Zayn Malik was the best boyfriend, the perfect fiancé, an abusive husband.

But how do you escape a man who vows never to let you go? Harry can't just walk out. Zayn is the not the type of man who will allow himself to be left.

What choice does Harry have? Run? Hide?

Fake his own death?
Chapter 1

The early morning sky, a vision of soft pinks and purples as the sun started to rise. Gulls circled up above, calling to each other, diving into the silvery ocean below, bobbing on the gentle waves.

Harry Malik stood at the waters edge, his long brown curls ruffled gently in the sea breeze, the fabric of his, oversized sky blue shirt, billowing slightly, a frown of concentration on his pretty face. He was using his feet to dig into the wet sand, the edge of the water lapping around his ankles, clouding his view, having to rely on what he could feel instead of see.

Clenching his toes around the object he was looking for, Harry crouched down in the surf, not caring how wet his trousers were getting, reaching for his prize before it got washed out to sea, and popping it into the large white bucket set besides him.

He faintly smiled as he looked at the bounty he had collected, before averting his eyes and letting them wander to the horizon, to where the sun was beginning to kiss the sea good morning. It was going to be a beautiful day, there was something in the air that felt tranquil - something Harry hadn't felt in a while.

Shaking his head, remembering why it was he was here, Harry let out a little sigh, and still squatting in the foaming salty water, picked up a clawed took, scratching it into sand just like he had done with his toes, until he found a large clam to add to his collection.

With the sounds of the waves lapping, birds crying and wind blowing, Harry was too engrossed in his task to hear or see his husband Zayn appear. He didn't look as though he belonged on the beach, walking stiffly with purpose, wearing a smart black suit and carrying a scarf that fluttered in the breeze. Even when he stopped four foot away from his husband, Harry was still unaware.

When Zayn spoke, it was toneless, his handsome face passive.

"Good morning Harry"

The smallest flicker of alarm jolted through Harry's expressive jade green eyes, his whole body jumping in surprise at his husbands surprise appearance, but he quickly steadied himself, and all of a sudden the alarm had transformed into delight, smiling up at Zayn as though it was he was lighting up the bay with his golden rays, and not the actual sun.

He chuckled as he eyed his husbands crisp business dress.

"I like a man who dresses for clamming" he grinned up at Zayn, dimples popping in both cheeks, lips stretched into a wide smile.

Zayn's face cracked immediately into a smile, walking a couple of steps closer.

"Business" he stated, picking his way carefully through the sand towards Harry, "And on our
holiday" he squatted down next to Harry, who's smile had faded, and was trying to cover the fact up by starting to dig once more for more clams, "Do you forgive me?"

Zayn's words were asking for forgiveness, but by the sound of his tone, it was clear he was only asking out of politeness. A tone Harry was only too used to. He was required to answer though, so he flashed him the smallest smile he could muster, and hurriedly changed the subject.

"How about these?" he asked, indicating to the bucketful of clams in front of him, that he had woken up especially early to gather, knowing his husband would want them as fresh as possible, "Aren't they beautiful? I thought I could steam them for starters?"

"I told the Cowell's we'd do their stupid party" Zayn said, as though Harry hadn't said a word of importance, "All your hard work. I'll call and cancel"

Harry looked sadly down at the bucket. He knew that Zayn didn't mean what he'd just said. It was just a formality to offer to cancel, with no meaning behind it what so ever.

Zayn got to his feet, turning abruptly on his heel, and beginning to stride back down the beach, apparently going to cancel their acceptance of an invitation.

"No" Harry spoke up quickly before his husband got out of ear shot, and jumped up, watching as he predicted the exact moment that Zayn would turn around.

"I can just dig fresh ones tomorrow" he announced happily, as though digging in wet sand was the perfect way to spend two hours in the morning.

A half smile tugged at the corners of Zayn's mouth, moving back towards Harry, captivated by adoration in his husbands eyes.

"I missed you this morning" he murmured, capturing Harry's mouth in a firm kiss, then pulling him into his embrace.

Harry closed his eyes as he lay his cheek against Zayn's chest, breathing in the familiar scent of his husbands aftershave, holding close the man that he fell in love with.

His lack of judgement suddenly realised, Harry's eyes popped open in alarm, stepping out of Zayn's embrace and groaning as he saw he was right.

"Look what I've done" he wailed, indicating to the lapel of Zayn's freshly pressed suit jacket, which now had traces of wet sand on it - no doubt transferred from Harry himself - watching intently as Zayn took a look himself, raising his hand to brush at the patch.

"No problem" Zayn shrugged surprisingly and Harry beamed with relief, blushing slightly as Zayn picked up his hand, maintaining eye contact, and bringing it to his lips, deftly kissing his knuckles, "I have time to change" he turned away, still brushing the fabric with his hand, making his way back to their house.

Harry watched him leave with a blissful, romantic smile on his face.

It could have been the light, but the further away Zayn walked, the less Harry's expression looked like he was smiling, and the more it looked as though he was silently contemplating, it was almost like he was relieved that Zayn had gone.
Whenever Harry and Zayn were invited to a party of one of Zayn's business associates, the apprehension of the event always made Harry nervous. He was well aware that because Zayn was such a well known and respected chairman of his company, that he would have to go to every effort not to embarrass his husband, and make sure he looked and acted in the perfect way that Zayn always expected him to.

Preparing himself for the evening took hours. First he had to cleanse himself, bathing, washing his hair, drying it and styling it to how he knew Zayn liked it best, which took at least an hour and a half on its own.

Then he had to dress, which was fine once he knew what he was wearing. Deciding on an outfit was a completely different matter. He had to look perfect. Everyone at the party had to look at him on Zayn's arm, and think he looked perfect - otherwise, Zayn would not be pleased with him at all.

There should not be this much pressure built in to going to a social work gathering. But this was Harry's life now.

Harry was looking into the mirror, and giving himself one final check when Zayn got home from work. As much as it had pained him the last hour to go through every item in his wardrobe, pretty much discarding everything he owned, he had managed to come up with an outfit that he felt
somewhat comfortable in, and hopefully would pass as acceptable.

Tight black trousers with a white pin stripe detail clung to his slim, yet muscular legs, held low on his hips by a chunky leather belt with silver buckle. His shirt was freshly washed and pressed, crisp white cotton, his tie black, perfectly knotted, and because it was meant to be rather cold that evening, he had shrugged on his warmest, most stylish black blazer. He nodded at himself in the mirror, carefully checking for loose threads or dirty smudges - this was a good outfit, Zayn would be proud of him.

He was just smoothing down his eyebrows, when Zayn appeared, leaning on the door frame, looking at Harry through the mirror, his face neutral, more or less ready to go in a similar black suited dress, his tie, undone and draped around his neck. He took a step into the room, eyeing Harry keenly.

"That's a nice outfit" he stated, glancing briefly at the side of Harry's face, leaning forwards and looking into the mirror as he began to sort out his tie, "I wouldn't have thought of it"

A small rehearsed smile played on the corners of Harry's mouth.

"You were thinking the blue blazer?"

"Uh" Zayn replied, indicating with that one softly murmured syllable that Harry was mistaken with his thoughts, a hint of amusement in his eyes as he held Harry's gaze within the looking glass.

"No blazer actually" Zayn replied passively, "And the shirt I got you last weekend - the black one"

Harry's smile didn't falter, and he answered teasingly.

"Well - it's sheer, and it could be chilly tonight without a blazer"

Zayn said nothing, just smiled knowingly.

Harry tried to hold back a shiver as a soft breeze, hard enough to cause discomfort fluttered over his chest. Now dressed in his sheer black shirt, unbuttoned to his navel, he could feel each and every billowy gust - his nipples uncomfortably hardened due to the cold.

Zayn's hand rested securely on the small of his back, pushing him through the crowded outdoor party, nodding with a grin to the associates that greeted him.

"Hi, Zayn. Great to see you"

"Thanks" Zayn replied, nudging Harry to prevent him from stopping.

Harry maintained his party face, despite his level of discomfort and sudden shyness. He never liked these parties, he always felt as though he was on parade. But Zayn was looking happier than ever - of course that could have something to do with the warmth of the thick jacket he was wearing...

It didn't take long for Zayn to wander away from Harry. He'd find some of his associates wives for him to talk to, then leave Harry to it. He kept a close eye on him though, not liking Harry to be out of his sight, even if he was only at the other side of the room, Harry could always feel his eyes on the back of his head, and that was when he just knew that he was required.

He looked up. Dark brown eyes bored into his own. The side of Harry's mouth quirked up in a little
"Excuse me" he quietly uttered to the women he was with, sliding away from the group and making his way, quickly, yet demurely to where his husband was waiting.

"Have I been social long enough?" he asked rolling his eyes a little in jest. Since they had been married, Harry just wasn't the social butterfly that he used to be - something which Zayn was well aware of.

"For the whole season" Zayn smirked in reply coolly, taking his hand, preparing to leave.

Harry and Zayn lived in a very exclusive, outrageously expensive house on the South Coast with a private beach. It was a stunning place to spend the summer, but in the early Autumn as it was now, it wasn't the place that Harry would have chosen to reside in all year round. Harry needed warmth and sunshine in his life - even more so as the wind whipped his hair around his face in a frenzy, tasting salt from the sea on his lips, chilling him to the bone.

Zayn pulled him up the stairs to the front door, opening it up and ushering a shivering Harry inside. What Harry wanted was a long hot bath to ease his tense, frozen limbs, but as always it was his husbands needs that were prominent in his mind.

"Are you hungry?" he asked, walking with Zayn in the darkness through their open plan living room.

"yeah" nodded Zayn, who had probably been waiting for Harry to ask, since there hadn't been food as such at the party.

Harry nodded agreeably, leaving Zayn in the living room, and going straight to the kitchen, and throwing open the fridge door, eying its contents to see what he could quickly rustle up, there wasn't much.

A chill cascaded through Harry's soul that had nothing to do with the temperature, as the first notes of Berlioz Symphonie Fantastique echoed around the painted walls, the bowl of strawberries tumbling out of his hands and scattering onto the floor, as Zayn grabbed his arms from behind, hungrily kissing the back of his neck, across his shoulder and down one arm. Harry let out a soft gasp, feeling Zayn's insistent lips on his neck again once more, turning his body around in Zayn's arms, digging his fingers into his husbands hair, as their mouths met in a rough needy kiss, Zayn's hands grabbing at the back of his thighs and bum, bending just a little, to hoist Harry into the air and sit him upon the counter top behind them, his fingers instantly going to Harry's belt buckle, swallowing the little moans escaping Harry's mouth with his own, roughly dragging his trousers down his legs, letting them fall in a heap on the floor.

No matter how many times Harry had ended up in this position, it still made him feel uncomfortable when Zayn pushed his chest with the palm of his hand, so that Harry was fully laying down on the kitchen counter, blushing with embarrassment as his husbands thumbs hooked around the skimpy black lace knickers that contrasted against his lily white skin.

Zayn had always 'insisted' that Harry wore women's underwear. At first it had been a kinky suggestion on their honeymoon, which Harry hadn't minded, because of how appreciative and loving he had been whilst he'd been wearing them. His big brown eyes, almost a liquid dark chocolate shade by how vastly his pupils had blown, gentle fingers exploring the tender, sensitive skin of his inner thighs, Harry withering underneath him on silken sheets, overcome by the level of worship his
new husband was lavishing on him.

It had been one of the most intimate, perfect sexual experiences Harry had ever encountered, Zayn taking foreplay to a new level, loving how Harry looked wearing the lace so much, that even though his cock was hard to the point of being painful, he just didn't want to take them off. But when he did, slowly kissing the curly haired boy, opening him up so carefully until Harry whined and begged, gathered his long lean body in his arms, and holding him so close, never letting his lips leave Harry's snowy white neck as he rode him, whispering declarations of love into his skin, leaving traces of his want and commitment as he raked his fingers softly through his hair, making Harry see stars and fireworks every time he thrust up inside him.

It was no wonder, that Zayn wanted to repeat that night again, Harry wanted to relive those hours over and over again, and if him wearing lace knickers ensured that, Harry didn't mind in the slightest. He had just married the most wonderful man in the world. Harry would do everything to keep him this happy.

Sex with Zayn was nothing like that now. It hadn't been for a very long time, and now Harry no longer wore lace knickers because he wanted to, it was because he no longer had an option.

Whenever Harry had put on his boxer shorts in the morning, Zayn wouldn't hide his disproval, distracting him with kisses and cuddles, whilst sliding the offending item down his legs, and flicking them away, until Harry was feeling all suggestive and pliable under his hands, happily putting on the silk or the lace garment he was handed, then getting disappointed when his expectations weren't met.

Making love had quickly turned into just having sex - and for someone as warm, loving and tactile as Harry - he didn't understand why.

Time passed, and due to Zayn, Harry no longer owned a single pair of mens boxers, briefs or otherwise. Instead his drawers were filled with skimpy satin, silk, and lace numbers - mostly crotchless.

It was the fact that he was wearing crotchless lace knickers that was embarrassing Harry now, spread out on the kitchen counter, Zayn's hand still pressing on his chest, telling him silently not to move.

Zayn's eyes were almost black once more, but the love Harry used to see in them was no longer there. He involuntary sucked in his stomach as his husbands long fingers trailed down his defined and toned stomach, clumsily squeezed his semi that was clearly visible through the black lace, then in one quick movement lifted Harry's legs, gaining access to Harry's most intimate area.

Without ceremony, Zayn plucked from him roughly, the glittery pink butt plug that had been bothering Harry incessantly all evening.

Ever since, he had gotten up to change his shirt to the one Zayn had 'suggested', and found himself bent over the dressing table. His trousers were shoved down around his thighs before he had time to blink, biting back his objections, and willing his muscles to stop clenching in protest as his husband screwed said plug painfully deep inside him. There was no stretching, no lubricant, not even spit to make it easier on his previously abused hole, there was no love in his action whatsoever.

The moan of appreciation Harry let out, was not the groan of pain that filled his own ears, artfully disguising his expression to look as turned on as Zayn wanted him to be. No words were exchanged, instead Zayn fumbled at his belt, not even taking his trousers off, just getting his prick out, grabbing Harry by looping his arms underneath his thighs dragging him towards him. Harry's
bum was almost hanging off the side, but this was exactly what Zayn wanted.

Despite wearing a rather substantial sized butt plug for a good few hours, it still wasn't enough to prepare him for excruciating pain that shot through his rectum and lower back, as Zayn mercilessly thrust his full length into him in one go. Gripping into Harry's thighs, using them for leverage, Zayn thrust harder and harder, grunting loudly, eyes shut, not noticing Harry's arms flailing around, stretching out either side of him to grip the edges of the counter, bracing himself in the same position, trying not to distract Zayn from his impending orgasm.

A strangled shout fell from his husband's lips, the intensity of his release, spurting hard deep inside Harry, who winced inside at the feeling of each shuddering spasm.

Satisfied and spent, Zayn released Harry's thighs, carelessly letting them slap down onto the marble counter top, slipping out of his husband without a word of acknowledgement, tucking himself back inside his trousers and walking abruptly away.

Harry didn't move. He stared at the dark ceiling, still gripping onto the sides of the counter, only too aware of the trickle of seamen seeping from his hole, his legs dangling off the edge of the counter just as Zayn had left him - who was probably fast asleep in bed by now, completely fucked out.

Harry knew that Zayn would be irritated if they didn't wake up in the same bed together, so gingerly, Harry scooted forwards, trying not to put too much pressure on his painful posterior. As he left the kitchen, he caught sight of himself in the hallway mirror, openly wincing as he took in the view of his lace knickers rucked up around his hips.

"My pretty princess" Zayn had called him whilst they had been dating, "My angelic, curly haired, beautiful princess"

At the time, Harry had considered those endearments romantic and sweet, but along with the underwear he was now forced to wear whether he liked it or not, Harry realised that Zayn had said those words, not to make him feel special or loved, but by making him learn his place.

Harry was the princess, the helpless little woman in their relationship who cooked and cleaned at home all day, got paraded around at parties like a trophy, wore sexy lingerie for his husband, bottomed during sex, and wasn't allowed to object or suggest otherwise.

Zayn was the man of the house. He was in control. Of everything, and everyone, which included Harry.

If Harry had remembered how to cry, he would be doing so now, staring at a stranger in the mirror, and realising as he saw himself dressed in a shirt he hadn't wanted to wear, and lace that didn't make him feel like Harry. A painful reminder, of how Zayn had been steadily emasculating him, ever since the day they met.
"Good morning Princess"

Harry's eyes shot open, his subconscious already fearing the worst before he had even had a chance to properly wake up. To his good fortune though, his eyes focused upon his husband, hovering over him, with an almost unrecognisable gentle smile on his face.

"Er, morning, uh..." Harry's tongue felt parched and dry, fighting to wake up quicker.

"Shhh, take your time my love" Zayn crooned, in a tone that to some would sound sweet and romantic, "You have plenty of time to get breakfast ready on the balcony for when I've finished my workout"

Harry nodded, smiling reassuringly. After all, making sure his husbands breakfast was ready at the exact time he needed it, was his first priority.

Zayn said no more to Harry, slinking out of bed, changing into his work out clothes, then disappeared from the bedroom. Only then did Harry let his smile slip - the muscles in his cheeks were starting to ache from the pretence.

Getting out of bed slowly, the previous nights activities still making him feel a little sore and uncomfortable, Harry didn't change out of the over - sized white pin striped shirt he'd worn to bed, Zayn prefered it if he dressed casual for breakfast. He did however wash his face, brush his teeth and run a comb through his hair. Although he would be casual, he was still expected to be well presented.

On the way to the kitchen, Harry paused in the doorway of the gym, seeing what circuit Zayn had decided on doing this morning, for that would impact on what breakfast he would be expecting. It had taken a few "lessons" to get it right, and ones that Harry would not forget in a hurry - Zayn was very particular when it came to "teaching".

It felt such a long time ago, that Harry could barely remember the time that he used to watch his husband work out, and swoon. His muscles rippling, sweat gathering on his bare skin - moving as one perfectly lean, exquisite machine, the fiercest look of determination on his face as he worked towards his goal.

Harry didn't find it attractive now. He'd seen and felt what the "machine" could do when it was put to use, and every day, its stamina and strength increased to something that Harry now feared, not worshipped.

Zayn never saw Harry lingering in the doorway - which was exactly what he wanted. It was another rule, that when Zayn was in the zone, Harry should not be seen, or heard.
Whilst Zayn worked out, Harry prepared the breakfast area. He wiped the table until it glistened, set the place mats exactly as he had been shown, buffed the cutlery so it gleamed, and arranged a pretty posy of freshly cut flowers in a vase in the centre - the exact centre mind. Then he prepared the ingredients for the meal itself, brewing the coffee, slicing the bread, softening and curling the butter for its special dish. Everything had to be timed exactly for when Zayn had finished his shower and ascended onto the balcony.

As always, his timing was perfect. Zayn had just pulled his chair up to the table, when Harry trotted out with the breakfast tray, placing it neatly in front of his husband and removing the silver lid with a flourish - standing nearly next to his husbands chair as his efforts were inspected for imperfections.

It was a tense moment, almost as though Harry was standing on the edge of a cliff face, wondering if the bungee rope attached to him would work or fail.

The toast was a perfect golden brown with the butter spread evenly into every corner and cut into two perfect triangles. The bacon had all its fat removed and just the right side of being crisp, but not burnt, and the eggs were the right shape and colour.

Zayn loaded his fork, took a bite and thoughtfully chewed. Harry's heart was pounding in his throat, waiting, hoping, praying that he liked it.

The answer was in the second bite. Zayn didn't acknowledge Harry, say thank you, or compliment him at all. But the second bite told Harry it was acceptable, and that he may sit and eat his own small bowl of cubed fruit with a smattering of natural yoghurt.

