaving is like losing a brother on the road, you know?"

"I understand entirely," Jessica admits, throwing a quick glance to her lighting and sound team behind the glass. They nod back appreciatively. Smiling, she continues, "Did you all understand why he's leaving?"

Louis suppresses the urge to make a sarcastic comment, knowing full well that she's laying bait for another potential argument. In the moment of thoughtful silence, he takes the opportunity to cut off her attempt: "No, we didn't understand. To be honest, I'm still struggling to understand. There's stuff we gotta work through, stuff the lads and me have to handle. We're all angry and we're upset, but - at the end of the day - Zayn is our family, and there's no fuckin' way we're ever gonna let him piss off out of our lives completely. And that's fuckin' that."
There's a second of shocked silence as Jessica glares at Louis. He knows why: he swore, badly, but the interview is almost over so he doesn't give a shit how much trouble he gets into. He shrugs and slouches in the uncomfortable chair.

"It's stuff we are working through, and stuff we will solve as a group - with Harry." Zayn adds, his voice holding a sense of finality.

"Okay," Jessica says shakily, uncertain of how to move on from Louis' comment, "well, that's all the time we have for today. Thank you so much for coming through boys; it's been a pleasure having you." She says that with a hint of sarcasm in her voice. Louis smirks, catching Niall's gaze. They share an amused look. "Now, to end off this exclusive interview, here's One Direction's What Makes You Beautiful."

As the room erupts in an explosion of screams and shouts and flashes, Louis takes a deep breath, happy he's managed to get some stuff off of his chest. Even as he watches Simon and the production manager and Jessica approach him with stern expressions on their faces - knowing full well that he's about to get lectured and chastised for his behavior - he feels calmer; he feels more at peace with the events of the last few days.

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Niall sits in Harry's room, alone with him for a few minutes as Louis goes to fetch a few snacks for the boys and Zayn accompanies Liam to a checkup with the doctor; apparently all the bright camera flashes, loud interviews, fighting and stress aren't good for a mild concussion.

Harry is awake, lucid and able to carry a semblance of a conversation for the first time in almost a week. He's still pale and he can hardly move without almost passing out from the pain - which the doctor says is to be expected as he's had more broken bones and more surgeries and more complications in the space of a few short days than most people will experience in their lifetimes - but he's more aware of his surroundings, which puts Niall at ease; it was scary seeing Harry so confused and groggy, when he's usually so excitable and happy.

"Did Lou get into trouble?" Harry asks, smiling as Niall tells him about the interview that they had that morning.

"So much trouble!" Niall replies, laughing as he remembers the sight of Louis rolling his eyes exaggeratedly as Simon yelled at him angrily and the production manager ranted about his disappointment in their performance and Jessica firmly - but calmly - told him off.

Harry laughs, his swollen and bruised face scrunching up. But his laugh is short-lived as he abruptly stops and attempts to suppress an agonized groan. He curls in on himself as much as his battered body will allow. With his arm and shoulder still immobilized, his stomach still bruised and sensitive and riddled with countless surgical incisions that have barely healed, his chest a mess of bruises and broken bones, his movement is extremely limited.

After a moment of pause as Harry gathers his wits about him and straightens out, he says, "Only Lou, eh?"

Niall laughs but it's slightly forced. Harry's breathless and his raspy voice is strained with pain and fatigue. Though the swelling on his face is starting to go down and he has a nasal cannula in
instead of an oxygen mask, he's still barely recognizable. The bruising is even darker and more spread, which means it's healing, but it still looks horrible. Niall feels tears well in his eyes and he tries to will them away as he leans forward on the plastic chair and gently taps Harry on the arm.

Harry frowns, his hazy eyes riddled with concern. "What's wrong, Nialler?" He asks, grabbing Niall's hand tightly. He's sitting up in the bed so that the pressure of his weight is taken off of his chest, making it easier to breathe. Ideally, the doctor wants him to be able to sit in the recliner they've brought in, but Doctor Ryan says that Harry's wounds are still too fresh and too severe for him even to try to get out of bed.