Just like his hair and clothes, it was Zayn's choice what went into his mouth nourishment wise, he liked Harry to be waif like and delicate. Harry himself missed the days when he didn't have to deny himself something as simple as a slice of toast, just to make sure that he would always fit into the clothes that Zayn would buy him. If something didn't fit, it was Harry's fault for gaining weight, not that the item was clothing was just a size too small.

"What are your plans for today?" Zayn asked, delicately dabbing the side of his mouth with a napkin, and frowning at the table, as though he was expecting something to be there. It was a trick question, Zayn knew very well what Harry would be doing with his time, it was the same routine every day.

Harry opened his mouth to answer, but Zayn had forgotten the question already.

"Harry, where are the papers?" he asked, although it was less of a question, and more of an observation that Harry had forgotten something.

"I'm so sorry!" Harry leapt to his feet, making the small table tremour slightly, and dashed quickly back inside, racing to the door to collect the papers he had carelessly neglected when preparing the table. He bent down to pick them up, but stopped himself just in time - he hadn't washed his hands, and he didn't want to risk any grease or dirt on his finger tips to smudge the ink or dirty the paper.

It took him less than thirty seconds to wash his hands in the downstairs bathroom, making sure every droplet of water was dried from his skin with a hand towel before rushing back to finish his task.

"I'm so sorry Zayn" he babbled handing his husband his papers in the correct order, feeling flustered and guilty. He didn't dare sit down to finish his breakfast now - he didn't deserve to eat after that.

"You're allowed to forget something once" Zayn replied smoothly, handing Harry his empty plate to dispose of, and spreading his papers out on the surface, "We are all allowed to make a mistake one
time. If we keep making the same one however...."

His words hung thickly in the air. Harry swallowed hard, then turned, steadying his rapidly beating heart as he went to commence the washing up, internally thanking his husband for being so leanient over his shocking mistake.

An hour later, Harry was sat at the same breakfast table on his own, bent over a list of household items that he was preparing to submit to Zayn in hope that they would be allowed on the weeks shopping list, and working out his reasons for needing them, should he be asked - which more often than not he was.

He noticed Zayn approach him immediately, a small smile on his handsome face as he reached for Harry's hand.

"Come with me" he said quietly, coaxing Harry to follow him who stood immediately.

Thinking that he was being led to their bedroom for an early morning "session", Harry put on a playful smile.

"Already?" he giggled bashfully, "It's so early"

Zayn didn't answer, just held his hand tightly, leading Harry past their bedroom and downstairs. At the doorway to the bathroom, he dropped Harry's hand, crooking his finger for Harry to follow him into the bathroom. Harry followed full of apprehension and worry.

"Anything in here look amiss?" Zayn asked casually, looking around him, his back to his husband.

Harry looked around quickly. Obviously something was broken, or out of place. His heart began to pound, then race as he spotted the state of the hand towel he had used to dry his hands after washing them when he collected the papers. Instead of it being neatly hung on its little rail, it had slipped to the floor - probably in Harry's haste to deliver Zayn his papers - and lay in a crumpled heap.

"I'm so sorry" Harry croaked out, picking it up and arranging it to how he knew it was expected to be hung, "I don't know why I did that. I must have forgotten"

"We all forget things from time to time" Zayn replied, looking into the mirror, "That is what reminders are for"

"Thank you" Harry said quickly, twisting his fingers together nervously, "Thank you Zayn"

"I don't think you will forget again" Zayn remarked, "You may go"

Cautiously, Harry backed away slowly. He had gotten off lightly this time. He would have to be so careful for the next few weeks, Zayn would not be so understanding if Harry messed up a third time.

For the rest of the day, Harry worried. Whilst he was washing up the dirty dishes, whilst he did the laundry, whilst he made the bed.

Everything seemed to take ten times longer than it should do, because he kept checking, then double checking that it had been completed to a standard that Zayn would be pleased with.

That meant no water marks on the china, no creases on the bedsheets, that he used just the right amount of fabric softener in the wash.

Whilst he was cleaning the kitchen surfaces for the third time that same day, a sudden thought struck
him, rushing to the cupboard that housed their stock pile of food cans, seasonings and condiments, quickly neatening the contents so that all the labels were facing outwards, and every item was placed within the right food group and neat and tidy.

Obsessive organisation wasn't something that came naturally to Harry, and if he was in a hurry or nervous, it would slip his mind. But a slip of the mind was not worth it if Zayn opened it up and found the contents in disarray.

He wondered fleetingly if he would live forever like this, feeling afraid of someone who he had willingly given himself to, constantly having to be on his guard, constantly regretting his life choices.

"What's for dinner?"

Zayn entered the kitchen behind him, resting the palms of his hands on Harry's narrow hips and making him jump in surprise.

"Um, lamb with rosemary and the peach chutney, new potatoes and baby peas" Harry babbled, smiling to cover up his nerves as Zayn smoothed his fingers up under his t-shirt, stroking the soft skin on his waist.

"Sounds great" he murmured approvingly, leaning a little closer so that Harry could feel the soft puffs of his breath on the back of his neck.

"I was going to make that herb bread that you like so much" Harry added, only just thinking about it on the spur of the moment.

"I can hardly wait" Zayn responded, and just like that his hands were gone, and Zayn was striding out of the kitchen, through the door that led outside, his hair blowing in the wind as he walked purposely across the beach, towards the little pier where their neighbour kept his boat.

Harry watched him go, gulping down a lump in his throat.

Zayn approached the man working on his boat with elegance, confidence and radiating importance.

"Are you renting from the Lucas'?" he asked loudly as he got near.

"Hi" greeted their neighbour, jumping off the boat when he realised he had company, "Yeah, I am" he held out his hand to Zayn, who shook it enthusiastically, "I'm Matt Cardle. I guess we must be neighbours"

"Zayn Malik. We live up there" Zayn turned and indicated to his beach house, which looked even more impressive in the late afternoon sunshine.

"Oh" Matt nodded, looking to where he pointed, "So that must be your husband that I keep seeing staring down from the window."

"Harry" Zayn acknowledged nodding.

"Mmm" Matt made a noise of approval, "You're a lucky man. I've been admiring your house. It's one of the finest in the area."

"Thanks" Zayn grinned, "Are you from London?" he moved to take a closer look at the boat as Matt began to continue his work.
"Yeah" Matt nodded with a smile, "I've escaped the city for a while, gets pretty hectic in my line of work - I'm a neurologist there."

"We live there too" Zayn revealed, "I manage a firm of investment counsellors" he changed the subject, "This is a terrific boat. Boats are a passion of mine. One I don't get to indulge very often"

"That's too bad" Matt sounded sympathetic, "I would never let anything keep me off the water."

"My husband doesn't like sailing" Zayn explained, "He can't swim. Nearly drowned when he was a child. I usually try to get him on a boat once a season. It's difficult, but I try"

Matt nodded approvingly. He couldn't understand people who didn't like sailing, and was all for encouraging people to face their fears.

"Well listen," he began to offer, "I'm gonna be taking a run up the coast this evening. It's full moon, weather's supposed to be great. Maybe this would be a good time."

"Maybe" Zayn mused, although he had already predicted this offer, "Let me talk to him. I...I'll raise it gently" he grinned at his new "mate", and reached to shake his hand in parting, "Thanks"

"No worries" Matt grinned back.

Zayn arrived back in the kitchen to find Harry happily arranging some freshly delivered flowers in a crystal vase. He watched as his husband picked up two white orchid blooms, inhaling their sweet smell deeply, a natural smile making his dimples blossom in his cheeks.

He didn't notice, that as he shut the door loudly behind him, Harry's smile disappeared and his dimples hid from sight.

"Nice looking man, the doctor" he commented, casually, but with a slight edge to his tone.

"Doctor?" Harry asked, confused, intent on arranging the flowers, intent on keeping his hands busy.

"Said I have a beautiful house" Zayn continued, walking closer to Harry, who picked up the vase and carried it into the living room. Zayn followed close on his heels, "Best on the beach" he paused, "When was he in here?"

Harry drew in a slight shuddering breath. His knuckles were so tightly clasped around the crystal he was holding they had turned white.

"Yesterday whilst I was in town?" Zayn persisted, still in keeping with his hard edged tone.

"Zayn I don't know the doctor" Harry smiled sweetly and innocently, turning around to face his husband.

"Sure you do" Zayn scoffed, "Young, good-looking. Outfitting his sailboat down there"

He began pacing towards Harry, who started to back up towards the adjoining wall, holding the crystal vase in front of him like a barrier.

"He says," Zayn continued, a sarcastic glare spoiling his handsome features, "You're been staring at him from the window all day"

Harry didn't see it coming. One moment, Zayn was glaring at him, the next his fist had sprung from
his side, sledge hammering onto Harry's face, knocking him, or rather throwing him sideways with the sheer force behind it.

The crystal vase flew from Harry's finger tips, smashing to splinters on the cold marble floor, exactly at the same time as Harry's fragile body slammed onto it - the entirety of his weight landing on his wrist, which cracked loudly, making the boy cry out in pain, sobbing where he laid on the floor.

Now the waterworks had started, Harry couldn't stop them, weeks worth of grief and panic, since their last incident, bubbling to the surface in the form of hot tears cascading down his cheeks, howls of anguish shaking his mentally and physically traumatised body.

"Does it give you that much pleasure to humiliate me?" Zayn growled, stalking around the pathetic form that was Harry, who was gripping at his long hair and using it to try and hide his face, sobbing loudly, unable to move.

"Stop it!" Zayn roared, drawing back his leg, and kicking his foot hard into Harry's soft tummy, making him yell out even louder than before, curling in on himself so that he was just a tight little ball.

A wild, crazed expression took over Zayn's facial features, as he crouched down next to his husband, his tone sneering.

"Now you'll sulk, won't you?"

"No" Harry choked out, shaking his head animatedly, terrified as Zayn reached his hand out, cupping the cheek he had cruelly punched, stroking the sore spot with his thumb.

"Yes you will" he crooned, the fierce primal gleam never leaving his dark eyes.

"I won't!" Harry sobbed insisting, shaking his head, shrinking away from his husbands touch.

"You'll pout and you'll spoil out dinner" Zayn accused, his voice starting to become more human, still stroking Harry's face somewhat tenderly as he cried, "Our beautiful dinner"

It was almost like he was trying to distract a toddler out of a temper tantrum.

"Just smell the bread" he breathed, helping Harry get up into a sitting position, and sitting down besides him, stroking his hair and face, "I'm so sorry" Zayn sounded upset, "Will you smile?"

Harry had stopped crying, and sniffing, but he continued to look downwards at the floor, not able to look his husband in the eye. Even when he bent his head to look up into Harry's face through his mane of curls. His hand gripped Harry's chin, his face was inclining.

A ripple of fear and disgust flooded Harry's veins as Zayn kissed him softly on the lips, then began to stoke up and down his shivering arms.

"Your doctor friend" Zayn said carefully, "He asked us to go sailing tonight"

Harry's eyes widened in terror at the word sailing.

"Just a run along the coast" Zayn hurried to say, "less than an hour each way. I'll be right there princess. Right by your side"

Harry sat frozen, not able to trust himself to move or speak.

"I know how you feel, but we can't conquer our fears by running away" Zayn told his husband
softly, "Do it? Do it for me?"

There was no point in saying anything else. No point in arguing. Harry gave the smallest of nods, almost unseeable to the naked eye.

Zayn nodded with satisfaction, pressing his finger tip against Harry's lips, before getting to his feet, and pretending what had happened only minutes beforehand, had not happened at all.

"I'll think I'll run into town" he announced. He no longer saw his husband tear stained and trembling on the floor in front of him, "Anything you need?"

Harry shook his head, with the same level of enthusiasm he had just nodded with it. Barely.

"I'll be back" Zayn promised, getting his car keys from his pocket, then striding confidently away.

Harry waited for the slam of the front door, before he let the tears begin to fall once more, raising his hands to his face, feeling the tender skin where Zayn's fist had collided, and letting a few more tears slip down his cheeks, that he was too upset to hold in.

It was hard to stand up, legs feeling like jelly, his stomach muscles clenching in protest where they had been kicked.

But all too soon, he forced himself to pull together - Zayn would be home soon.

And when he returned, every single splinter from the smashed crystal vase would have to have disappeared from sight - and Harry would be expected to pretend that what he'd just felt, had never happened. Just like the hundreds of almost identical incidents that had happened before.
Harry stood right at the edge of the shore line, minute waves curling over his feet, his arms tightly wrapped around himself as he stared thoughtfully out over the choppy, intimidating water, his mind filled to the brim about what the night ahead would hold.

Rubbing his neck with his hand, like he did when he was anxious, he started to slowly drag his feet back up the beach towards the house, stopping just before he got to the steps that led to the houses, frowning as he looked curiously up at the row of bare bulbed lights, that were evenly spaced between the houses and the beach.

Randomly, he switched his attention to the sand below his feet, searching almost frantically with his eyes, then pouncing when he found what he was looking for - a pebble.

Looking back at one particular duo of bulbs, he raised his arm far behind his head, aimed, and threw. The small chinking of glass hitting the path below alerted him that he had made a perfect shot, and feeling a small sense of triumph searched for another pebble to see if he could get the second. His next attempt failed, as did the third and forth, but the fifth one shattered it in such a way, that Harry had to jump out of the way to avoid getting hit from the debris.

A small smile played on the corners of his mouth as he gazed up at the broken lights, then with a new found enthusiasm, hopped up the stairs and jogged towards his house.

Harry was sitting still and motionless in the living room when Zayn returned from his errand, lost in his thoughts.

"Bonjour, Madame" Zayn greeted cheerfully, a playful little dig about how Harry was the wife in their relationship.

"You all alone in here?" Harry could tell Zayn was joking, but as his humour was sparse at the best
of times, there was more weight to his query than necessary. Even when he crouched down behind Harry's chair, carefully lowering a bouquet of long stemmed red roses into Harry's lap. The smell was beautiful, but it didn't stop Harry from wrinkling his nose in distaste and biting his lower lip.

"They're beautiful" he fake smiled automatically, taking hold of them, and waiting for Zayn to round the chair and sit besides him, holding out a large gift wrapped box for Harry to take.

"I'm sorry we quarrelled" Zayn told him, without a hint of remorse, not waiting for Harry to open the box, but walking away to look out of the window.

With a heavy heart, Harry carefully untied the ribbon, lifted the lid, and rummaged through the expensive tissue paper, holding up a blood red shirt, designed by his favourite designer, made from the finest silk. There was no question, it was gorgeous.

"If you don't like it I can..." Zayn started to say, but was cut off.

"No, I do, I do" Harry smiled, looking delighted with what he was holding, running his fingers over the material.

Walking over to his husband, Zayn reached and took Harry's hand, guiding him out of his chair and leading him to the middle of the living room, where he held his hands, then bent down to sweetly kiss Harry's lips and pull him into his embrace, before turning him around in his arms. Harry made a face as Zayn began to gently unbutton the shirt he was currently wearing, delicately kissing down Harry's neck.

Harry knew what was coming, he had known ever since he had set eyes upon the silk shirt, enforced by how Zayn was removing first his shirt, then trousers, holding his arms up high, then slipping the soft silk over his head.

"Is it too early for this?" Zayn joked, cracking that rare smile, then pulling a subdued Harry into a long, deep kiss, leading him into their bedroom.

Harry wondered a lot of things when Zayn was "making love" to him. He wondered if he should repaint the ceiling, he wondered if his face looked as boring as his thoughts were as his husband thrusted deeper and deeper inside him, grunting and groaning into his neck. He wondered, if Zayn noticed that he didn't make any noises himself.

As Zayn gripped tightly into him, Harry's facial expression changed from one of boredom, to one of fucked out ecstasy in the blink of an eye, only lapsing back when Zayn had pulled out of him and gone straight to the bathroom to wash, leaving Harry alone, half naked and venerable in bed, covering himself up in the sheets, once again staring out of the window at the crashing waves, thinking hard.

"You want something" Zayn commented cheerfully over dinner, "I know my princess"

Harry pondered as he took a sip of water.

"I'm waiting" Zayn prmouthed, giving Harry's knee a small squeeze under the table.

"Mr Walsh called from the library" Harry hesitantly told him, "He said they could use me full time now"
"But you already work three mornings a week" Zayn frowned, "And I support that because I know your love of books. What about our home?" he questioned trying to make Harry feel guilty, "Don't you love our home as much?"

Harry knew he would regret it, but all of a sudden a voice he could barely remember shot out of his mouth.

"Has your dinner been late to the table even once?" he bit out.

Zayn didn't rise to it. He sat back in his chair, sipped his wine and commented in an easy tone, "Oh I can remember not so far back when it was late. By two days"

"That was six months ago" Harry responded tightly, "My mother was all I had. I'll never forgive myself for not bringing her to live with us"

"You shouldn't beat yourself" Zayn assured him kindly, "You always treated her with love."

Harry clucked his tongue in annoyance.

"She died Zayn. How could I not go to her funeral?"

"If you had told me, I would have taken you, given me a chance to pay my last respects" Zayn stated sweetly, "But you sneaked off inexplicably"

"I didn't sneak off" Harry muttered stubbornly.

"Need I remind you how I worried?"

"No" Harry was finding courage deep inside him, allowing him to fully look Zayn in the face, "You reminded me enough the night I came back"

Zayn held Harry's uncharacteristic hard stare, "You're not suggesting that I enjoyed that are you?"

"Oh God no" Harry exclaimed a little sarcastically, "That would make you a monster"

The vein in Zayn's temple throbbed. But whatever he was about to say was thought better of.

"If I didn't know you better" he said, trying to maintain control, "I would think you were deliberately provoking a quarrel so you'd be unable to sail tonight"

Harry's lips pursed in a pout.

"Now, this is a useful discussion" Zayn continued, "But one best postponed until after our sail, don't you think?"

Harry's face fell.

"Yes" he murmured quietly, no longer able to look at Zayn any longer.

Wrapped up in his thickest jumper, his long hair tied up in two braids close to his head, Harry mused as he smoothed his hands over the face of a statue that Zayn had given him as a present many years ago.
"Thinking of our honeymoon?" Zayn asked, helping his husband to put on his coat, "The night I gave you that, the night I taught you to dance?"

"Those were the happiest days of my whole life" Harry admitted truthfully, letting Zayn turn him around in his arms and lifting Harry's left hand, playing with the ring he found there on his ring finger.

"We will always be together" he said gently, kissing the ring, "Nothing can keep us apart" he grinned, "it's time to go" leading Harry outside to where the boat was waiting for them.

The sea was choppy and rough, the sky was dark, the little boat being tossed around and making poor Harry feel nauseous as he sat small and tidily where Zayn had placed him, and tried to remember how to breath. Even with his life jacket on, he did not feel safe in the slightest.

"I wish that moon would come back" Matt commented, watching the rushing clouds overhead. He glanced at Harry, seeing his disdomfort, "We're ok" he assured him gently. Harry nodded politely, but still gulped.

A roll of thunder rumbled in the distance, followed by a flash of lightning and a sudden downpour.

"Ah shit!" Matt swore, "So much for the weather reports!"

"I thought you said the weather was fine" Zayn exclaimed.

"Yeah" called back Matt, "I don't know where this is coming from. We're going to turn back, prepare to come about"

The boat turned around a bell buoy that clanged in the fierce wind.

"Relax princess" Zayn shouted over the sound of the waves and the rain, "Nothing to worry about"

Harry wasn't so sure, there was rather a lot of water gathering at the bottom of the boat, and the rain was coming down so hard, he could barely see, desperately he clung to the side of the boat, not daring to move.

A loud familiar clanging got his attention, and he tried to open his water logged eyes to look.

"There's our first buoy" Matt explained, trying to put him at ease, "Almost at home now"

"Tighten the jib! Crank it in!" Matt shouted to Zayn, who moved away from Harry, to gain control of the sail, but in the dark and within the confusion, the rope slipped from his grasp, and escaped the mechanism holding it in place, one strong gust of wind and the sail was flapping all over the place.

"Zayn! Go try bring down the jib!" Yelled Matt, as Zayn climbed on top of the cabin, almost loosing his footing on the slippery surface, rolling dangerously close to the edge.

Checking that Harry would be ok, Matt followed him, thinking that two of them would be better than one.

Harry tried to watch. Matt and Zayn were both fighting with the sail, one moment they had it and were pulling it back into place, the next, a huge gust of wind had snatched it back, forcing them to lie on their backs, feet braced against any surface they could find a grip. At last, Zayn finally pulled the rope in, Matt grabbing it too and beginning to wrestle it back to where it was meant to go, which
would have been fine, except for a particularly large wave tossing the boat almost over on it's side, swinging the boom across and knocking Zayn cleanly into the water!

"Give me your hand! Give me your hand!" Matt yelled, throwing himself face down onto the cabin roof and lunching for Zayn who had managed to grab the railings when the boat tipped again.

"I've got you!"

Matt dragged, Zayn scrambled, clawing at the wood with his fingers, and for the first time seeing the back of the boat since he had first gone forward to correct the jib.

A scream of agonising terror escaped his mouth as he looked wildly around him.

"HARRY!!" He screamed out, "OH GOD! HARRY!!! He can't swim!"

"Be careful!" Matt shouted to him as Zayn charged across the boat to where he had left Harry sitting. Checking inside the cabin and praying Harry was inside it.

"Harry!" Zayn continued to scream out, searching desperately over the side of the boat, "Harry!" Throwing himself and the light of his torch around in all directions as Matt sent up a flare, the bell buoy clanging in the near distance.

Despite their searching eyes, and their bright torches. Neither of the men saw the flicker of eyes, watching them cautiously just below the surface of the water, swiftly moving further and further away.

"You've got to have another boat and a helicopter!" Zayn demanded to the coast guard, wrapped in a blanket and storming the boat to where the patrol were sat, still searching the water for any trace of Harry, "Get back on the radio, please!" He begged, "He's my husband"

"Object sighted in the port bow"

"There's something there! See it!"

"There's something out there!"

A flurry of voices pounded in Zayn's ears.

"Is it him?" Zayn demanded, running out, "Harry!" He yelled into the darkness, "Harry!"

But it wasn't Harry. It was a torn, beaten life jacket, or to be more exact, it was Harry's torn, beaten life jacket.

"He can't swim" Zayn murmured in disbelief looking from one sympathetic Cree members face to another, dissolving into tears as he thought of his precious princess who he loved with all his heart, "Harry can't swim!"

Little did Zayn know, Harry was no longer in the sea, Harry hadn't drowned. Harry was four miles away on a train, heading for the last place that Zayn would ever think of searching for him:

Doncaster.
Harry watched Matt and Zayn struggle to control the jib, his heart pounding in his chest, waiting, analysing, waiting, for that split second that could change the rest of his life.

The waves were brutal in strength, tossing the little boat around, Harry could feel it in his bones, that those precious few seconds could happen in an instant, and he prayed to the Gods above that the moment would be now.

In anticipation, he slid a few inches to the left, no longer leaning his back against the guard rail, but sitting right next to it. He blinked the rain water from his eyes, and prayed harder.

The Gods were on his side.

A huge wave rocketed from the East, toppling the boat almost on its side, raising Harry upwards, and swinging the boom sharply to the right. Anxious nerves pulsed, bubbled under his skin.

Harry took position, pinching his nose with one hand, crossing the other over his chest, pressing his knees together, watching, waiting, praying.

The Gods answered.

There was a cry as the boom hit Zayn squarely on his back, just as the boat rolled and tilted towards the water, sending him flying over the guard rail and into the sea. This was it. There was no time to check if this was the right moment, or even consider if it was now or never, Harry sucked in a large breath, shut his eyes, and as the boat swung left to correct itself, Harry lent backwards, letting the motion of the boat tip him into the icy black ocean.

That was the night that I died, and someone else was saved.

The sudden change in temperature made Harry want to instinctively gasp out loud, the strength of the current swirling around him was terrifying. Water was everywhere, deafening in his ears, up his nose, in his eyes, panic coursed through his veins - not because he was afraid of drowning, but because Zayn or Matt could spot him.

Panic switched to adrenaline. He had to move! Now!

Someone who was afraid of water, but leatend to swim.

For the last year, for an hour before he was really due to start work at the library, three days a week,
Harry had secretly been taking swimming lessons at the local community pool. At first he had been terrified, the idea of being immersed in water chilled him to the bone, but something told him, that one day, facing his fears, and learning this simple skill, could one day save his life.

Harry had deliberately left the laces of his shoes undone and loose. He kicked them off, and started to swim, kicking his legs, propelling himself forward with his arms, his strokes were clumsy and uncoordinated, but he was getting further and further away from the boat - which was thankfully moving in the opposite direction.

His trousers were made from the thinnest material he owned, it was almost like when he was competing for his life saving award at his swimming club and he had to swim in his pyjamas. His sweater was heavy and water logged, but his life jacket was keeping him buoyant. He would loose that in a minute. Just as soon as he reached...

A red glow surrounded him, the light atop the bell buoy, the place he had been aiming for ever since Matt had alerted him to it. Grasping it desperately, breathing hard, his legs and arms screaming at him to rest, he positioned himself on the far side of it, feeling completely safe and grounded - so safe that he was able to hold it tightly with one hand, escaping from the confines of his zip up jumper, freeing himself from his life jacket.

The jumper, he let sink to the ocean floor, the life jacket he held on to. It wasn't time to let that become visible. He was just gripping two hands back onto the buoy, when a scream tore the night apart, even over the almost deafening sounds of the wind and rain.

"Harry!" Zayn screamed at the top of his lungs, "Harry!"

Someone who knew there would be one moment when he wouldn't be watching.

Zayn had noticed he was gone. For the first time in their relationship, Zayn had no clue where his husband was.

Peeping around the huge buoy, Harry saw the boat still drifting in the opposite direction, Zayn and Matt upon it, shining their torches into the water nearby, frantically running from one side of the boat to the other, searching for him. Harry had sunk so far down in the water, he was almost fully submerged, he steadied his breathing, he looked left to get his bearings, he blocked out Zayn's pained screams of his name, hearing instead, the cheers of encouragement from his swimming club friends, from when he'd attempted, and completed his first unaided 100 meters.

Harry looked to the left, he positioned himself in the right direction, letting go of his life jacket, hoping the current would allow it to do what he wanted it to, took a deep breath, and propelled himself in the direction of the shore.

Someone who knew that the darkness from the broken lights would show the way.

Harry's arms and legs were heavy and running out of energy quickly. But he kept going, he could see his goal, a big black hole of darkness in the lights along the shore line, getting closer and closer as his hands cleaved through the choppy water. He could almost see the beach, his foot hit the ocean floor. Harry struggled to stand up, staggering at first up through the surf, coughing and spluttering, a small wave demonstrating his bodies fatigue by pushing him to the floor, but Harry was not going to give in now. He was closer to freedom than he had ever been in his life!

But now was not the time to be sloppy, he may have just conquered the sea, but there were so many things that could go wrong.
Running as fast as his legs would allow, keeping his body low to the ground, Harry raced to his house, darting inside, and navigating himself through the dark, welcome bolts of lightening illuminating his way (another gift from the Gods?), to the rather large cupboard under the stairs where Zayn allowed Harry to keep his collection of books that he loved so much.

But what Zayn never knew, was books was not all it held. It also held a secret. A secret that Zayn would have probably killed Harry for if he'd found out.

Where the slope of the stairs desended, behind where the small bookcase was wedged, there was a gap - a gap that held a medium sized duffle bag, filled with everything Harry needed to escape at a moments notice.

Terrified that Zayn would return to the house at any moment, Harry hastily dragged the bookcase out, giving him just enough space to reach behind it, and pull his bag free.

Due to nerves, he tugged at the shelving unit a little too hard, and some of the books tumbled to the floor - which he quickly shoved back into their spaces, trying in vein to get them as neat as possible.

Staying confined to the cupboard, Harry fumbled with the zip, rummaging through his small kit, which consisted of a large wad of cash and a piece of paper with encrypted phone numbers and an address on it, to grab a pair of tracksuit bottoms, a large t-shirt and a beanie hat, shoving his limbs into the material as quickly as possible, then shoving his feet into the shoes that were also in the bag, he couldn't risk removing any clothes or shoes from his wardrobe - these were new, purposely brought, carefully hidden.

Now for his appearence. The brown coloured contact lenses, made his eyes sting at first, but they hid the green of his natural eye colour. The sandy coloured wig, he tucked his plats into, which only showed in wisps beneath his beanie made him almost unrecognisable.

The last thing he did, before he closed up the gap, was remove his wedding ring. It was tough to remove, since it had been stuck on his finger for many years, but he pulled and tugged, until the shackle was no longer bound to him.

He should have taken it off at the buoy, and thrown it into the sea along with his jumper, but in the moment he found it darkly amusing to leave it here, in the hidden gap that had accommodate his freedom.

With a quick flick of his wrist he sent it rolling right to the back, safely out of sight beneath the bottom stair, then shoved the bookcase back where it belonged.

Grabbing his bag, he pulled out a small hand towel, using it to mop up the splashes of water that had dropped off him as he had run through the house, shoved it back into his bag, and without looking back, raced out of the door, hurtled through the shadows, almost bent double, to the road, then straightened up and flat out sprinted towards the station.

Just as though fate had planned the whole ordeal, Harry barely had to wait for his train. Out of breath and wheezing slightly from his run, he collapsed into a window seat, clutching his bag tightly to his chest, waiting and praying that it would leave soon.

The whistle blew. The guards shouted all was clear, the train began to move, and Harry began to shake. The enormity of what he'd just accomplished hitting him for the first time.

Harry smiled. His first proper smile in years. He was crying. Fat, globules of salty tears slid down his cheeks, as he silently wept, but he was smiling so hard his cheeks hurt.
He'd finally done it. He'd escaped his abusive husband.
It would roughly be a seven hour journey to Doncaster.

Harry watched the darkened scenery flash by, feeling the knots of tension disperse as the hours ebbed by, knowing he was getting closer and closer to freedom and safety.

The safer he felt, the sleepier he became, his nights adventure beginning to take its toll on his exhausted mind and body, very slowly, and surprisingly painlessly, he nodded off to sleep.

When he awoke, probably only an hour after he had fallen asleep, he wasn't alone.

A lady was sat next to him, eating an apple, and reading a magazine. As Harry tiredly yawned, opened his tired eyes, and looked around for some clue of where he was, he caught her eye.

She smiled at him, a warm, motherly type smile, and offered an apple to him from the bag she held in her lap.

Harry stared at it.

"Don't you like green?" the lady asked, with a smile that made her whole face scream of sunshine, "I don't have a red one left" she pushed her offering closer to him, "come on" she coaxed, "I have plenty"

Harry smiled shyly, and with a small nod, accepted it. There was no way he could eat now, but it would be silly to turn down free food - although he had some money now, who knew how long that would last him. He toyed with it in his lap, but then felt the rumble in his stomach and greedily took a bite.

The lady huffed a little as she smiled at him.

"Are you visiting out here?" she asked, Harry noticing for the first time her broad Yorkshire accent. Harry chewed carefully, and swallowed.
"My mum's by herself in a nursing home" he confided, toying with the apple once again, "She's blind and she can't move her left side very well. She had a stroke."

The sunshine in the lady's smile, clouded with sympathy.

"I'm sorry to hear that" she said, sounding genuinely sorry, "Do you live down South?" thinking of where the train had come from.

Harry thought quickly.

"I was visiting a friend" he told her thinking of the boy in himself who he had left behind, "He needed me"

"Poorly?" The lady asked, still sympathetic, she seemed to catch herself, "Not that it's any of my business mind" she added quickly.

Harry's voice cracked. Suddenly he wanted nothing more than to talk about what had happened to him, but using the guise of a friend to take the brunt. Finally letting someone know what he had been through for so long.

"He left his husband"

The lady looked up, a small frown creasing her forehead.

"He was married to a horrible man, who used to beat him"

"No!" the lady softly gasped, saddened.

"It started right after their honeymoon" Harry continued, remembering, "At first he was charming, tender, but it all changed. He told my friend, if he left, then he would track him down, punish him"

A sob threatened to escape from his throat, and he looked out of the window to try and swallow it.

"He said, it was like the lyrics to this song, that he said was about them" Harry felt sick to the stomach, but he repeated the verse anyway.

_There's nowhere to run, _

_No place you can go, _

_Nowhere you can hide, _

_Where you won't be found, _

_There's no place on earth, _

_Where you could lay low _

_Wherever you are, _

_I will track you down. _

"He meant it" Harry remarked with a sniff, "His punishments were terrible"

The lady looked horrified, "Couldn't he call the police?"

Harry nodded, his eyes glistening with unshed tears, "Well, he did. He called them, and a lawyer
too. They said he could get a restraining order” he scoffed darkly, "It was pathetic"

The lady frowned, "Then how did he leave?"

Harry gazed out of the window, a far away expression in his eyes that matched the tone of his voice.

"He risked everything" he uttered, thinking of what was ahead of him, "Escaped. Started a new life" he nodded to himself, feeling more worried than he had been.

"Brave man" the lady commented nodding her approval.

Harry turned back to her, smiling tiredly, "He thinks he's a coward"

"A coward?" the lady asked softly, frowning once again, and sighing, "Not a man like that” she watched Harry, really looked at him, from his tired, bloodshot brown eyes, to the slight tremor in his hand where he held his apple, to the way he was trying so hard to swallow what seemed to be a lump in his throat.

"How long did you stay with him?" she finally asked, guessing who the friend really was. She watched as he looked at her, his eyes slightly wider.

"Too long" he murmured, "Three years, seven months...six days" his voice cracked with emotion as he finished his sentence, and he turned to face the window to try and cover up the lone tear creeping down his cheek bone. He wiped it on the back of his hand, then turned to the lady, giving her a watery smile, "Thank you for the apple"

Knowing their conversation was over, the lady smiled back, going back to her magazine as though his confession had never happened.

Harry turned back to the window, leant his forehead against it, letting the engine of the train lull him back to sleep. When he awoke, the lady was gone, but on the little table in front of him, was the bag with her remaining apples in it and a little note attached.

Your mum will be so proud of you.

I have a son around your age, and as a mother, I hope that if he ever got into a difficult situation, someone would be there for him if he needed it.

If you ever need anything, please don't hesitate to call.

I hope you finally get the life you deserve. You've been so brave.

J.Deakin

Following the note was a phone number. It was nice to know that there were kind selfless people out there. He wondered what the life she thought he deserved would be like.

Very carefully, he folded her note and stowed it safely in his bag. He would never phone "J. Deakin", but he would never forget the random act of kindness she had demonstrated.

There was never a question about where he would live once he reached Doncaster. There was a house there, purchased two years ago by a friend of the family, paid for by his mum, financed by the inheritance left to Harry by his father.

Harry had always been Anne’s baby, no matter how tall he grew, or how old he got, he would always be her baby.
She'd known immediately, when Harry and his new husband Zayn had visited her about six months into their marriage. The Harry that she had raised had been a vibrant, smiley bundle of enthusiasm and energy. The Harry that walked into her house, holding Zayn's hand was as far away from that as you could get. This Harry was a pale, quiet, skinny, overthinking ornament.

It worried her. It worried her more when he reached up to a high shelf to pass her down a gravy boat. His t-shirt had rucked up, and there on his prominent rib cage was a bruise the size of a tennis ball.

The moment Zayn got a phone call, Anne spirited her son out to the back garden, under the pretence of showing him her newly planted rose garden that she had planted in memory of her late husband and Harry's older sister Gemma.

"You have to leave him!" she hissed, "Please baby! You have to get out of this!"

Harry's words had made her heart break.

"I can't mummy" he'd replied, the same expression on his face that he'd worn when he pleaded with him mum to write him a note to get him out of swimming at school, "You don't understand, I can't just leave him! He'll come after me!" he dropped his voice to a terrified hiss, "He'd rather kill me than let me walk out!"

Anne grabbed Harry's cheeks, forcing him to look into her eyes, which were bright with passionate anger.

"I will handle everything" she assured him, completely ready to take any risk to stop her baby from going through any more pain, "Leave everything to me! The first moment that you can get away, you go! Everything will be in place, he'll never be able to find you. I promise!"

Harry's lower lip wobbled, throwing his arms around his mum, who was his whole world, and cried with her, at the uncontrolled mess that was now his life.

Zayn watched them out of the window. A mother and son, crying over the memories of their dead father/husband and sister/daughter.

Three months later, they visited again. Harry had shrank even further into his shell than last time. But by now the foundations had been set. She had bought Harry a house, one that couldn't be traced back to any of her sons family members.

She gave him a jumper as a gift, with the address of the property and code to the safe encrypted on a minuscule piece of paper sewn into the cuff. Even if Zayn did see the paper, he would never be able to understand the "secret language" that Gemma and Harry had made up when they were small.

Every day, she hoped and prayed that she would hear the news that Harry had managed to get away, and that he was safe.

Then, a year later, disaster struck. Anne suffered a stroke, blinded and half immobile, she had to give up her independence and go to live in a residential home.

The only thought she had, was that she had to take care of herself, she had to be strong so that her baby Harry had someone to run to - it terrified her that something worse could happen - and Harry really would be all alone.

Anne was always prominent on Harry's mind. He knew that the first person that Zayn would go after if he couldn't find Harry would be his mum - because he knew that Harry would do anything to
If he was to disappear, he would need to get her out of harms way. He would need to do that before he even considered leaving himself. He set everything up from the library. First he found his mum a new residential home, in the same city that his safe house was situated. Then he calmly left work early, got on a train from London to Holmes Chaple where his mum lived, spun a lie to the manager, then took her on the train to his new home.

"I miss your face", Anne whispered to him through her tears, "I never got to see you smile again"

"I have dimples mum" Harry reminded her, not being able to help but cry himself as he guided her hands to his face, "When I smile you'll feel it"

"You do know what you are doing don't you baby?" Anne asked, Knowing that Harry would have to go back to the monster that was his husband, "How long are you going to let this last?"

"As long as it takes to be believable" Harry told her quietly, "But", he thought of his swimming lessons, "I'm getting there"

"Will he really believe I'm dead?"

Harry shrugged, "That's the chance I have to take. But why would I lie?" His tone turned bitter, an acidic taste in his mouth, "He'll be glad you're gone. As far as he will be concerned, all I have is him now"

"I'm sorry I couldn't protect you more"

"I'm sorry I need protection"

"You will let me know won't you? When you get away, so I know you are safe. I know you won't be able to visit me. Just knowing you are safe will be the best day of my life"

Anne was crying again, fearing that this could be the last time she was with her baby boy.

If Zayn got a hint about what Harry was planning, who knew what horrific things he was capable of doing to her precious son.

Harry cuddled her close, both of them quiet, both of them trying not to think of the worst, and commit this moment to memory.

Neither of them wanted Harry to leave, but he knew he had to go - how else would he be able to finish the final steps to his plan if he didn't.

Anne and Harry didn't say goodbye, they said "I love you"

As soon as he got off the train at the station in Doncaster, the first thing Harry did was find a florist shop, where he chose a bouquet of flowers based upon scent and not beauty and sent them to his mum. He asked the florist to print the card.

All the love on the best day of your life

When Anne received them the next day, she couldn't explain the tears of happiness that fell from her eyes, or the huge smile that wouldn't fade from her face as the card was read to her.
There would never be big enough words to describe how much of a weight had been lifted off her shoulders, with the knowledge that her baby boy was finally safe.

It was the first time he had seen his new home, and it was as welcoming as an oasis in the desert.

The key to the back door was still hidden exactly where Anne had left it, under a loose paving slab in the greenhouse in the back garden (which was so over grown it resembled a small jungle).