"It's just scary, that's all," Niall replies, furiously wiping the tears from his eyes.

Harry gulps and asks, "What's scary?"

Niall sucks in a deep breath and shakily tries to calm himself down so he can answer Harry. His heart is pounding and his back aches; the past few days have been long and stressful, and he's been trying to keep it together, but it's hard. He feels like he'll fall apart if one more bad thing happens. "It's just that.. I don't know. It's scary that we almost lost you. You died, you know - on the table. And look at you..." He trails off, getting tearful.

"I look that bad?" Harry asks, joking though his voice is shaky with emotion.

"You're just so hurt, Harry, in so much pain. It's just not right. And Zayn is leaving... It's just scary."

"I know, Niall; everything is changing. It's scary. But I'll be okay. I will be, alright? And Zayn will always be there, even if it's on the sidelines."

Niall nods, knowing that Harry is right, but he finds it hard to believe. Harry will never be the same again; he'll always carry the emotional and physical scars of the incident. One Direction will never be the same again; they are what they are because of the five of them, together.

"You're right," Niall admits, struggling to hold conviction in his voice, "how are you feeling, Harry? And don't give me any of that 'I'm fine' shit. How are you?" He glances at the heart monitor above Harry, wishing he knew what it meant. He knows enough to know that Harry's blood pressure is extremely high.

Harry pauses for a moment. His eyes are clouded from the medication - painkillers, antibiotics - and pain. He finally says, "I'm, uh - I'm sore, Niall. But I'm okay. I am."

"What about what the doctor told you?" Niall asks, searching Harry's face for some sort of sign as to how he's really feeling.

"About what?"

"Everything."

"Well, it's kind of scary to think that I've got so many things kind of wrong. You know? I don't like to think about it, though." Harry's voice cracks for a second, but he quickly regains his composure and attempts to smile. It looks out of place on his broken face.

"And about your shoulder? The physical therapy and stuff?" Niall gulps and nibbles his bottom lip.

"It's... I don't know. Can we not talk about it, please?" Harry asks, his voice turning thick with emotion.
Niall's suddenly consumed by guilt, and as he tries to apologize for pushing the topic, the door opens and Louis charges in carrying a shopping bag filled with crisps, chocolates and juices. His gaze darts from Harry to Niall and back, frowning. It's only then that Niall realizes he's crying, and he quickly wipes his cheeks dry.

"What's going on in here?" Louis asks, dumping the bag on the table at the foot of Harry's bed.

"Nothing, just chatting," Niall says, shrugging. He stands and stretches, suddenly aware of how tired he is. Judging by the bright red rays of sun streaking in through the blinds, the sun is setting.

Louis nods, uncertain, and says, "Listen, Niall: Liam and Zayn are going back to the hotel; Liam isn't feeling too good and Zayn's a little on edge so they're going back. Go back with them; get some rest, and I'll meet you guys there. You look tired."

Niall smiles and nods; he's exhausted. He knows he looks a mess, but he doesn't care since they all look it, anyway. He hesitates, feeling the need to stay with Harry, but one look at the look Harry and Louis are sharing tells Niall that they need time alone. Harry looks as though he's about to burst into tears, and Louis looks just about the same. Niall knows he should be offended that they want him to leave and that Harry waited until Louis was here before he started crying, but he knows that Harry and Louis are closer than just best friends; they are brothers and they have a much closer bond than any of the others. It's for no reason other than the fact that they get along so well; they can understand and read each other, and communicate with such ease that it's almost off-putting. They simply need to share a look to tell each other something.

"Okay, I'm gonna go," he announces, giving Harry's muscular arm a quick squeeze. "I'll see you tomorrow, Harry?"