The house in itself was a good size, not huge so that Harry would rattle around in it, but not so small so that he would feel claustrophobic.

But to be honest, Harry wouldn't care if it was just one small room - the point was, it was his little sanctuary.

It smelt musty and starved of fresh air, dust partials filled the air as he moved from room to room, examining the modest furniture and trying to find the safe.

Ironically, it was in the cupboard under the stairs which made Harry chuckle.

Inside was everything he needed. The rest of the keys to the house, the fob for the electricity meter, the house deeds, a large pile of bank notes, and a note from Anne.

Welcome home baby. I love you xx

It was probably why he had instantly felt so comfortable here, this wasn't a strange house, it was one that his mum had chosen and brought for him, someone who had spent time here planning for his arrival, which was why it felt like he was coming home.

Still overly tired from his journey, Harry grabbed a blanket and a pillow from the airing cupboard, and because he could, settled down in the biggest bedroom for a nap, grinning to himself when he realised he didn't have to ask permission first.

"WAKING UP BESIDE YOU I'M A LOADED GUN...."

Harry woke up abruptly, the loud obnoxious singing from somewhere outside interrupting his much needed kip!

"I CAN'T CONTAIN THIS ANYMORE, I'M ALL YOURS I'VE GOT NO CONTROL! NO CONTROL!"

Bleary eyed and confused by the sudden noise, Harry rolled out of bed, staggering over to the window that overlooked the back garden, as well as his neighbours - this must be one of them now.

Rubbing his eyes, to get a clearer view, he leant on the window ledge, watching.

It was a boy. Wearing long black basketball shorts, a high necked tank top and a backwards baseball cap. He was singing at the top of his lungs, jumping around the grassy lawn in his garden and brandishing a hose. It looked like he was meant to be watering the garden, but was paying so much attention to jumping about and singing, that he was getting more wet than the plants were - his shirt sticking wetly to his skin.

It looked like so much fun!
Harry watched the boy wistfully, wishing that he could run out and join the boy, sing so loud that he’d lose his voice, jump around and get so stupidly wet and dirty! He couldn't remember the last time he'd done something silly and funny like that. Zayn would have never allowed it. But Zayn wasn't here...if he wanted to...he could go and introduce himself to his new...

Harry jolted back from the window as though the sill had electrified him. What the hell was he thinking! The last thing Harry needed right now was the complication of a person in his life, what Harry needed now was sleep. As he settled down once more, he couldn't help but think that his next door neighbour had an outstanding singing voice.

Maybe one day he'd tell him.
For the next four days, Harry didn't leave his house - there was so much to do. Everything in the house needed to be cleaned, tidied and turned into a habitat that a human could live in after a couple of years of being empty and desolate.

Harry scrubbed the floors, hung the curtains and the bed linen out to air, polished the surfaces, and tackled the cobwebs. It took hours, but for the first time, cleaning was actually enjoyable, because he was doing it purely for his benefit.

It was strange to think that he actually lived on his own. He was so used to having to creep around and keep quiet so as not to disturb Zayn, that for the first couple of days he slipped back into his habits of tip toeing from room to room, not even realising he was doing it, until he suddenly remembered, and celebrated in style by sliding down the banister, laughing hysterically at how silly the whole situation was!

When he had been with Zayn, he had only been allowed to drink water, so the first time he made himself a mug of green tea was a much bigger event than it should have been, but also even more satisfying, especially when he paired it with sinking into his new favourite armchair, putting his feet up on the coffee table (which of course had been forbidden), and lazily thinking of how perfect this all was. The knowledge of his freedom would never get old.

A car door slammed outside, the same time as it had done every day since he'd moved in, and Harry jumped up to race to the living room window to peer out.

His neighbour was home.

The boy, who had awoken him with his loud singing, was home, this time wearing a red footie kit.
His longish hair (which reminded Harry strongly of melted milk chocolate), tamed and held back from his face with a black hair band.

Even from this distance, Harry could see that the scruff around his face had grown since he'd seen him yesterday, and he had to say that it suited him.

The boy was trying to juggle a large duffle bag in one hand, a large shopping bag in the other, and sort out -what was presumably his house keys all at the same time, until he got in a tangle, dropped the duffle bag on the driveway and left it there, choosing to let himself into his house first.

Harry watched all of this, stupidly mesmerised.

He didn't understand why, but there was something about this particular boy that had just got inside his head and he just couldn't stop thinking about him, couldn't stop watching him.

Harry was just inexplicably drawn to the stranger, paying attention to all the little things that seemed to make him who he was - whoever that may be.

Harry noticed that he almost always wore his shoes without socks, rolling up the cuffs, showing off his dainty ankles, except when he was messing about in his back garden when he would run around barefoot.

Sometimes he carried a backpack, sometimes his pockets looked so full of stuff when he didn't carry one, that Harry was convinced that his jeans would fall down if his bottom hadn't been so...ample.

He liked to sing. Harry loved his voice. It was so strong and powearful, and he always sounded so passionate, as though, instead of sitting in his back garden, he was performing in front of a 75,000 strong crowd cheering his name - whatever that was!

Harry leant forward as the boy wandered back down the drive to retrieve his duffle bag. Harry's nose was almost touching the window, transfixed on how he was dawdling along, tapping on his phone.

Suddenly he stopped, with a small frown on his face he looked up, then slowly looked around him, scanning his surroundings.

Harry jumped backwards away from the window, even though there was a net curtain between him and the glass, the boy looked as though he was staring directly at him, rather resembling a meerkat in the way he craned his neck, squinting. Harry held his breath, but before he could decide what he would do if the boy was to approach the house, he had shrugged his shoulders and returned to his own front door.

The moment he disappeared inside and shut it behind him, Harry wished instantly that he hadn't. How could he admire someone, who wasn't there?

"What are we doing tonight?" Stanley Lucas asked Louis Tomlinson, reaching in the cooler between the two sun loungers and helping himself to another can of beer, "Wanna call the boys and go to a club?"

"Wha?" asked Louis distractedly, turning to his best mate and flicking his sunglasses down to see him properly, taking a gulp from his own can.

Stan rolled his eyes, "You. Me. The boys. Club. Tonight."
But he still didn't even have his attention. Louis was frowning, and looking at the house next door.

"What are you looking at?" Stan demanded, removing his glasses and obviously craning his neck to see exactly what it was that had captured Louis to such distraction.

Louis made an irritated grunt, and swatted at Stan.

"Nothing now," he complained in his thick accent, "They've gone. You had to make it fucking obvious didn't ya!"

"Who?" Stan shoved Louis back, smirking, "Watch my drink!" he muttered under his breath rather fondly, "prick!"

Louis removed his sunglasses. The only reason he'd been wearing them in the first place was so he could keep a close eye on next door. Especially the large window on the top floor.

He had been sure there had been someone there, and when Stan had made it obvious that they were looking, he was certain that he saw the curtains twitch, and a shadow back away.

"Someone's moved in" Louis sounded distracted, and for good reason. He knew someone was living in what he'd always known as an empty house, yet he hadn't seen anyone. He had however, felt something.

The first time had been in the evening exactly four nights ago when he'd been having a nice little sing song as he watered the garden (fucked about with the hose pipe), and he felt...eyes on him...and a warmth he couldn't explain, surging from within.

A born performer, Louis sung even louder to his unseen audience, jumping around even more erractically than he had done before, not going in until he was completely drenched, and the feeling he'd felt had disappeared. His audience had obviously retired.

The days that followed brought much of the same, every time he was outside, he could feel that someone was watching him. Sometimes he'd examined the windows, looking for that mysterious someone who he now shared a wall with.

A couple of times he'd been convinced that he'd seen a curtain twitch, and after football practice - when he'd strategically dropped his kit bag on the driveway, so he had to go back for it, and get a longer look - he'd considered boldly going up to the front door, giving it a knock and see what happened.

But there was this voice, in his head, telling him that it wasn't the right time. So he just picked up his bag, and went inside, trying to imagine what the eyes looked like that seemed to follow his every move so fondly.

"Do you ever get the feeling that something huge is about to happen?" Louis asked seriously, laying back in his lounger, enjoying how the sunshine was warming his already sunkissed skin. He crushed his empty can with his hands and cracking open another one, "That you're on the brink of something that's just going to change your life?"

"I think you've turned into a lightweight if you're spouting shit like that!" Stan smirked, "What's up with you Tommo? You've been distant all day."

"Could still drink you under the table" Louis muttered, "And I'm fine, I'm just...waiting.."
"For this huge life changing something? Do you even know what it is?"

"Not exactly" grumbled Louis, "But I bet you anything it's to do with whoever just moved into that house" he couldn't keep his eyes off that window. He could see a shadow lurking behind the net curtain.

The rest of the afternoon passed lazily. Chat about football, turned into chat about their mates, what girls they were getting with, who they were texting to go on a night out with that evening, getting more lubricated by the beer as the hours ticked by.

"Taxi's getting here in twenty" Stan announced bouncing into Louis' bedroom with a bottle of vodka, and two shot glasses, to find his mate fixing his hair, "Who are you trying to impress?" he laughed, "Gonna strut past next door and hope whoever is in there is gonna run out and jump ya?"

Louis glared at him through the mirror. That actually had been his plan! For fucks sake, why did Stan have to know him that well?

Maybe he had put on his tightest jeans, and worn a t-shirt that showed off his collarbones and chest tattoo, but that was his business...

Three shots of vodka later, he checked his hair again in the mirror. He wondered if the stranger was male or female (he had the strong feeling they were male). He spritzed himself with aftershave (Stan pretended to gag and ran off sarcastically chuckling), Louis wondered fleetingly if the smell would be to the shadow's taste. He gulped another shot.

By the time Stan called Louis to say the taxi had arrived, he was feeling pleasantly buzzed.

The night air was still warm and the freshness of it seemed to heighten his senses.

"Oy! Get your fucking ass in the car!" Stan shouted from the road. Louis couldn't half drag his feet when he wanted, and the meter was running!

Louis gave him the thumbs up, shoving his house key deep in his pocket along with his phone, and was half way down the drive when he could feel the eyes once more.

Maybe it was because he was a little tipsy, and the alcohol had given him some extra confidence (not that he needed it), but when he got halfway to the car, he turned to face the downstairs window. He cocked his head curiously, when for the first time saw the proper outline of a person inside.

In other circumstances, Louis would have felt like he was in some plot of a horror film, and that he was next on the casualty list. But the little voice was whispering in his ear, reassuring him that the shadow was much more scared of him that he could ever be of it.

Louis took a deep breath, then grinned his biggest smile and gave the outline a cheeky little wave.

For a second, there was no movement, then the bottom of the curtain twitched. Louis found himself holding his breath as a large pale hand, clasped in a tight fist inched its way under the lace, slowly uncurling, and hesitantly, waved back.

Chapter End Notes

Hiya, thank you so much for reading and your comments and kudos! It's been seriously
overwhelming so far, and I really hope I can continue to your satisfaction!
I'm going to have to take a couple of days longer than usual for the next chapter - I have coursework that needs my undivided attention!
Take care, and hope you like it so far :) xxx
As soon as Harry waved to the boy from his position behind the curtain, he instantly regretted it, or did he?

Although looking a little stunned at first, which had faltered the boys smile, he had quickly steadied himself, squared his shoulders slightly, and with a quirky little head bop, took a couple of steps towards Harry's front door!

Harry was torn, whilst half of him was panicking about - neighbour or no neighbour - a male stranger approaching his front door! The other half was wishing that he was wearing a nicer shirt and that he'd bothered to brush his hair. He began to anxiously smooth down his hair without even realising it, clearing his throat, poised to rush to the door, when...

"Don't even think about it!"

Stan's hand closed around Louis' shoulder stopping him in his tracks.

"You are not ditching me before we have left the drive" Stan told him sternly, whilst raising his eyebrows, "It's also really late for someone who's staying in tonight, and no offence mate, but your breath reeks of booze!"

Louis' eyes popped open, slapping a palmed hand over his mouth, demonstrating just how tipsy he actually was.

"But they waved to me!" Louis slightly slurred brandishing a finger at Harry's window.

Stan frowned, holding his mate steady, and peered at the darkened glass, not able to see anything on the inside, only himself and Louis, who, still had his hand over his mouth, and making a silly face.

"Did you wave at your own reflection?" Stan chortled, cuffing Louis around the back of his head, who let out an indignant snort of laughter,
"Come on mate, we can both wave at your stunning reflection all the way to the club" Stan promised, smacking a playful kiss where he'd cuffed him, then darting out of the way when Louis decided to retaliate by sucking his finger, and trying to stick it in Stan's ear!

Now positioned at the upstairs window, Harry struggled not to laugh too loudly, taking up his now usual position of leaning on the window sill, grinning as he watched the two boys lark about, finally getting a warning from their taxi driver about keeping him waiting.

As the car drove off down the street, Harry reluctantly tore himself away, just as the taxi's tail lights disappeared out of sight, and took himself to bed.

It was so silly, he thought as he turned out the lights, that he didn't even know this person, but yet he was actually feeling a small sense of loss, knowing that the boy wasn't just next door.

Cuddling down under his duvet, Harry closed his eyes, a soft smile on his lips as he thought of how undeniably handsome he'd looked when he was at a distance. But tonight, they had only been a few feet away, and Harry had completely changed his mind about his neighbours appearance - he wasn't just handsome, he was absolutely bow-down-to-the-Gods-and-thank-them-for-their-work stunning!

Harry remembered how his stomach had swooped when he'd seen his face break into that infectious smile - was it really possible that he'd felt butterflies? He'd never felt butterflies like that before, not even when he'd met Zayn.

Zayn.

At the mere thought of his ex husband's name, Harry felt a chill closing in on him from all angles.

When they had first met, Harry had thought Zayn was wonderful. A gorgeous, eloquent, intelligent, charming, tender, romantic man. One who Harry had once wanted to spend the rest of his life with.

And look how that had turned out, he thought darkly, feeling the pretty, angelic little butterfly that fluttered so romantically in his tummy, transform into a vicious, twisting, venomous snake. An accurate imagery of how his feelings had changed towards Zayn.

Harry wasn't stupid, he was attracted to the boy next door. It didn't matter that they had never formally met. He just seemed like the kind of person, who you could just sit, and admire him for who he was.

Which was probably what was best. After all, what if he changed into another Zayn? What if he made Harry fall for him and then broke his heart?

Maybe only admiring him at a distance was the best thing - Harry had only seen him a few times, but he just got the feeling he was someone special, he felt it in his gut. But he didn't want to be disappointed again.

With these thoughts in his mind, it took a long time for him to fall asleep - even harder when he heard the boy next door return in the early hours of the morning, roaring with laughter outside.

How he wished he could be out there laughing with him.

"Fuck me!" Louis almost spat out his tea, "Stan! Get over here now!"

Louis would have gone to shake his best mate awake, but that would mean moving away from the
window, and there was no way he was giving up this view.

Stan grunted a little in his sleep, and pulled his cover up over his head. Louis chucked a pillow in his direction. The muttering of swear words affirmed it had met his target.

For the first time he could actually see his neighbour, and that was definitely a sight worth waiting for.

First of all, he was most definitely male. Second of all, he was hot!

The lad was in his garden, shirtless, wearing a tight pair of shorts (that didn't leave any part of his cute little bum to the imagination), seeming to be surveying the overgrown mass of foliage that was swamping his garden.

The state of the garden though was invisible to Louis.

Eyes almost bugging out of their sockets, trying not to blink, absorbing the sight of long, lean legs, milky white and mouth watering thighs that had Louis salivating. Taking a gulp of tea, mainly just for something to do with his mouth, Louis drank in the smooth skin of his back, broad shoulders, tight little waist - if that was just what he looked like from behind, Louis was itching to see what his face looked like!

Just like he'd heard him, the lad turned around to pick up a pair of...large scissors?

Regardless, Louis was completely prepared to jump from the window, just in case he was fortunate to land on that achingly beautiful face - one that even made someone like Louis Tomlinson lost for words!

And that was before he'd checked out what else in those little shorts wasn't left to the imagination!

Harry was absolutely shattered. All day he'd been trying to sort out the complete mess that was meant to be his garden - which was an even bigger job than he'd considered.

However, he had discovered that his handsome next door neighbour had a rather large apple tree, right next to the adjoining fence, groaning under the weight of it's bounty.

Knowing the boy next door had gone out again, with the other boy, who always seemed to hang out at the house, Harry - torch in hand - decided to find out what they tasted like. He knew it wasn't his property, and it would technically be stealing, but with so many hanging off the branches, he didn't think the boy would miss just a couple - as fun as he looked, he didn't seem like the kind of person who would know what to do with them anyway.

Harry reached up into the thick branches of the tree, and plucked a sample down, giving it a quick sniff, examining th surface of its skin, nodding in approval and popping it into the little bucket he was balancing on the roof of his neighbours shed. He could see himself doing some quality baking the next day - but he'd get the fun of deciding what to make later. A pie? A crumble? Turnovers? If Harry got enough, he could make a little taster platter of all three - and he'd been so starved of "treat" food that the idea was positively heavenly!

The bucket was half full, but Harry had spotted some absolute beauties a little higher up. Harry was quite tall, but because he was having to stand about a foot away from the fence, due all the shrubs in the way, his height wasn't giving him much of an advantage.
"Let me help you with that" a warm, slightly sarcastic, heavily accented voice cut into his thoughts.

The branch that Harry had been aiming for, slowly descended downwards, making it the perfect height for him to reach.

"Thanks" he grinned, picking another apple, placing it into the bucket. How nice of the boy next door to help him.

The boy next door?!

His head snapped up, as did his hand holding the torch, shining its full beam right into the boy's amused face. He was stood right underneath the tree, both arms stretched as high as they could go to grip that one branch with both hands, pulling it firmly down.

As the light from the torch hit his eyes, the boy let the branch go to shield his face, making it spring back up into the tree, forcing it shed its fruit, raining apples down onto his own head.

"Nice one curly" the boy winced, screwing his eyes shut, and rubbed his shoulder where he'd been hit, "Point that death trap somewhere else!"

But Harry was frozen to the spot. Not only had he been caught red handed - stealing from his neighbours fruit tree, but he'd possibly blinded him as well! This was about as bad as first encounters got!

Still feeling the light on his face, the boy reached out, groping in front of him with his hand. Harry watched with amazement, until the tips of said fingers came into contact with his own arm.

A surge of electricity shot through his arm, the tiny patch of skin and hair burning white hot heat. Harry dropped his arm, crying out as it hit the fence, hearing a thud as the torch plunged into a bush.

"You do know those things have an off button right?" the boy next door had his eyes open once again, and although it was dark, Harry saw them twinkling.

"Uh...I..." Harry was at a loss, still. He couldn't over the fact that the boy was right in front of him - chatting!

The boy must have been trying to stand on tip toes to look over the fence, because there was a strange scuffling noise where his feet would be, and the wood shook.

"Down there"

Harry shook his head to clear his thoughts of unreadable static.

"What?" He asked dumbly. The boy next door was talking to him.

The most delightful little laugh, one that he'd wished he'd been involved with many times, echoed around the garden.

"You're so cute! Hold on curly, I'm coming in!"

Harry blinked in surprise, watching as the boy heaved himself up onto the shed, then jumped down besides him, immediately bending down to retrieve his torch - which amazingly was still burning brightly.

"Here you go!"
He sounded quite proud of himself. Harry took in a breath, then wished he hadn't. He hadn't registered the stunning boy had been so close, and as he breathed in, whatever fragrance got caught in Harry's nose - he smelled absolutely delicious! His hand closed around something hard...just the torch...he hadn't been thinking of anything else...nothing...well, almost nothing. His face reddened, it would be just like him to say that aloud!

"So, what are you doing to do with these then?"

It was official. Harry's mind was blank. All he could see in front of him was soft hair longing to be stroked and smell something he really wanted to be bathed in.

"Are you alright?" the amused, flamboyant tone was replaced with one slightly concerned. Well of course it was. Harry was being a silent, wide eyed, looser!

The torch was snatched out of his limp hand and shone up and down him. Harry blinked in the light. With the glare on him, he couldn't see the boy - which was a good thing, for said boy was positively drooling over Harry.

"You're bleeding mate" he announced, shining the light on the arm which had scraped painfully against the fence, "Eugh, that's rank, does it hurt?"

Sure enough, there was a rather angry graze along his forearm, with a few pin pricks of blood here and there.

It wasn't exactly anything to fall to pieces over. Harry had experienced much worse.

The boy next door didn't exactly fall to pieces over it per say, but he did seem to consider the minor injury a big deal. Before Harry knew what was happening, he had been taken by the elbow (his skin once again thrumming from the heat of their contact), and ushered down the garden path and into his own kitchen, where he was promptly sat down in a chair and told "Don't move"

Then the boy left!

Harry sat quietly, trying to take stock of what had just happened. Was he in some kind of weird and wonderful dream? He could still feel the burn on his elbow where the boy had held his arm, still smell his musk in the air, still see that hypnotising smile.

"I knew mum got me this for a reason"

The boy let himself back in through the kitchen door, holding a small first aid kit and looking very pleased with himself.

"Don't worry curly, I'll get you fixed up in no time!"

Harry cleared his throat, his mouth felt like it was stuffed full of cotton wool.

"It's just a scratch" he mumbled, feeling a blush heat his cheeks.

"No" the boy deadpanned, "It's a chance for me to show off my 'schmazing' first aid skills! Now let's see what we're dealing with"

He pulled out a chair next to Harry, picked up Harry's limp arm and laid it gently on the table.

"It's a good thing I caught this in time" he said mock seriously, as he examined the superficial wound, "This could have gotten infected, developed gangreen and fallen off overnight!"
A snort of laughter found its way up Harry's windpipe, bursting out of his lips with force. The boy looked quite pleased.

"So?" He asked, jumping from the table to wet a piece of actual cotton wool, "Introductions. I'm Louis Tomlinson, and I will be your doctor for this evening" he smirked as he sat down, "But you may call me..." He pondered. "Dr Tommo!"

Louis.

Harry smiled as the considered the boys name and how perfect it would sound slipping off of his tongue. Of all the names it could have been, that was the most fitting of all of them. Louis and Harry. Harry and Louis. His eyes widened a bit, and he blushed a little more, embarrassed by his own musings.

"And you are? I believe with introductions, you're meant to introduce yourself too" Louis grinned, but Harry barely noticed the smile, he was too caught up with how daintily 'Louis' was dabbing at the graze on his arm, as though it was something magnificent that needed to be cherished and saved.

"We'll start again" Louis put the now slightly pink cotton to the side, and put his face close to Harry's arm, inspecting the slight injury, "I am Dr Louis Tommo, and my patients name is....?"

He had adapted a voice of a talk show host, and had gestured flamboyantly to Harry, who half expected a drum roll to start up.

Shit! He had not prepared for this! He'd been so busy cleaning, and not expecting to talk to anyone yet, that he hadn't even come up with a fake name to go with the fake brown lenses that he still kept in his eyes.

"And my patients name is....?" Louis tried again, then rolled his eyes, "Mate. I'm trying to tell you that you've got a couple of splinters. If I mess this up and pop a vein, I'm gonna need to tell the paramedics what your name is"

"Liam" Harry told him, sounding and feeling slightly strangled, saying the first name that came into his head.

Louis cocked his head to the side, giving Harry a wonderful view of his strong, scruff covered jawline.

"Really?" he asked, slightly disappointed, "You don't look like a Liam" he busied himself with a pair of tweezers (which weren't really necessary, but Harry had the feeling he was enjoying playing 'Dr Tommo' and wanted to use everything in his little kit), approaching a tiny splinter of fence, with little crabby pincer actions.

"I know a Liam" he stated, "And trust me. I know a Liam when I see one. And you my curly friend are not one" he laughed, "So Patient Curly it is then"

He stopped talking to concentrate, sticking his tongue out a little as he jabbed with his tweezers. He was so sweet. So tender. And his jaw looked so...biteable!

Trying to hold down a cough, Harry watched transfixed as Louis evenly spread a little antiseptic cream over his graze, then fussed about with a square of gauze, making sure it was fully covering the patch of reddened skin before taping it down.

Zayn had never been so caring with Harry's injuries, even when he'd been the one who had caused them.
"All fixed!" Louis announced cutting the last bit of tape with a flourish, "You'll be back on your feet in no time Liam" he stopped and considered, "I'm really sorry" he apologised, "But that name really doesn't suit you at all!"

Well of course it doesn't. Harry thought to himself, it's not my name! It occurred to him that it might be a sign that Louis recognised this, but then again, it could be nothing.

"What name does suit me?" He asked, painfully aware that he's speed of speech was so much slower and deliberate than Louis'.

"I'm working on it" Louis shrugged, putting his kit back together and shoving it across the table, "But from now on, you're just gonna have to deal with me calling you curly" he leant forward and twirled a few wayward strands of Harry's hair around his finger.

Harry felt his heart rate increase.

"Doctor Tommo is officially off duty" Louis commented, putting his feet up on the next chair and stretching, "So, what were you going to do with my apples eh?"

Chapter End Notes

So I know I said this wouldn't be up until tomorrow, but I was so excited by the sheer number of kudos and subscribers I've received since the last one! Hope this was acceptable to you lovely people! Ok, now I'm going to be back to my coursework! Hope you like it :) :) :) Larry have officially met!! Xxx
To save confusion, I'd like to clear up a small detail. As far as Louis knows, Harry's name is Liam. When Liam is mentioned, it will be from Louis' POV, and when Harry is mentioned, it will be from Harry's own thoughts.

Harry looked out of the window nervously. It was almost 6pm and Louis still hadn't come home yet. He wasn't worried about Louis exactly, but very apprehensive about the evening ahead - and excited. He was nervously excited.

After stuttering through what he had planned to do with the apples he'd stollen from Louis' garden, blushing with shy pleasure, when the boy had sounded so impressed that he could actually make delicious sounding dishes from raw ingredients, he had somehow thought it was a great idea to invite Louis around to sample them the next evening.

To say Louis liked the idea was understated, Harry had barely finished his sentence before Louis was nodding enthusiastically, and telling him that he should be home about sixish, so how would seven sound?

Still surprised by his own boldness, Harry had just agreed.

"Can't wait Curly" Louis had stated, before yawning loudly and saying goodnight.

It didn't take Harry long to fall asleep that night. It felt so good to be able to look forward to spending time with someone, especially Louis, who he was beginning to think he would like to spend a lot of time with.

It was in the morning that he'd began to worry. First he needed to do some shopping to get the extras - he couldn't just serve Louis desert, he'd need to make him a proper dinner - and then was when the
first wave of panic set in. Did Louis have special food requirements? Was he vegetarian? Vegan? Lactose intolerant? Harry had no idea because he hadn't thought to ask! What if he guessed and he got it wrong and ended up looking really stupid and inconsiderate? What if Louis got angry because he hadn't guessed correctly?

There was only one thing to do. Ask. And that was why Harry had dashed outside, the moment Louis left the house at 7am.

"What do you like to eat?" he blurted out, before Louis even had enough time to recognise his presence and say hello.

"What?" Louis smiled a little sleepily, "Eat?"

"For dinner, what do you like to eat?" Harry asked again, twisting his fingers into a knot, "I'm sorry I didn't ask you last night. But I can't just serve you desert and I don't want you to get hungry, so I thought..." he trailed off as Louis' smile widened, "You might be vegetarian" he started up again, "or vegan, and have allergies...what?" He asked suspiciously as Louis tried to muffle a laugh, "What's funny?"

Harry shuffled his feet, self conscious and shy, looking at the ground, rather afraid that he'd screwed up already.

"You're just the sweetest thing"

Harry's head snapped up. The look upon Louis' face was not what he was expecting. Eyes crinkling at the corners, he looked so touched and happy. Harry smiled back. He couldn't help himself. He also stopped fidgeting - Louis' approval was just so instantly soothing.

"You really got up this early to make sure I don't have allergies?"

Louis beamed at him, and before Harry knew what was happening, he was being pulled down into a huge hug, Louis wrapping his arms around his waist, Harry slipping his around Louis' neck. Even during spontaneous hugs, they just felt so...compatible.

Considering how they had only just met yesterday, theoretically they shouldn't be at the hugging stage yet, especially ones that lasted this long, but neither Louis or Harry wanted to let go. They just stood there, each in their own little dreamworld, naturally slotting together like they had hugged this way a thousand times before.

It was Harry who had pulled away first, reluctantly, but he still needed an answer to his question.

"You know what?" Louis said aloud, when Harry had posed the question a second time, "How about I cook us the dinner bit, I mean" he stuffed his hands in his pockets, exhaled a little snort and looked to the side grinning, "I'll be honest I can't cook for shit, but since you're going to so much effort for me" he nodded to himself, "I'd really like to give it a go."

Now it was Harry who looked like Louis had just offered him the world in the palm of his hand. "I don't want to put you to any trouble!" he jumped in, "I mean, I invited you. It should really be me to do it for you!"

After all, Harry considered, it really is the thought that counts.

"Sorry Curly, it's already a done deal" Louis shrugged, and with a knowing smile, he reluctantly checked his watch, "I've got to go to work" he complained, he turned to the car as though cursing it's existence, "You don't happen to need a lift into town do you?" he asked hopefully. He just wasn't
ready to say goodbye yet. Even if he was going to be seeing the lad again in less than twelve hours.

"Well actually..." Harry began, "I could do with..."

"Hop in then!"

Whilst Harry ran to slip on his shoes, pick up his wallet and lock up the house, Louis jumped in his car, hastily chucking what rubbish he'd left on the front seat into the back, and hoping Liam wouldn't notice. He couldn't get over how utterly charming this lad was, and he knew he was being greedy for his company, but there was so much he wanted to find out about him.

It was a disappointingly short trip. The town was only a ten minute drive away from their houses, and Louis filled it all, asking Harry about what he had planned for his day.

"If you want help with your garden, I've got a mate who would be grateful for the work" he commented when Harry said something about tackling the shrubs, "He doesn't charge much, and he's really good. He did a stella job with mine"

Harry thought of how neat and organised Louis' garden was in comparison to his own. If he was completely honest, he had thought that Louis might have for help with it - he didn't seem to be the type to spend an afternoon cutting the grass, or planting pretty flowers.

"I kind of like gardening" he voiced quietly. It felt weird that he was openly mentioning something he liked to do. He didn't want to offend Louis' offer of getting his mate to help him out though. But Louis was just checking his mirrors, nodding, grinning at him - accepting him.

Zayn would have been mortally offended if Harry had turned down the help from one of his friends.

"Ok Curly, I've got to park in there" Louis announced, pulling up at a large gate and pointing into a car park, "I will see you at seven, at your place, with dinner" he grinned happily, "Can I bring anything else?"

Harry, half way out of the car, poked his head back in and instantly smiled, delighting Louis no end when he spotted he had popped a dimple (Louis loved dimples).

"Just yourself" he said softly, after all, that was all he really wanted. Just another excuse to spend more time with Louis.

Louis' eyes crinkled, "So cute" Harry blushed, almost stumbling out of the car, making him blush even more.

"Hey Curly!" Louis shouted to him, when he was half way across the road, "You got any allergies?"

He sounded so cheeky, looked so chuffed with himself, Harry burst out laughing. He shook his head, still smiling. Leaning out of his cars window, Louis gave him a thumbs up, then turned away, driving into, what looked to be the car park of a school. Harry would have to ask him about that later.

Walking into the main shopping street, Harry thought about how Louis had asked about his allergies, and how he'd found it funny because Louis was teasing him about how he'd worried so much about it - but the nice kind of teasing, the reassuring type of teasing. He and Louis had an inside joke - something little and stupid, and just between them. It felt wonderful.

Shopping hadn't been relaxing in any way shape or form. Not being allowed to have much say in things for such a long time, made simple choices overwhelmingly complicated. Choosing a selection
of drinks took about an hour because of his dithering, and Harry abandoned buying more clothes than just one simple t-shirt, a pair of jeans, some boxer briefs and some socks, because the range of choice was just too wide.

Now it was 6pm. The crumble had been lovingly prepared to Harry's highest standard. The drinks were chilling in the fridge and the table was set. He was dressed in his new clothes, hair freshly washed, a fresh pair of brown contacts covering his own green irises.

Harry was ready. Now. Where was Louis?

"Right, what am I cooking?" Louis questioned Niall Horan, one of his closest friends, the moment Niall got into his car, equipped with two huge bags, "We're going to have time right? Only..." he checked his watch, "We're running late!"

Niall let out a loud infectious laugh, and grinned at Louis' anxious face.

"Do not worry my kitchen-phobe friend, you will be absolutely fine. I have your back mate!"

Louis nodded, feeling better. He hadn't been lying, he was the worst person to ever be trusted to let loose in a kitchen. But Liam had been so worried about cooking for him, it felt like it would be an anxiety attack waiting to happen, and Louis didn't want to be the cause of making such a beautiful boy unhappy.

And if that meant spending a little time in the kitchen, then so be it.

However, he couldn't actually cook. So, he called Niall - who fortunately for him, enjoyed cooking as much as he enjoyed eating - one of his favourite hobbies.

They arrived at Louis' house at about 6:15pm. Taking one of the bags off Niall, Louis instantly looked towards Liam's living room and waving, knowing the adorable curly haired boy was waiting by it. Instantly the net curtain was thrown up, and Liam's happy face appeared, waving back.

Louis noticed how it faltered, realising quickly that it was probably down to Niall's appearance, so throwing his mate the keys to the front door, he jogged to Liam's door.

"He's not staying" was the first thing out of Louis' mouth as Liam threw open the door, "He's just helping me with something"

Louis gave the air a sniff, "Ooh, something smells amazing in her Curly! I won't be long!" bouncing on the balls on his feet, he gave Liam an unexpected peck on the cheek. His skin felt so smooth against his lips, and maybe he did let it linger a little while longer - and wonder how soft his lips were - hopefully he'd find out soon!

"Louis! Get the fuck into this kitchen!" Niall shouted as Louis bounded into the house, "I said I would help you, not do it!"

"I'm here!"

Niall was setting equipment up on the surfaces, correctly guessing that Louis would not have anything that they needed to use.

"Ok" he stated once he had Louis' undivided attention, "You are having crumble tonight right?"
Louis confirmed with a head nod, wondering if he was going to have time for a shower - it was already 6:30!

"So, we are going to make a nice, light, warm chicken salad, with a homemade dressing" Niall explained slowly, holding up a paper bag with two chicken thighs inside, "You go and get the salad bits, and I'll prep the meat."

Louis looked lost. Was he meant to buy salad? When had Niall mentioned about buying salad?

"You're not moving" Niall commented, sounding smiley even though he was frowning in concentration.

"I forgot to buy the salad" Louis groaned, "I'm so sorry!"

Niall turned frowning.

"You don't need to buy it. You've got everything you need in your greenhouse." he rolled his eyes as though he should have guessed, "You forgot it was there didn't you"

Louis had the grace to look sheepish.

"You had better have been watering them," Niall warned, "If it's all dead out there, you my friend are royally screwed!"

The pair trooped out to Louis' greenhouse, both breathing a sigh of relief at the contents.

"I'll pick the tomatoes and the cucumbers" Niall instructed Louis, handing him a bowl, "Pick out some nice leaves"

"Like this?" Louis asked, holding up a small lettuce plant, with the roots and a bit of earth dangling from it.

Niall's eyes rolled once more. This was going to be harder than he had anticipated.

"Not the whole plant Lou" he reminded his friend carefully, "Just cut the leaves off"

"I'm going to screw this up aren't I" Louis worried aloud, concentrating very seriously on finding the perfect leaves, "I'm going to give him food poisoning and he's going to hate me!"

"Less whining, more cutting please" Niall took a look at what his mate had collected, "Nice, well done Lou," he smiled, feeling as though his friend needed some encouragement, he really did seem really nervous about this. Of course, it was because he really wanted to impress this new boy - a great deal. Louis was notorious for ordering in pizza on dates!

Back in the kitchen, Niall turned his attention back to the chicken, telling Louis to wash the lettuce, then chop the rest of salad.

"You have got to be kidding me!" he exclaimed less than a minute later, jaw dropping at exactly what Louis was doing.

"What?" exclaimed Louis, high pitched and shrill, "I'm doing exactly what you told me too!"

Suds dripped off his fingers as he held a bunch of leaves in a bowl of soap filled water.

"Not with soap! Oh, give me strength!" Niall scraped his hands down his face, "Throw those out! Go get some more! You absolute prick!"
Louis' face fell, gathered the ruined leaves up and dumped them into the bin, shuffling back out to the greenhouse, looking completely deflated.

He soon perked up though. Salad made (without added soap), Niall talked him through each step of cooking the chicken, until it was perfect.

"Go get changed," he urged Louis kindly, seeing him check his watch for the fifth time, it was already 7:15. He was late, "I'll do the dressing and get it plated up"

"But I said I would cook!" Louis protested strongly, "If you make it, it's cheating!"

Niall tried very hard not to blink too owlishly. Louis must really, really like this boy, if he wasn't trying to get out of doing the work.

"How about I just prepare the ingredients?"

Finding that acceptable for their time constraints, Louis darted upstairs, fortunately knowing exactly what he was going to wear. This was pretty much a date. Pretty much a first date with his Curly! Fuck, he was nervous!

Dinner finally prepared, Niall helped load Louis up, only to get it all dumped back in his arms, as wide eyed he darted outside, then back in again.

Niall couldn't help but smile at his nervous, yet excited face.

"Om 'eddy!" he stated, holding his arms open.

"Go sweep lover boy off his feet!"

"ove ooo!"

"Love you too bud!"

"Taa daa!" Louis' mouth was muffled by a long stemmed white rose between his teeth, holding out a tray with two covered plates on it. He wagged his head, "For ooo!"

Cheeks hurting by how widely he was smiling, Harry carefully extracted the rose from Louis' mouth, who stood on his tip toes to peck him on the cheek, before strutting proudly through to the kitchen.

"I cooked Curly! I actually cooked!" Louis beamed, so proud of himself, "And don't worry, I was completely supervised" he looked up at Liam through his long eye lashes, "I wanted everything to be perfect" he almost whispered.

Harry looked into the crystal clear depths of his blue eyes, wanting so much for the smaller boy to grab his cheeks and kiss him! He had never been so happy from barely knowing someone, and yet feeling as though he had been around him all his life.

"It is perfect" he insisted fondly, "Even if you had ordered take away"

Louis' speechless face was priceless.

Louis eagerly accepted his bowl, smiling delightedly, and taking care to inspect it from all angles.
His chicken salad had been an amazing success, Liam looking genuinely impressed with his efforts, even after admitting that he had almost screwed up by trying to wash the lettuce with soap, making the boy laugh so much, water dribbled down his chin.

"He did tell me to wash it!" Louis playfully defended himself, playfully hitting Liam on the shoulder, then once again when he enjoyed the little shiver that rushed up his arm when they made contact.

"Wow" Louis complimented, "This looks almost as good as you!" he tore his eyes away to give Liam an appreciative glance. He may only be wearing a simple white t-shirt and black skinny jeans - but, fucking hell, did he look fine! The sweetness on his face, full of bashful shyness, got Louis right in the heart, wanting to climb onto his lap, sink his fingers into those gorgeous, silky curls, gaze into his hypnotic brown eyes, and explore his mouth with his tongue!

Instead, he turned his attention back to his bowl.

"Are these pecans? Is that toffee sauce?" he asked, astounded that a real life person could create such a delicious looking dish, from scratch.

He looked up at Liam who was standing a little stiffly to the side of his chair, biting his lower lip and looking worried.