"You bet ya," Harry replies, smiling, but his smile falters as the first tear roles down his cheek. The sight breaks Niall's heart, and he initially hesitates before he runs out of the room before Harry sees him sob. He runs straight into Liam and Zayn -looking for him - who both envelope him in a warm embrace without question. He collapses into their touch and finally allows himself to break down. He's vaguely aware of the stares and glances from the nurses and other patients, but he just does not care. None of them does.

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Louis watches Niall leave, watches the door close before he turns to Harry, with tears in his bright blue eyes, and says, "Alright, lad?" It's stupid, but it's all he can say under the circumstances.

Harry hesitates, his already uneven breath catching, before he shakes his head and his bruised face crumples.

Louis rushes forward and wraps an arm around Harry's heavily bandaged chest and shoulders, careful not to press or tug too hard. Harry collapses into his touch and his body trembles with the force of his sobs. His sobs, though desperate and genuine, are shallow and breathless as Harry fights against the pain they cause.

"What's wrong, Haz?" Louis asks, frowning in concern. Though tears are welling in his own tired eyes, he's unsure of what set Harry off; since he's woken up from the coma, he's been strong and positive despite his situation. Louis expected no less.

Harry shakes his head and pulls away from Louis gingerly, failing at suppressing a groan. Louis
gulps and takes a seat in the leather recliner beside the hospital bed, fiddling with the white sheets nervously. He remembers, only hours ago when he bumped into Harry's mum in the corridor, Anne saying that she's worried about how Harry's handling the situation; she thinks he's too nonchalant about it all, that he's going to have to break down eventually. Louis dismissed it, telling her that she had nothing to worry about as he hailed a taxi for her and sent her back to the hotel to get some well-deserved rest.

"Hazza," Louis repeats, more sternly this time.

Harry's eyes - the swollen one still barely open a slit - travel towards him, landing on his own. He awkwardly scratches his chin, fiddling with a scabbing scrape. His eyes are watery and bloodshot, his mouth fixed in a grimace.

"What, Harry?" Louis presses, getting frustrated - not at Harry, but at seeing his best friend like this: helpless.

"I just," Harry begins, pausing to shake his head and gently rub the tears from his cheeks, careful of the broken bones, "I'm not okay, Lou. I got hit by a car and now I'm here." He gestures around the room with a small flip of his hand. "And it hurts, Lou, so bad. I know that I have the morphine but it doesn't take the pain away completely. It hurts..." Harry wanders off, his voice wavering dangerously as he's on the verge of tears. Louis bites his bottom lip, forcing himself not to cry. He gently places a hand on Harry's thigh, grounding him. Harry gulps and lets his head fall back against the pillows. "I can't sleep anymore 'cause it hurts too much, and when I do, I just..."

"Just what, Harry?" Louis asks, his own voice thick with emotion.

"I just... I have these weird dreams about Zayn." He pauses, shaking his head. "He's leaving us and I should've been there for him - for all of you - but I was selfish and I... I..." Harry stops, his voice shaky and his lips quivering. "I'm here because I acted like a child. I'm so angry with myself!"

Louis shakes his head emphatically, standing and stepping closer to Harry. Harry looks away, tears staining his cheeks. Louis grabs his chin, tugging it so Harry is forced to look at him. "Do not blame yourself, Harry. We were all angry; I still fuckin' am. You reacted better than I've fuckin' reacted lately." Louis says firmly, his brows furrowing in concentration.

"I know, it's just," Harry says, his free hand wrapping around his chest as though he's trying to hold himself together as he breathes heavily, "I should've reacted better.

"Maybe," Louis says, "but you didn't, so stop playing the 'what if' game. Yeah?"

Harry nods, but his eyes are still wet with unshed tears and his lips are still quivering. He gulps, his Adam's apple bopping. Louis watches him, traces his facial expression - his features screwed up in a mixture of pain and heartbreak.

"What's wrong? Hazza, you need to talk to me." Louis says, only vaguely aware that his voice sounds as unsteady and uncertain as he feels.

"Doctor Ryan came to see me this morning." Harry says, finally gathering the courage to look Louis in the eyes.

"Your mum told us; he told you about... Everything?" Louis questions, gesturing towards Harry's chest and stomach, still covered in bandages and hidden from view by a green hospital gown.

"Yeah," Harry says, nodding. His brow furrow and his mouth curves as his lips quiver. His entire face crumples and he looks like a little boy with the rays of the setting sun streaming in through the
blinds illuminating his face, silhouetting him.

"What exactly did he tell you?" Louis asks, unsure of what he should or shouldn't say. He knows this, though: if Doctor Ryan hasn't told him something, there must be good reason. He's built up a sense of faith and confidence in the fit doctor, despite their rocky start.

Harry considers the question, looking at the ceiling as he thinks. He nods as if approving his response: "My cheek, my nose, concussion," Harry pauses, cocking an eyebrow, "my ribs, my lung - twice?" He asks, looking for confirmation from Louis. Louis nods, remembering when he sat in the room, watching Harry suffocate as a second hole tore his lung. He tries to hide it - the sadness and horror - but he's sure it's evident on his face. Harry's eyebrows shoot up as if he can't believe it himself, and he continues, "My stomach... I've had a few surgeries."

"And you're gonna need more," Louis blurts out, but he says it more to himself than he does to Harry, shaking his head.

Harry nods, a saddened grin tugging at the corners of his lips. "And my shoulder's a mess; he showed me the x-rays."

"Yeah," Louis says, taking a deep breath to calm himself down as he returns to his position on the recliner.

"I'm scared, Lou," Harry says, starting to cry again.

"Why?" Louis asks. Though he knows the answer, he feels it's important for Harry to get everything off his chest.

"I might never get to use my shoulder properly again." Harry exclaims, gasping for air as he suppresses a sob. He winces, tugging at Louis' heartstrings.

"But you might get to, Harry," Louis says quickly, leaning forward in his seat, "don't forget that."

"Yeah," Harry says, looking more and more inconsolable as time passes, "but Doctor Ryan was telling me about all the surgeries I'm gonna need for my shoulder, and that I might need more for my lungs and stomach depending on how they heal."

"I know; it's scary. But you will get through them, Harry." Louis offers weakly, unsure of what more to say.

"What if I never get to sing again, Lou? What if I never get to run or gym again? What if I can't drive or... Or..."

Louis nods, knowing it's his time to step in as Harry abruptly stops talking and covers his face with his hand. Tiny scrapes mar his knuckles. "I know," Louis says, getting up and standing beside Harry's bed, placing a hand on Harry's, "it's scary. No one wants surgery, but you need to know that you're not alone Harry. Your mum and Gemma are here for you always; me and the boys are right at your side - I'm always here, Harry. We take it one step at a time. Alright? As it comes, yeah? And stop thinking like that, Harry! You will be able to sing and run and gym and drive, but till's just take time. Yeah?"

Harry sobs, trying to gather his thoughts and gain some control. He furiously wipes the tears from his eyes, flinching as he presses too hard, and says, "Yeah."

"Baby steps, Hazza," Louis says, wiping his own tears away as his other hand gently grabs Harry's. "You have so many of us standing behind you. I mean, Lou Teasdale shut on me the other day for
not ringing her the second it happened. She was scheduled to fly up within the next few days, but Simon cancelled everyone's trips because he told everyone - even management, the wankers - that we need time."

"Really?" Harry asks, managing a small smile. He sniffs and adjusts the nasal cannula.

"Really. Simon's been a real hardarse, but the lad has a heart, Haz. You'd be proud of him." Louis jokes, winking playfully.

Harry chuckles - cut short once again with a pained grimace - and slaps Louis' arm in jest.

Louis laughs, feeling at ease with the familiarity and comfort of joking around with his best friend again for the first time in almost a week. The moment of laughter, however, is followed by an equally powerful moment of pregnant silence. Louis licks his lips, searching for the right words. "You're not okay right now," he says, once again grabbing Harry's chin so they're forced to make eye contact, "but you will be. And we will all be there for you every step of the way."