"There's a layer of toffee sauce between the crumble topping and the apple" Harry explained hesitantly, "And I chopped the pecans into the crumble. I...if you don't like it, I can cook you another one...yeah.." he made a grab for Louis' bowl, "I'm so sorry, I should have asked what you'd like, not just assume..."

"Get your mits off my crumble!" Louis squeaked, snatching the bowl back and holding it protectively against his chest, "I haven't even had a bite yet!"

Harry shrank back a little. Hesitating, not sure what he should do. This was unknown territory, and he felt like he was torn between how he had been taught to act, and what came naturally to him.

"Cream?" he offered, wondering if Louis could hear the slight tremor in his voice, handing Louis the little white jug filled with double cream, expecting the boy to hold his bowl out for Harry to pour, but instead,

"Thanks!" Louis beamed, plucking the ceramic out of his hand and almost drowning his crumble in it, he frowned in Liam's direction quizzically, "Now are you going to sit down? Or do I have to eat this in the toilet to prevent you from trying to take it away from me again?"

He looked so comical, looking as though he was seriously worried about Harry taking his pudding away from him, which delighted him no end. How lovely to live the kind of life where that was your biggest concern. Harry could live like that - Harry would love to live like that.

And he wanted to live like that with Louis. His mind might have been telling him that he was crazy, but his heart was telling him that he was right!

"Fuck me! That was incredible!" Louis moaned minutes later, sitting back in his chair and dropping his spoon with a clink into his empty bowl, "You Curly are incredibly talented!"

"You're not such a bad cook yourself" retorted Harry, wide eyed and blatantly excited by such high praise (which he had never had with Zayn).
"Meh, I just followed Ni's instructions"

Louis was both bright eyed, and sleepy at the same time, reaching over and giving Harry's knee a little squeeze.

"Seriously Curly, that was the most delicious pudding I have ever eaten" his gaze turned soft and searching, "Thank you so much" he began to stroke Harry's thigh lazily, "You know what would be really great right now?"

"What?" Harry asked, thinking there was no doubt that he would want to do whatever Louis suggested. He watched as the smaller boy, sat up a little straighter, leaning towards him, brushing a few stray hairs out of his face.

"Well, I know this is a little bit forward and all that" Louis began, making Harry gulp a little nervously, only half distracted by Louis' hand still stroking his thigh, surely he wasn't going to...

"But I'm so full" Louis smirked, removing his hand from Harry's leg to rub at his tummy through his tight, black t-shirt, "And I'd really love to just snuggle up on the settee and watch a film with you"

His hand found Harry's, who squeezed it, wanting nothing more than to be relaxed on the settee, with those sexy, strong arms wrapped around him, completely enveloping him in tenderness and comfort. He couldn't remember when he'd been on the receiving end of a proper cuddle - the last one being when he said goodbye to his mum....

There was just one problem.

"I don't have a tv" Harry told Louis quietly, feeling instantly a let down. It would have been the perfect ending to the most perfect evening, and now he had failed in the most stupid way possible! His heart sank, when Louis immediately got to his feet. Was this it? Was the evening really over?

But, he had forgotten. This wasn't Zayn he was dealing with. This was Louis, who was the complete opposite of his husband. Ex husband that was!

"That's ok" Louis smiled down at him, offering him his hand, "I do"

Giddily, Harry accepted.

"DVD's are in the corner" Louis pointed out, leading Liam into his living room, "Do you want a drink?"

Harry shook his head. He hovered in the doorway, wanting to follow Louis, but concerned he would get under his feet.

"I'm gonna make a cuppa" Louis stated, reaching up and gently massaging Liam's shoulders, "Pick out what ever you want. I'll be honest, I'm just looking forward to the cuddle"

Louis was just so straightforward and honest. Harry could feel himself falling, especially when he was doing that with his hands to his muscles.

'What do you want to watch?' Harry asked, closing his eyes blissfully and trying hard not to moan with satisfaction. Louis must have been standing on his toes again, how else would he be able to feel Louis' soft breath on the back of his neck?
"Anything you want love" Louis reaffirmed, "But if you want to lean towards something romantic, I wouldn't object" he wandered past Harry and gave him a cheeky smile, "Goes with the cuddles right?" and trotted off (on his toes) to the kitchen.

Harry knelt in the corner, sifting through the film titles, trying to find something he recognised. He hadn't watched television in years - Zayn was convinced his common sense would rot.

Harry thought at the time, and still wondered, if Zayn had really been trying to prevent him from seeing how wrong his husbands behaviour had been towards him, hoping that he would consider it was like this for other married couples.

"Found anything you like?" Louis' voice was slightly husky in Harry's ear, his arms slipping around his shoulders, the scruff on his face tickling his cheek. Harry closed his eyes, inhaling that delicious fragrance that Louis was wearing again. He hoped he'd wear it all the time. Louis chuckled in his ear quietly, then pressed the softest kiss to his cheek. Harry's heart soared. Louis took the DVD case that was dangling between his fingers.

"This one?' he asked, a smile in his voice, "Good choice Curly, very cuddly."

Leaning over Harry, he slipped it into the player, then took Harry's hand leading him to the settee.

"Any particular position?" he asked politely, sitting down and stretching his legs out, automatically holding his arms out wide, in hope that soon Liam's long, lean body would be somehow wrapped around his.

It didn't even have to be sexual. He just wanted those long arms around that body, and be in the position to look into his eyes, silently telling him how happy he was that they had met.

Feeling shy again, Harry slid off his shoes, and slowly sat down next to Louis, automatically turning his face rest it on his chest. It just felt so natural to be so close to him.

"I like you" he murmured, suddenly sleepy, feeling so content. A finger applied a little pressure under his chin, coaxing him to look upwards, their eyes were so close, Harry could see each individual spec, all marginally different shades of blue. Louis inclined his head every so slowly. He could feel breath on his face, ocean depths were covered by long thick eyelashes, he hoped, he wished.

It was so soft, so featherlight, that the hand smoothing through his hair was firmer. The flutter of Louis' lips brushing against his so briefly. Little pockets of glitter sparkled behind Harry's eyelids, warming him from his toes upwards.

"I like you too" Louis murmured in his ear.

The titles of the film started. Harry nuzzled into Louis' strong chest, melting as Louis pressed kiss upon kiss in his hair, his forehead, stroking his back with one hand, thumbing at his cheek with the other.

Louis liked him. And Harry definitely liked Louis.
Chapter 10

From the moment Louis awoke the next morning with Liam in his arms, he knew he was a changed man.

One minor detail that had established him a place within his friendship circle, was a mutual love of three things: football, partying and men.

His immediate group was very tight knit consisting of himself and three other lads who he'd known since primary school. Stan, Calvin and Alberto. Weekends was all about watching football during the day, followed by a raucous lads night out, consisting of drinking until they could barely walk, hitting upon timid singletons in clubs, and more often than not, ending up in bed with the ones who were so astounded at being chatted up in the first place, they didn't realise what they were getting themselves into was a one night stand.

However, all of that was a distant memory, as Louis' eyes cracked open that early morning and his sleepy gaze landed on Liam's curly head, snoozing quietly on his chest.

Every morning should begin like this. He thought to himself, tightening his arms a little around the lads skinny frame. He could honestly say he didn't want to ever see another random in his room again, all he wanted to see was curly, in his arms, just like he was now.

It was hard to pinpoint exactly when they developed a routine, but things seemed to fall into place so naturally that it was hard to imagine when they had no idea of the others existence.

To Harry's interest, Louis revealed he was a drama teacher at the local secondary school. He'd loved drama at school himself, and he was such a big personality, full of fun, laughter and frolics, it was the perfect job for him.

"Basically, I get to play and show off all day, and I get paid for it!" he'd told Harry with a laugh.
Louis left for work at 7am every morning, waving to Harry through his downstairs window who always waved back, mug of tea in hand - already wishing that it was 6pm when the smaller boy arrived home. Louis would always park his car in the drive way, wave to Harry again, then quickly take a shower, dress in more comfy clothes and go and join his new friend...possibly more than friend...

This week Harry had been all about working in his garden. The weather had been hot, and it was a tiring job, but it didn't matter because as soon as 6:30 rolled around, he'd pack up for the day and spend the rest of the evening with Louis.

They ate dinner together. Sometimes Harry cooked, sometimes Louis introduced him to the cuisine from local take away restaurants.

"Why don't I teach you how to make a few dishes?" Harry suggested one day, whilst they were debating between getting a Chinese delivered, or walking around the corner for some fish and chips, "I swear, I could make any dish on this menu, and trust me, it would be a lot healthier and taste really good."

Louis might have been complaining that his football shorts were getting a little on the tight side - which Harry had shot down immediately. There was nothing wrong with Louis' physique in the slightest.

"You're just saying that because you like my bum!" Louis smirked, wiggling it around with glee, "Just admit it Curly! You are all about this bass!"

Harry's cheeks reddened, but he didn't deny such a claim, or make an effort to look away!

There was always a slight anxiety when Louis questioned Harry about himself - even small stuff, like what did Harry like to do for fun? Did he play sports? Did he ever play computer games? What was his favourite film? Where did he like to go on holiday?

It was so hard to think of what to say, and he couldn't even lie because he didn't have much knowledge to make up stuff with.

If he said he played football, Louis would invite him to play a game, the last time he had played a computer was Crash Bandicoot - and by the looks of Louis' huge XBox game collection, that wasn't likely to impress him much. He didn't have a favourite film anymore, and he didn't want to talk about the places he'd been, incase he accidently revealed something he shouldn't.

So in the end, he just sounded boring and non eventful.

Much to his surprise, Louis was delighted!

"We've got so much to introduce you to!" he enthused, settling down on his settee and opening his arms for Liam to cuddle into, like they did every evening "You can teach me to cook, and I can teach you how to play FIFA!"

Cuddles had also become a very important fixture, or rather touching in general.

Louis was very tactile as it was, his personal space not exceeding far from the surface of his skin, and he frequently got into a lot of trouble on night outs, looking as though he was being flirty, when really he was just being him.

Liam was no exception. In fact, if possible, he had awakened a new level of contact within Louis that he'd never experienced.
Intimacy.

Louis had a lot of experience in physical contact. Sober, drunken, friendly, sexual, mistaken and deliberate. He had at some point, been in every position imaginable - including one disastrous time when he'd ended up on his head!

But this was different. Five days later, and they had still barely even kissed - at least not to Louis' standard. He still had no idea what Liam's tongue tasted like - which would have been agonising - but Liam was so sweet, so innocent, so shy when it came to their lip locking, that Louis almost felt as though he wasn't worthy of such delicate and romantic kisses.

He also had to be touching Liam - all the time. Whenever possible.

If Liam was cooking at the stove, Louis would wrap his arms around his waist as he watched, constantly asking questions about what he was doing. When he and Liam were waiting to pay for some snack food at the corner shop, Louis would stand close to make sure their arms were touching.

When Liam collapsed on the settee after a day of hard work gardening, Louis would dump the taller boy's legs in his lap, massaging his aching limbs, then pulling the sleepy boy into his arms, where he would constantly and consistently dot kisses all over his face and hair, stroking the soft skin of his midriff with the tips of his fingers.

With anyone else, this wouldn't be enough for Louis. If he dated someone for too long, this long for example, and he hadn't managed to get the guys top off, his interest would have been gone. But not with Liam.

Admittedly, Louis had tried to take things a little bit further with him. During one particular cuddle session on his settee, Louis had gotten a little too ahead of himself, slipping his hands up under the lad's shirt, making him start in surprise, especially when Louis took the opportunity to gently swipe at his juicy lower lip with his tongue for access.

Liam, didn't exactly push him away, but he didn't exactly allow him to get what he wanted, pulling slightly away, then shuffling lower and burying his face into Louis' tummy - instantly making Louis feel terrible.

For all he knew, Liam could have very little experience, and considering that they hadn't established what they were doing yet...it was on the tip of his tongue to ask him there and then, but he stopped himself just in time, he did not want the lad to think he was only asking him to be his boyfriend so he could try and get him into bed!

So instead, he whispered that he was sorry, made that achingly beautiful face, with hypnotic puppy dog eyes look up into his own, and pressed one deliberate kiss onto the tip of his cute little nose.

He would wait. He and Liam were not a one night stand, and maybe he didn't realise it, but by being patient and waiting, Louis was subconsciously building the foundations for his first proper relationship.

Thursday evening, and Harry was absolutely shit himself. He was meant to be over at Louis' twenty minutes ago, and his hair was not co-operating with him - and he was seriously regretting not buying any more clothes when he had the chance.

Louis had pretty much flown over to his after work, shocking Harry with the news that three of his best friends were coming over for a lads night in, and how excited he was for them to finally meet
"my curly"! Before dashing back to his own house, shouting something about forgetting to order the food.

Harry only had three outfits. Two pairs of jeans, one pair of shorts, two t-shirts, a shirt, and two pairs of shoes. And now he had to pick something to wear in front of Louis' best mates? The pressure to perform was enough to bring him to tears - which was odd, because he had been through so much worse...

"Curly!"

Louis was in his house, and stampeeding to his bedroom.

"You alright?" he asked, sticking his head around the door, then coming fully in, eyes raking over Harry's body, looking for some kind of problem.

"What's wrong?" he asked, his tone dripping with concern, striding over to Harry purposefully and slipping his arms around his waist, "I thought you were coming over?"

"I...wouldn't you prefer it to just be you and your mates?" Harry asked, hoping Louis would agree instantly, "What if they don't like me?"

"Aww, don't be silly" Louis cooed, his face splitting into a big smile, "They will love you! You're really sweet, you're really funny, and I'll be there with you the entire time" he promised, raising his hand to kiss his knuckles, "And you'll think they're amazing!" he assured him, taking his hand, and coaxing him to follow, "After all, they're pretty much carbon copies of me - and you love me!"

Zayn would have told him to shut the fuck up, and drag him out. Louis reassured him, and made him feel wonderful.

"Do you want me to change?" Harry asked in a small voice, digging his heels into the floor. He didn't want to leave unless Louis was fully happy with him.

"You look great" Louis rushed to reassure him, meaning every word, "But are you comfortable?" he really looked at Liam. The poor lad seemed so far out of his comfort zone. But what did it matter what he was wearing? He wanted to show off the reason he was so happy, and who had made him smile the way he did, not display his curly as some kind of pretty decoration. However, everyone had their insecurities, and this was obviously one of Liam's.

"Babe, if you would really rather not come, it's absolutely ok" he insisted, "They'll come around again, plenty of opportunities to hang out when you feel you are ready. I was being selfish" he smiled guiltily, "Even if they are over, and I love them to death, I'd really miss you. And trust me" he continued, "Whatever you wear, you look fantastic in"

"But do you like it?" Liam asked, gesturing to his jeans and blue shirt, "I don't want to embarrass you"

He looked terrified at the prospect, and was already starting to unbutton his shirt.

"Were you planning on telling them how I thought that those daffodil bulbs you were drying in the kitchen were onions?" Louis asked suspiciously, referring to an incident that had almost happened when Liam was giving him a cooking lesson, "Because that would embarrass me! You looking sexy and hot in those shirt and skinnies...well I am envious of the skinnies," he conceded gesturing to his own thicker set thighs, "Is not even on my list!"

Harry didn't say another word. Just followed Louis, smiling, finally confidently to the door.
Louis' friends were exactly as Louis had always described them - huge personalities and a laugh a minute.

He had felt very self-conscious when he'd gotten to Louis', but the boy had stuck to his word and kept close to Harry the entire time.

Out of the three though, Stan was the one who Harry really wanted to impress. Every other story that came out of Louis' mouth had him involved.

Admittedly, he had slipped up a few times. He kept forgetting (what with feeling so nervous about impressing Louis' friends), that his name was meant to be Liam. Louis had needed to nudge him a couple of times because one of the boys had directed a question at him, calling him that name, and he hadn't responded. After the third time, Stan had given him a weird look. He deserved it though, it would have looked odd. So much so, that Louis had quietly asked if he was ok.

It was also after that, Stan only referred to him as 'Curly'. Probably because that was what he knew to respond to, because that was Louis' name for him, it even felt more familiar to him than Harry did right now.

The biggest fuck up of the night came about when the boys started to talk about a holiday they had planned in about a months time, to Zante in Greece.

"Proper lads holiday!" Calvin enthused brightly, "You should come Liam, it's gonna be a great time!"

"Curly?" Louis had to hiss at him, then pointed subtly to Calvin, who was exchanging a look with Stan.

Harry recovered quickly, "Thanks, but I don't have a passport"

"That's no problem" Louis shrugged, holding Harry's hand, "We can get you one. We've still got time."

"It's fine" Harry said quietly, "I wouldn't know how to get one"

The truth was he'd love to go. He had never been on a proper lads holiday before! And he would be going with Louis! But the truth also was, he'd never be able to get a passport without revealing his true identity.

"Curly, it's not a problem. I can help you with the form, and mum's a nurse - she could do a reference for you" Louis insisted, "we just need to get you some photos and..."

"Drop it!"

Harry didn't mean to snap. He really didn't, but this was really stressing him out now. He got up, and without looking at Louis, he strode into the kitchen.

Louis gave Stan a concerned glance, then jumped up and followed him.

"Are you ok?" He asked Liam, who was leaning on the counter by the sink, "I'm sorry I didn't mean to to on about it," he bit his lip, watching as Liam gripped the counter so tightly his knuckles were turning white, "Love, don't get upset. It's no big deal, promise! It would just be so much fun if you..."

"I said drop it!"
Liam whirled around so fast he accidently sent a glass flying off the counter, smashing it to the floor. His eyes were bright and filled with unshed tears, his whole body trembling.

Louis took a step back, feeling as though he had been slapped. Liam sounded so angry, and considering Louis was used to his low, husky drawl, it came as quite a shock.

"I'm...sorry" Louis stuttered out, not at all sure what to say or do.

"What's going on?"

Stan appeared behind Louis, quickly scanning his surroundings, noting the smashed glass, Liam's suddenly traumatised expression, and his shell shocked best mate.

Seeing the look of shock on Louis' face brought Harry's mind screeching to a standstill. What had he just done? He was absolutely appalled with himself! He saw Stan watching him, calculating, analysing. He had to get out of here! He'd ruined everything!

Before anyone could say anything, Harry bolted. Out of the kitchen door and was scaling the fence to get to his own house, where he pounded up the stairs and threw himself into his bed, cowering and shaking under the duvet, crying so hard. He had actually scared himself. Harry had no idea he had it in him to react like that, to something so minor.

It was exactly how things had started to go wrong between him and Zayn, only this time, he was Zayn! The realisation only made him cry even harder, howling with grief that the person he had fought so hard to escape, had somehow become part of him.
Chapter 11

The back door slammed hard behind Liam as he ran out, making both Louis and Stan wince, even though they knew it was coming.

Stan glanced at Louis sideways, trying to weigh up his mood. The Louis Tomlinson he was used to would have just rolled his eyes, made a crack about the boy being a headcase, and suggested a night out so he could find someone else to 'crack on with'. This Louis, was just standing there in astonishment.

"You alright mate?" he asked quietly, reaching out a little hesitantly and patting Louis' arm with caution.

Louis shook his head, silently, his eyes still fixed upon the door that had just slammed shut.

Stan squeezed his mates forearm, feeling that he might need some alone time, then returned to the living room where Alberto and Calvin were waiting expectantly.

"What's going on?" asked Alberto, with raised eyebrows, "Has the kid gone? Did I hear glass breaking?"

Stan nodded, "He ran off" he confirmed, "Think he threw a glass at Lou, or something," he lowered his voice, "Don't be dicks ok, watch what you say to him,"
"Look at Lou hooking up with a psycho!" smirked Calvin, "I can't believe Tommo brought such a drip home...how many times did I have to say his name before he realised I was talking to him?" he burst out laughing "Lou?!" he called out, "You wanna go out?"

Stan stood aside as Louis strode out of the kitchen, patting his pockets for his phone and keys. Obviously he wasn't too upset if he was already ready to go out.

"Which club you wanna hit? Alberto asked, grinning and wondering how much of a state he was going to have to carry Louis home in later, he could sense a massive bender around the corner, judging by Louis' previous ways of handling failed conquests.

"What?" asked Louis, confused, "Club? You're leaving already?"

"Thought you might wanna go out," Alberto stated, clapping him on the back, "Get that curly thing out of your head, and maybe get you a little summit to make up for it"

Louis stared his his mate as though he had lost his mind.

"I don't want to go to a club" he said incredulously, "Why the fuck would you think that?"

Alberto, Calvin and Stan exchanged glances.

"Because that's what we always do?" Calvin offered, "Look mate, I know you were kinda fond of the kid, but seriously...he's a bit weird..."

Stan watched as Louis' thin lips decreased in size as his mouth clamped into a thin line, crossing his arms and drawing himself up to his full height.

"You didn't like him?" he asked coolly, Exaggerating the size of his eyes as he stared pointedly at his close friend.

Calvin started to glare back, and Stan, sensing that this was not going to end well decided to step in.

"I think I can speak for all of us, when I say, Liam wasn't what we were expecting," he said quickly, thinking fast and hoping his terminology was correct, "We were kind of expecting someone...more like you...and less like..."

"A used wank rag?" Calvin offered smirking, "Oh come on Lou!" he argued as he saw Louis' lip twitch in annoyance, "He barely even knew his own name! I fucking tried hard for you mate, but seriously, he's not your type of person!"

"It's a shame" Louis said simply, but sounding incredibly pissed off, "That you, as my best mates, can't see a good thing for me when it's right in front of your faces! I am going to check on Liam. If you want to stay, fine. If you want to go, fine!" He glared around at all of them.

"But if you do stay, and I bring curly back here with me, you had better be nothing but nice to him!" he turned around when he got to the front door, looking and sounding really disappointed in his closest friends.

"You know he was really nervous to meet all of you tonight, wanted to make a good impression because I've been banging on about what great lads you are!" he pursed his lips, "He would be so upset if he heard what you just said!"

"You really like him?" asked Stan, feeling his heart sink a little. As first impressions went, he hadn't been blown away by Liam. There was just something about him that didn't seem right.
For example, he hadn't answered to his name once! He could understand if maybe once or twice he had been distracted, but nine times? And that was just from when he had started counting!

Then there was that crap about the passport - that was not something to flip out over - especially not enough to start lobbing glasses! Was this really the type of person who Louis wanted to be with?

"Yes Stanley, I really like him" Louis confirmed sarcastically, "Now if you will excuse me." and he left, not bothering to close the door quietly behind him.

"Well that was unusual" Calvin commented, raising his eyebrows, "I thought he'd be thankful the kid legged it"

Alberto nodded in agreement. He couldn't see the lanky, brown eyed, brown haired kid fitting into their group.

"Look, Lou likes him, so let's just be a bit more supportive eh?" suggested Stan dryly, "We could be seeing a lot more of him"

"You liked him?" asked Calvin incredulously, "But he's a dull moron!"

Stan shook his head, "But our opinion is irrelevant," he reasoned, "Let's just see how it plays out"

Louis let himself into Liam's house through the kitchen door. He was steaming with what his mates had said, but that soon changed to dismay when he heard the sound of sobbing coming from upstairs. Heart sinking, he raced up the stairs and cautiously approached Liam's bedroom.

Under the duvet, crying out all the tension and worry he had been holding onto, Harry fretted about what his future was going to hold for him if he kept going down the path he didn't realise he had turned into. When a hand touched his duvet covered shoulder he froze in fright.

"Curly? Are you ok love?" he heard Louis ask him, the hand that had touched where his shoulder was, moved in a stroking action, "Can we talk?"

Harry swallowed hard. He didn't know if he wanted to talk or not. But he had to remember that this was Louis. Louis wouldn't hurt him. Would he?

He felt the bed dip next to him, and curiously he peeped out from under the covers. Big blue eyes peeped back.

"I'm so sorry curly!" Louis said immediately as they achieved eye contact, "I really don't know when to shut up sometimes, but I really had no intention of upsetting you!"

Harry was stunned. Was Louis really taking responsibility for Harry's actions?

"It wasn't you" Harry sniffed quietly, "I shouted, I broke your glass" he stiffened, horrified once more, remembering the consequences when he broke something that wasn't his, "I'm so sorry!" he began to bubble out with an edge of hysteria, "I'll buy you new glasses! I promise! I'm so sorry!"

"No you won't" Louis scoffed, taking up his hand and kissing his knuckles, "It's just a glass love, nothing to get..." he gestured vaguely at Liam, "upset about. The boys have broken loads over the years, couldn't give a shit!" he softened his tone "I do give a shit about you being so upset though,
and I'm so sorry. You were so nervous to begin with, and there was me pretty much forcing you into doing something with us that you don't feel comfortable with" he grimaced, "It was the stories about our last holiday wasn't it? I don't blame you in the slightest Curly"

Harry thought back to the stories the other lads had been telling. Ones that didn't really put Louis in an amazing light - about drunken, loud nights out, where Louis got wasted in all of them - and seemed to get around a bit.

But they hadn't bothered him. Because of how Louis had looked and sounded so embarrassed instead of proud, and how he'd squeezed Harry's hand that little bit tighter. Kind of like he was trying to get a silent message to Harry that he wasn't like that anymore.

"But I shouted at you" Harry knew he was pushing his luck. Any minute now, Louis would turn on him and punish him for how rude he had been.

"You didn't shout exactly love" Louis smirked, "I don't think you have it in you to actually shout at anyone. You just put me in my place - which I respect"

It was all so unfamiliar to him and overwhelming, that Harry couldn't get a grip on himself fast enough to stop bursting into tears. He hadn't been programmed this way! He was still expecting to be scolded and beaten for his behaviour!

"Shit!" Louis muttered, dragging the duvet off Liam, kicking off his shoes and climbing into bed besides him, wrapping his arms firmly around the boy who struggled a little at his abruptness, sobbing in his arms as though his heart was breaking, "What did I say?" Louis asked gently, kissing the lads temple, "I'm going to be honest curly, I don't really know what to do here. What's upsetting you?"

"I..like..you" Liam hiccuped, looking up with his big brown eyes, "I..you're..so nice to me"

"If I was nicer I would have introduced you to Niall and Liam...my other Liam...first" Louis grumbled, "They are much more your sort of people"

"They were alright" Harry insisted, "I just don't think they liked me"

"If they don't, that's their problem" Louis shrugged, "You make me happy, very happy actually, and it might be selfish, but that's all i really care about"

"I make you happy?" Harry had never been told this before, not even by Zayn, "But I'm ..."

"Incredible? Stunning? Perfect?" Louis asked nuzzling into Liam's neck, "Sweet? Caring? Kind? Yeah, I kinda noticed that! Infact, it has occurred to me that I have no idea how you put up with me to be honest" he laughed dryly, carding his fingers through Liam's soft hair that he loved, "I'm a massive handful. I'm loud, I'm obnoxious, I can't cook for shit or do any type of DIY! I don't enhance your life in the slightest" he sounded a little sad, "But you make me want to" he added quietly, "You make me want to be a better man, so that one day I might deserve you and your time"

Harry listened to all of it dumbfounded. He felt tired, overly emotional, and he had this amazing man, with his arms around him, saying that he didn't deserve the screwed up mess that he was. It didn't make sense! It was madness!

Harry had never wanted to kiss someone so much in his life!

It was definitely a lunge. Emotionally driven, Harry grabbed hold of Louis' surprised face with both his hands, clawing his fingers into his hair, his thumbs digging into his cheeks, crashing their mouths
together - so hungry and desperate to feel the words that Louis had spoken in that way.

It was new territory, a needy moan escaping the depths of his throat, crackling volts of electricity surging through his veins as the heat between them burned brightly.

Louis’ heart was pounding so hard he really believed it might escape his chest. Blood rushed to his head, pulsating in his ears. He didn't even need to swipe with his tongue, Liam automatically opened his mouth - whimpers tumbling out of his mouth and into Louis’, sending Louis’ nervous system into overdrive.

Louis had felt something when they’d kissed before, and he knew that when it happened properly it would be explosive! But nothing could have prepared him for the avalanche of desperate need and want he would feel as he licked into Liam's mouth for the first time, rolling his Curly onto his back, straddling his lean waist, almost gasping aloud as long, lean, muscular legs wrapped themselves around his back, pulling him in closer than he was before.

Flashes of his future cascaded at the forefront of his mind: holding hands on the beach as they ran through the surf, hot, sweaty passionate nights before they passed out in each other's arms, standing before each other at the alter, building a family together. Smiles, laughter, love, commitment. Louis, for the first time in his life, wanted it all, and he wanted it with his Curly.

His voice trembled as he pulled away, urged on by the whine of longing as Liam tried to pull him back in. But he couldn't. He knew Liam had felt it to! He could see it in his beautiful eyes, he could feel it in his hands gripping him so tightly.

Louis never thought he'd say it, never thought he'd found someone to ask, which made this moment even more perfect. When Liam had moved next door, the Stars had aligned and created something wonderful just for Louis to discover.

"Liam!" he gasped out, his voice thick and strained with emotion that didn't come naturally to him.

But Liam shook his head, so furiously that Louis received a mouthful of disheveled curls.

"No-no-no" he muttered to himself more than Louis, "Curly..." He uttered, clamping his hand firmly on the back of Louis' neck, straining with his neck to reattach their lips once more, "I'm your Curly!"

And he was. Or rather. He would be. Louis pulled away again, grabbing Curly's wrists and shoving them up above his head. The moment was now...

Harry was caught in a riptide, dragged down and under into the ocean that was Louis Tomlinson. The boy who made his world shudder to the core.

"Liam!"

It was wrong, it was all wrong! He wasn't Liam! He wasn't pretending anymore! He was Harry, and he didn't want to be called that, because it would cheapen the moment and he didn't want to be broken and disconnected anymore. Harry wanted to shine in technicolor, feel everything in full focus!

"No-no-no!" he couldn't let this happen, he was inches away from blurring out his real name, which would ruin everything but it would allow him to have his true identity when it mattered to him the most. Then he realised, there was a name, that was just as, maybe even more special and unique to him than his own.

"Curly..." he insisted, trying to continue their kiss, "I'm your curly!"
Feeling a shudder ripple through Louis' entire body, he pulled himself a fraction away, breathing hard in Harry's face, cooling his perspiring skin.

"I need you!" He gasped out, clumsily kissing his face - his cheeks, his forehead, the tip of his nose, the scruff on his face feeling like acupuncture needles to his skin, before his huge eyes, a vision of sincerity, realisation and the greatest level of desire.

"Be with me?" Louis pleaded with him, "Be mine? Be my boyfriend? Be my Curly? I need you so much!"

Harry's eyes widened, his jaw slackened, thoughts running so fast through his head that his feet hurt. There was no noise. No cars on the street. No birdsong or breeze through the trees. Just the sound of his own heartbeat thudding like a jack hammer in his ears.

Then one sound cut through the silence. His own voice, barely recognisable to his own ears.

"No" he whispered painfully.

Louis' world crumbled. Cloud nine evaporated from under him, and his stomach lurched painfully as he free fell, the perfect images in his mind extinguishing one by one until there was nothing in his mind except endless blank space.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Louis was on autopilot, shuffling from Liam's front door over to his own, head down, metaphorical whiskers drooping.

The strong stench of weed hit him as soon as he walked into the hallway - obviously Alberto and Calvin had hung around. A glance to the living room on his way upstairs confirmed they were still there, but he didn't want to see them right now.

Stan on the other hand was right where he wanted him.

"Wake up!" he grumbled, getting into bed and prodding his best mate in the back. Only Stan was ever allowed to sleep in his bed - it was just something that had evolved over the years, and Stan neither snored, nor stole the duvet!

Stan grumbled, shrugging away from Louis' incessent prods then turning over, fully in mind of telling his mate to fuck off - and then he saw the look on his face, and once again his heart sank.

"What happened?" he asked sympathetically, shoving his pillow and pulling himself into sitting position, his eyes never leaving Louis' defeated expression.

"I haven't a fucking clue," Louis swore, "I really thought..." he trailed off, biting his lower lip, "I asked him...I actually asked him!" he looked hopelessly up at Stan, "I have never asked anyone!" he
stated in disbelief, "You know what I'm like - I don't do relationships! And I...he kissed me...properly...first time...and...fuck! I just couldn't keep the words in my fucking mouth!"

"What did you ask?"

"For him to be my boyfriend"

Stan's eyebrows shot skywards. He'd known Louis for years. He'd never had a boyfriend. He'd never wanted one. Then in came this kid and changed his mind in about two weeks?

"What did he say to that?" Stan probed, the answer obvious, the reason not so much.

If anyone else had asked him, Alberto or Calvin for example, Louis would have shot back a sarcastic retort that would be sharp enough to cut skin! But he knew Stan better than that - he genuinely cared. So, just for him, he recounted that soul destroying moment and the first crack he'd felt in his heart.

(Under one hour ago)

"No"

Louis felt the impact of the response before he understood the word. Unable to even mask the utter devastation he was feeling, unable to tear his eyes away from the lad who had made him feel that.

"I'm so sorry!" Liam croaked out, his expression exactly how Louis imagined his own to look like, as he sat back abruptly, still straddling the brown eyed lad, only this time with both hands held up in a silent surrender.

"My fault" Louis whispered, fighting a lump in his throat, trying to find it in him to climb off the lad "I...I thought you felt like I did..."

A large hand clamped shakily down on his thigh. It stung his leg with the force, he didn't want it to move away.

"I do"

Liam had whispered it, so quietly it came out as more of a hiss, but Louis was so in tune with this lad that he always understood him. He looked scared, shrinking into the mattress, his body tense and rigid, a frown spoiling his pretty face.

And all Louis wanted to do was comfort him.

"Look" he tried to reason, "I know I've spent my life acting like a dick! I know I've got a stupid ugly rodent face! I know I lack in so many ways! But I want to..."

"Don't!"

Liam's eyes were awash with misery.

"You can't say that!" He insisted, struggling to get up - Louis was still sitting heavily on his thighs - and instead grabbed for the smaller boys hands - who couldn't allow the intimacy of such a small gesture when he was feeling so unhappy.

"I think you are incredible," Liam insisted stressfully, falling back defeated onto the bed, "You have no idea how much I want to be with you! You're not a dick - you're funny and you mess about, and I love that about you!" he made a swipe again for Louis' hand, finally grabbing it and twisting their
fingers tightly together, "Have you even looked in a mirror?" he asked softly, yanking forcefully on his hand so Louis had to brace himself with the other on Liam's chest to prevent himself from head butting the lad.

Liam's other hand cupped Louis' face, who closed his eyes, immediately leaning into the touch that caressed his cheekbones so carefully.

"You're the most gorgeous man I've ever laid eyes on" Liam insisted roughly.

"I have the face of a rodent" Louis muttered, Liam's words only making him feel worse inside. If he was this amazing then why didn't the lad want to be with him. This was just toying with him!

"Maybe a hedgehog"

Louis' eyes snapped open.

"Excuse me?" he gaped, "I look like a what?"

There was a softness in Liam's eyes behind the tears as he thumbed at his rough jaw.

"Not just look like, you are one"

"What? Curly! Why are you being such a prick?"

A wet sounding snort sounded.

"You're so prickly!"

Louis tried to glare at the lad, but he just couldn't.

"Shouldn't I just go?" he asked, squeezing the hand he was still holding tighter, not wanting to leave at all, "I mean, you don't want to be with me, so you being cute like this..." He dropped Liam's hand and shrugged the other one off his face, "Not helping!" he finished bitterly.

"Lou, I really like you" Liam rushed to insist, Louis didn't understand why tears were gathering in his eyes again, "But we barely know each other. Can't we just stay as we are? For now, see what happens?"

"Until you decide that you really don't want to be with me?" Louis was bitter. He'd never handled rejection before. He didn't know how to deal with it, finally getting the inner strength to get off Liam and leave, not even saying goodbye.

"Louis!" Liam thundered down the stairs behind him, grabbing the back of his jeans, wrapping his arms around Louis' chest, plastering himself to his back, "Don't leave me!"

"You felt something" Louis said flatly, grasping hold of Liam's forearm, "I know you did!"

To prove his point he spun around, took Liam's face between his palms, and deliberately kissed his beautiful mouth, long and slowly, pulling away, taking in Liam's flushed face and bright eyes.

"I'm sorry" Louis admitted, feeling lost, "I've never asked anyone that before, I shouldn't have reacted..."

He didn't get to finish his sentence because Liam had shut him up with a kiss.

"Just stay as we are" he mumbled against Louis' lips, "No pressure, no labels, no confusion...I'm just
not ready"

The words stung, but Louis nodded in acceptance.

"Hang out tomorrow?" He asked, unsure if they could continue as they were after this.

Liam nodded, a fake little smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. Louis' betted anything that Liam was going to get back into bed and cry after he'd left. But he had to go. He wanted to cry himself. So he pecked Liam on the cheek, and closed the front door behind him, with the horrible feeling that he'd left his bright and perfect future behind.

"So, not all is lost then?" Stan stated optimistically after Louis had recounted his sorry tale, "It's not like he told you a flat out no. It just sounds like he's being cautious - maybe he's had a bad breakup?"

Louis shrugged. He didn't know anything about Liam's past. All he knew was that he wanted his future.

"I'm a fucking dick!" Louis burst out all of a sudden, ashamed of how he had handled the 'rejection' so badly.

"You were just hurt", Stan instantly soothed, "You really put yourself out there, for the first time, don't be so hard on yourself. He said you could hang out tomorrow, and he kissed you back right?"

Louis nodded slowly, curling up in bed, still looking heart broken.

"But what if he didn't mean it?" he asked, staring at his mate emoloringly for comfort, "What if he was lying just to make me get out?"

"He followed you and begged you not to leave him."

Stan did wonder if this kid was actually trying to head fuck his best mate. He could completely understand if Louis' head was all of a tangle.

"Lou? Don't bite my head off, but what is it about this lad that has you so bothered?" Stan asked carefully, needing to get a full understanding of what his best mate was feeling.

Louis contemplated for a moment, then plucked his phone from the bedside table, fiddled with it, then passed it to Stan.

"Scroll left" he said simply, rolling onto his back and staring up at the ceiling, "He makes my face look like that" he felt the need to explain.

Stan looked at the screen, already in Louis' camera roll. There were so many pictures. Pictures of Liam, pictures of Louis, selfies of the two of them together, every one of them an advert of how compatible they were together and how much they loved each other's company.

It was Louis' face that Stan zoned in on though. The expression of pure adoration written all over Louis' softened features as he gazed at Liam instead of the camera he was holding made it clear that he was completely enamoured with the lad. Even when it was clear that Liam was the one taking the picture, Louis was only looking at him.

It was such a different image of his best mate than he'd seen before. Even though the cheekiness, fun
and confidence was still apparent, he evidently had been hiding a softer, romantic side within him that Stan had never been in the position to experience. Louis didn't like like this kid. He was falling in love with him.

"Just sleep on it" Stan told him carefully, putting the phone to the side, and laying down besides Louis, "It might be a little awkward tomorrow, but if you are as compatible as you say you are, I'm sure it will be fine, and you can carry on where you left off."

But when tomorrow came. Things weren't as simple as Stan made out. Because of one huge reason.

Liam had disapeared.

The first sign that something was amiss was at 7am the next morning when Louis left for work. He hadn't had much sleep, and what little he did have were full of tear filled brown eyes.

Feeling self concious, palms sweating, he waved to Liam's window, knowing he would feel better when he saw his curly wave back.

Only nobody did. The curtain didn't twitch, Louis couldn't even feel eyes on him. Liam wasn't waiting for him.