"Zayn won't." Harry says, and for the first time it finally dawns on Louis that Harry is taking it the hardest of all of them. He's stuck in hospital, in pain, confused and facing an uncertain future, but he's still more concerned about Zayn - Zayn's feelings more than anything.

"He will. You know he will." Louis says, adopting a stern tone.

"I know," Harry says. He shrugs, evidently regretting the painful gesture immediately. "I can't believe he's leaving us."

"Neither can I." Louis admits, and he stumbles back and falls back into the recliner. The leather squeaks and groans under his weight as he collapses into it.

He says nothing for a long time, staring at a spot on the floor as he contemplates everything that's happened in the last few days. There's a new spark of anger that's ignited in him; Harry is in hospital and is severely injured, and the first thing on his mind is still Zayn. He's not sure why, but he blames Zayn for that. A part of him knows it's irrational, but a part of him - a larger one - doesn't quite care. There's a nagging in the back of his mind reminding him that he's moving in circles once again, but he doesn't care. It's going to take a lot for him to forgive Zayn.

When he looks up again, Harry is staring out the window, a vacant look in his tired eyes. Louis opens his mouth to say something, suddenly aware of the heavy atmosphere in the room - lighten the mood, as he often does in awkward situations. He snaps it shut again, unsure of what's appropriate.

"Lou," Harry says, turning to him as if he could sense Louis' uncertainty.

"Yeah, Haz?"

"I hear we're getting sued by some reporter 'cause you punched him." Harry says, glancing back at the window and down to the street below, now shrouded in darkness.

"Yeah, Haz," Louis says, smiling devilishly.

Harry smiles, amused, but the smile fades fast as he turns to Louis and says, "Do you know what you're going to say to Simon about it?"

"What do you mean?" Louis asks, frowning. He stands and walks closer to the window as Harry gestures towards it with a flick of his chin.
"I just saw him arrive," Harry explains. Louis looks out of the window, his hands fitted firmly in the pockets of his black jeans. He surveys the streets, looking for Simon. "He's with our lawyer." Harry adds, quickly.

Louis' eyes widen and he pivots on the heels of his black sneakers. "Shit," he says, tugging on his hair, "I fuckin' thought it would blow over."

"Don't worry, Lou," Harry says, "Simon didn't look that mad."

"Yeah, well between the lawsuit and the videos of Zayn and me having it at each other and the photos of Liam's black eye, he's probably fuckin' pissed off." Louis says, sighing in frustration. His heart pounds hard and fast, and his gaze darts frantically between Harry and the door.

"Yeah," Harry agrees, reaching up with a shaky hand to scratch his chin. He tries to sit up straighter, but he fails, grunting and collapsing back into the pillows. He bites his bottom lip as he suppresses a whimper.

Louis watches him helplessly, suddenly coming to a conclusion: who cares about the lawsuit, as long as his best friend is getting better? Who cares about the videos as long as Harry is okay? He takes a deep breath and exhales painfully slowly; he smiles and ambles over to Harry's bed, taking up position beside it.

"Why are you smiling like that?" Harry asks, frowning. As the hours have ticked by, he's paled further, tired and sore from a long day.

"If you're okay, I'm okay." Louis says, shrugging. He hears the unmistakable sound of Simon's voice echoing down the hall, but he remains calm.

"What?" Harry asks, confused at Louis' sentiment.

"It's been a long few days, Hazza. And you know what?" He pauses, gently patting Harry's uninjured shoulder. "It's made me realize that we can handle anything as long as we have each other. I got you with me, so I'm okay because you're okay."

"Are you drunk?" Harry asks, smiling mischievously - though it looks painful - despite the hint of genuine uncertainty in his voice.

"I wish," Louis replies, laughing, "it would make what's about to happen a whole lot easier."

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