Pulling himself together, he strode confidently to the door, ringing the bell. Liam had been so honest with him last night about what he wanted, and it wasn't his fault that Louis had reacted so badly.

He must have waited on the step for about ten minutes, ringing the doorbell, knocking on the door, he had planned to stay there until Liam answered, until Stan turned up, on the way to work himself.

"What the fuck are you doing?" he called out to Louis, "You're gonna be late for work!"

"Curly's not answering!" Louis turned to his best mate, flapping his hands with anxiety, "He's ignoring me!"

Stan rolled his eyes, "You both had a rough night, he's probably still asleep" he reasoned, steering Louis to his car, "Stop harassing the kid! You're giving me a lift now by the way" he added, hopping into the passenger seat, laughing when Louis glared at him, "Your fault for being a pest!"

Work was agonisingly long for Louis. He had fun as normal, and larked around with his classes, but the time dragged. Everything felt off. He missed Curly, and worried that he'd really messed up.

His fears were amplified when he returned home, and there was still no Curly at his window!

Not even bothering to go inside his own house, Louis put his hands to the glass, trying to look past the net curtains to see any sign of the lad inside, then raced around to the back door. He wasn't in he garden, he wasn't visible in the kitchen, he just didn't seem to be there! So where was he? Had he gone out? Why wasn't he back yet? Was it because of him? Had he really fucked everything up that much?

Worried and slightly sick to the stomach, he did the only thing he could think of. Called Stan, then set up camp on the inside of his doorstep.

When Liam came home, he would be the first to know about it!
"Why don't you give him a call?" Stan suggested, stretching his legs out, and wondering why he hadn't thought of it sooner,

"Or are you afraid you're going to sound too clingy?" he snorted at the ridiculousness of his last comment - Louis was far from being 'needy' when it came to other men, usually it would be him dropping off the map!

"He doesn't have a phone," Louis grumbled, thinking back to the exact conversation he'd had with Liam the other day:

"You know I still don't have your phone number Curly!" Louis had stated as they chatted, pretending to be watching a film that was only really background noise. He got his out and looked at the lad expectantly.

Liam had just shrugged, "I don't have one" he replied simply, leaning in for another kiss.

"Then how do people text you?" Louis asked confused, he was under the impression that everyone owned a mobile phone- even his grandparents had one!

"The people I care about, know where I am" Liam wistfully smiled, then he turned to the television for the first time, a signal that it was a subject he was not interested in conversing. Louis put his phone away without further complaint. It was just another part of him that made his curly so unique.

Stan raised his eyes at this, but didn't say anything else about it. Maybe this Liam wasn't into technology- Louis had already mentioned that he had nether a TV or a radio.

"Oh my god!" Louis suddenly jumped up, "What if he is home and he's hurt? I didn't think of that! Come on!"

He jumped off the doorstep (where he had insisted that he and Stan stayed for almost four hours.

"The only reason I don't think he's home is because he didn't wave to me or answer his door" Louis quickly explained, "But if he fell over..."

"Maybe he just doesn't want to see you" Stan muttered quietly, feeling that he shouldn't keep giving his mate false hope any more, "I mean he did say no to being your boyfriend"

Louis glared at him. Clearly his words were not appreciated.

"We can't break into his house!" Stan hissed at his mate minutes later as they approached Liam's back door, "Just take no for an answer Lewis!"

"I'm not stealing anything!" Louis insisted, "We're not even breaking in, I have a key for when Curly's in the shower and I'm coming over"

Stan just stood back, and let his mate continue. There wasn't anything to say to that - although he was apprehensive about what they might find.

Once in, Louis went racing from room to room, calling out for Curly, looking everywhere.

Stan however, thought this might be the perfect opportunity to do a little snooping. Find out a little more about the kid who had Louis coiled around his little finger.
The further Stan wandered into Liam's house, the more odd he suspected the boy was.

He had moved in here, but yet he seemed to have neglected to bring any personal items. There were no photographs lying around, no nicnaks, nothing to show a person actually lived here at all.

The basic essentials were in the bathroom - toothbrush, toothpaste, razor, soap and shampoo. But that was it. There was no personalised medication in the cabinet, dirty clothes.

It was pretty much the same situation in the bedroom.

It was a big room, but it was barely furnished. The wardrobe had its doors wide open, with just one outfit hanging up inside. Jeans and a t-shirt, with a pair of shoes at the bottom.

His suspicious eyes raked around the empty floor. This was definitely unusual. Who only had one outfit? Of course he was probably wearing something, but where were the rest of his clothes?

Stan looked through the drawers. Nothing. Not even spare batteries, receipts, CD's, nothing!

Finally, he looked under the bed, curiosity bullying as he dragged out the duffle bag he found there. He felt no guilt about opening it, whatsoever. This kid had captured his best mates heart, and if he had fucked off with no explanation, and broke Louis' heart in the process, then Stan felt he had every right in trying to figure out why!

Inside was a small towel, a crumpled bit of paper with odd words and numbers on it, and a large wad of cash. Stan fingered the notes thoughtfully. There was a few hundred at least, and who carried that kind of cash around?

This was so weird.

Hearing footsteps in the hall, Stan quickly took a picture of the paper on his phone, stuffing it back into the bag, which he shoved back in the same place that he’d found it.

He had the nasty feeling that something was going on with this Liam boy that wasn't going to be pleasant.

"He's not here" Louis sounded so worried and upset, "I kinda wish he was hurt and here, because at least I would know where he was!" he thought about what he said, "Fuck! I didn't mean that!" he insisted, horrified about wanting Curly hurt and helpless.

"Why don't we get out of here before he comes back and thinks you're a creepy stalker?" Stan suggested, thinking of how much he wanted to leave so he could properly think this through. "If he's still not back by the morning, we could call the police?"

"I don't know his last name" Louis agonised, waving his hands around in dismay.

Stan looked at him sharply. No last name? No phone? A house that didn't look lived in? Disappearing at the weekend without telling someone who you were pretty much joined at the hip with? That was not natural!

He didn't share his worries with Louis however. Louis was frantic enough as it was.

"Let's lock up here, and go sit on your doorstep" he told his mate kindly, taking hold of his shoulders and steering him towards the door, knowing that Louis would want to be nowhere else.
All night, the whole of the next day, Louis didn't move from the step, watching, waiting, becoming increasingly tired, shitty and distressed as the time ticked on, and still curly headed boy came into view.

It was 10am on Sunday morning. 57 hours since Louis had last seen Liam.

A crunching of footsteps on gravel woke Louis. His neck was stiff and sore from trying to sleep sitting up and out in the cold. But as his eyes finally focused on the tall, skinny lad with long brown curls who was trying to sneak past him, he didn't notice!

"Fucking hell!" he rasped to himself, trying to jump to his feet, and staggering over to the lad - who was looking petrified about being caught, "Where the fuck have you been?"

His eyes were bright with fury, but it wasn't anger, Louis was just desperately relieved that Liam was back, throwing himself on the lad, almost strangling him around the waist by how close he hugged him.

"I'm so sorry!" He gasped out, not caring what he looked like, kissing every inch of Liam's exposed face as possible and then throwing his arms around him once again, "You have no clue how worried I was! So fucking worried! You are alright yeah? You are ok?"

It was hesitant, and it took Liam's body quite a few kisses and cuddles to unfreeze, eventually thawing into Louis' arms, and sinking into his smaller frame.

Stan watched from the doorway, unimpressed. He approached the two. Liam would have to be able to come up with a top notch explanation for putting Louis through this!

"You smell odd" Louis muttered into Liam's neck, "You don't smell like you at all"

Stan tried to look natural, but his brain was buzzing from the new piece of information, joining all the little bits and pieces he'd already collected.

He watched intently as Liam slightly stiffened in Louis' arms, then pulled anxiously away, a slight tremor to his hand as he combed it through his hair.

Then Stan saw it.

It wasn't something he hadn't been looking for, but there it was glaring at him in the face, kicking himself for not seeing it sooner!

All his questions suddenly added up to something so blatantly obvious he wondered why it had taken him so long to figure it out! Unless...

Whilst Louis fussed and fawned over the wanderer, Stan analysed and calculated all the data he'd collected, finding it easier to outrightly accuse than debate.

1. Liam didn't have a hearing problem, he just didn't associate people calling his name, because it wasn't his real name! That was why he always answered to curly, no matter how softly it was spoken, because he associated himself with it! Liam was not this boy's name! That's why he had no phone, or passport, or an ID card, or a drivers license. They were all in his real name, and if he presented one of them he would be caught out!

2. The house he said he lived in, wasn't his real place, but a second home. That was why there were no personal belongings or clothes there.
3. Why had he disappeared without a word to Louis and came back smelling different? Because there was someone else. In his primary home, this kid had a family that he was cheating on, living some kind of twisted double life, which poor Louis had got caught up in!

And how did Stan come screaming to these conclusions?

When Liam had brushed back his hair, Stan had seen the forth finger on his left hand - with the pale strip of skin there for all to see - except Louis who was obviously too head over heels to notice seeing - the mark of a wedding ring, that had only recently been removed.

"Liam" was married.

Louis could never be "Liam's" official boyfriend.

Louis was just another man.

Anger boiled inside Stan's blood as he watched Louis, every part of his smaller frame shielding the one of the rats from harm, tenderly kissing his mouth, stroking his hair, lavishing adoration on him. He looked like a love sick puppy!

Stan, was not going to let this charade continue!

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so this one is a little angst filled. Stay tuned for the next one, Harry's got some decisions to make! Xxx
Chapter Notes

My only excuse for this is, I started writing and this was the result. I'm slightly nervous about this chapter, so I hope it's ok. I've got my fingers crossed...and toes...let me know...but please be kind, I'm quite delicate, lots of love xxx

The moment that Louis shut his front door behind him, Harry sunk down to the ground, head in his hands.

How could something so magical turn into something so tragic?

It wasn't fair! After everything he'd been through, Harry felt like he deserved some kind of break! Some kind of happiness! Was that really too much to ask for? Was it really too much to ask for something great?

The look on Louis' face as he'd walked out of that door had been the final straw in Harry's fragile, emotionally stunted frame of mind.

Curling up on the floor in the smallest ball he could get into, Harry cried. He cried about his failed marriage and the lengths he had been forced to go to in order to get out of it.

He cried for his dad and his older sister who he missed so terribly every single day.

He cried for his mum, desperately wanting to hear her voice, see her smile, crawl into her lap like he had done when he was a little boy, have her cuddle him and rub his back, and promise everything
was going to be ok.

Then lastly, he cried about how the true love of his life had offered him everything he'd wanted, and he'd cruelly rejected him - because he couldn't start something that was fundamentally spun out of a lie.

Harry's thoughts were scrambled, he felt so disconnected from the world. He needed something to ground him, something familiar to hold on to, somewhere he could go where he could just be "Harry" even for just a little while.

It took him five minutes to shove a few notes in his pocket and leave for the train station.

Three hours later, in the Lake District, Harry checked into the nearest bed and breakfast to the train station, under a false name, crying himself to sleep, praying for the pain and confusion to go away, and that someone up there would find a way for him to honestly be with Louis - who he was convinced was the love of his life...

If he ever forgave "Liam" for rejecting him.

Friday morning. 7am. Harry watched the hands of his watch tick past from 6:55am to 7:15am. He wondered if Louis would have waved to him on his way to work? He wondered if he had walked past and not given him a second thought?

He wondered how long it would take for Louis to notice that he wasn't there. And if he did, would he even care?

Regardless of the fact that Louis had asked him to be his boyfriend, he hadn't really asked "Harry", he'd asked "Liam". Louis wasn't even aware that "Harry" existed. Surely not even someone as kind, sensitive and caring as Louis would want to be associated with someone as screwed up, with as much emotional baggage as "Harry"!

It took Harry about two hours to walk to his destination, he didn't stop. His legs ached, his chest hurt, and his eyes stung from the tears that refused to stop building up, and falling down his cheeks.

But finally, he was there, at a place he hadn't visited in years. At a place he never thought he would ever see again.

It was a beautiful meadow, surrounded by a forest of trees, and containing some of the happiest, and saddest memories that Harry kept locked away in his mind.

His family's favourite camping spot, and the final resting place for his dad, and his older sister Gemma.

Harry didn't go directly to the spot where the ashes were buried. He didn't need to, just being in the meadow, he could feel them all around him. He could feel them watching him from the vast sky above, hear their voices whispering to him mixed with the breeze rustling the trees, he could almost see them running though the grass.

It was so familiar, even after all the time had passed, even though visually the actual place didn't entirely match up to the one in his mind, it was still a place where he kept a big piece of his heart, whilst he was here, he was nothing less than Harry Styles and as he lay down on the soft grass and stared up at the clear blue sky, he felt a little something slot neatly into place, remembering the main reason he kept fighting to survive, faced his fears and escaped Zayn.

His dad and Gemma had lost their own lives whilst saving him - if he let someone else take his life
from him, without fighting, without trying to save himself, it would all have been for nothing. They would have given up their own lives for nothing!

That's why Harry had never given up, even in his darkness hours - when Harry had stood at the edge of the swimming pool for the first time, the time Zayn physically hurt him so badly he was hospitalised and he'd almost wished he wouldn't wake up. When Harry had made himself tumble off the side of the boat, and into the ocean that stormy night.

They were the fire inside him that burned, urging him forward, cheering him on, persuading him that he could last another minute, another hour, another day.

Turning his face to the side, his red and aching eyes, found the very tree that he had helped his mum dig a hole under all those years ago, and bury their loved ones ashes.

His legs moved on their own accord, his mind felt elsewhere, in the past, and before he knew it, he was sitting in front of the tree, not seeing the carved stone that was there, but seeing his dad and his sister, exactly how he remembered them, leaning against the tree, waiting for him.

"Hey Dad," he rasped, hot tears cascading down his cheeks,"Hey Gem, I did it, I finally got away...."

Harry hadn't intended to stay so long. For hours he sat in front of that tree, talking to his dad and sister. He told them all about the night he left, where he lived now, the flowers he had sent Anne to let her know he was safe. He told them about Louis.

Day turned into night, and he didn't even think of leaving. He wanted to stay with his family, sleeping with them underneath the tree, pretending they were on another camping trip.

The next morning came. Harry awoke with thoughts of Louis prominently in his mind. Had he noticed he hadn't been at home for over twenty four hours?

Harry didn't talk to his family today. He didn't relive their happy or tragic memories, he just lay, in the grass, basking in feelings of security, watching the clouds drift by, breathing the fresh air deep into his lungs, mentally attempting to cleanse his mind and soul.

It was with a heavy heart that he left the meadow, but he had to leave - having had no food or water since the previous morning at the Bed and Breakfast, but he felt disrespectful for even thinking about his stomach in the sacred place.

Before he left, Harry gathered together a little collection of simple ferns and flowers, arranging and displaying them delicately under their tree, saying goodbye, not only to his dad and his sister, but to the piece of his heart that he left there in the meadow to be with them always.

It was time to go home.

When he boarded the train heading for Doncaster, Harry's mind had been pleasantly blank. The closer he got to his original destination, little niggles, feeding off past memories, manifesting by fear jabbered away at him inside his head.

It was like he was having a flashback of when he had returned to Zayn after his mothers "funeral".
The "welcome" he had received on his return, was a memory that wasn't going to fade any time soon - it was probably the most vivid memory he had - just the mere thought of it sending him into a shivering wreck, feeling each and every injury as though it had just happened.

Harry had known at the time, that Zayn would not be pleased with him for going a.w.o.l, but he had hoped that the pretence of his mother's funeral would make his husband a little more lenient. He was sorely mistaken - in Zayn's mind he had to be punished for his wrong doings, and punished he was, his eventual markings so severe that Zayn called in sick at work for three whole weeks, just to make sure Harry didn't leave the house, or so much as get too close to a visible window until he healed.

Even though this time, he had no Zayn to return to, the memory was still enough to associate with that horrific period, and give him an inner anxiety of what could happen. Would there ever be a time when he would no longer be scared?

Before he started walking home from town, Harry went to the florists, once again choosing scent over beauty, attaching a small card to his mum. He wanted her to know that he had been to see his dad and sister, to let her know that he hadn't forgotten.

_When the world was too small to contain them,_

_And their spirits were released to the sky,_

_I took my heart to their meadow to love them,_

_And I left it where forever they'll lie,_

_Wherever I am they are with me,_

_Your hand, in my heart, is in mine,_

_One day there won't be distance between us,_

_Until then, all the love, I'll be fine._

His thoughts of his mum, and how much he missed her stayed with him as he walked into the town centre. He wanted to see her, but although he did feel that he was safe here, the worry he still felt for his mothers safety didn't waver enough for him to risk a visit. It was too soon. What if something went wrong, and he accidently led Zayn straight to her?

If something happened to his mum because of him, he would never forgive himself - he still had the guilt hanging over him from his dad and his sister.

The only thing Harry could do was such a stupid, pathetic little attempt to get closer to his mum, but he did it anyway, because it was the only thing he could.

He went to a shop where they sold fragrances, not caring that it was a woman's that he doused himself in.

A scent can reawaken a thousand forgotten memories, and from the first few airborne particles, Harry was no longer in the middle of a busy store in the middle of Doncaster, he was back at his childhood
It was 10am on Sunday morning. 57 hours since Harry had last seen Louis, and even though Harry wasn't committed or tied to the boy in any way, the same feeling of dread he had literally had hammered into him over "disobedient disappearing acts" came screaming back to him, as he reached the bottom of their shared drive, and he spotted Louis.

Fast asleep, propped up against the door frame, mouth partly open.

Harry slammed on his internal breaks, eyes wide, pulse racing. It was like he was reliving his return to Zayn all over again! Louis was angry with him for leaving! Possibly furious! What other reason would he be sleeping outside, apart from waiting for him? What should he do? His legs didn't want to move! How was he supposed to run if he didn't move?!

Tearing away from Louis' sleeping face, Harry weighed up his chances of getting to his front door unseen and unheard. He was already being loud as it was, just standing still, his own breathing, sounding like a hundred panting dogs to his anxious ears.

His insides squirming, anxiety building, Harry tried to creep towards his front door, his fear making him clumsy, uncoordinated, and loud!

"Fucking hell!"

Harry jumped in alarm. Louis was awake, and staggering towards him, looking slightly insane, driven and furious. Harry couldn't move, he tried to hold his arms up to protect his face from the punches that he was convinced were coming, but he was frozen to the spot.

"Where the fuck have you been?!!"

A huge weight slammed hard into Harry, but it wasn't a punch, or a kick, or even an object.

It was just Louis, hugging him so tightly, Harry could barely breathe. Stunned, relieved to his very core, his breath catching in his throat.

"I'm so sorry!" Louis gasped out, in his rough and broken voice. Then Harry was being kissed, all over his face, over and over again, before arms were around him once more, squeezing Harry as though he was scared that was going to evaporate on the spot.

"You have no clue how worried I was! So fucking worried!" Louis sounded tearful as he looked up into Harry's face. His big blue eyes shimmering. His scruff was longer, as though he hadn't shaved in a few days, and purple shadows were under his eyes as though he hadn't slept.

"You are alright yeah? You are ok?" Louis kept asking him, each little kiss he received thawing out his bones, every hug extracting his anxiety. He was only beginning to realise that Louis wasn't going to hurt him, and very slowly, let his guard down, relaxing into Louis' loving arms, and sinking into his smaller, yet stronger frame.

Sighing sleepily, Louis stood on his tiptoes, nuzzling his face into Harry's neck, his stubble was scratchy, but Harry couldn't care less - this was the most unexpected yet touching welcome he'd ever had in his whole life!

"You smell odd" Louis muttered quietly "You don't smell like you at all"
He tried not to, but once again, Harry's automatic response was to panic. Against his will, he slightly stiffened in Louis' arms, then, nerves getting the better of him, pulled anxiously away, a slight tremor to his hand as he combed it through his hair.

As Louis protectively held him once more, pressing reassuring kisses to his cheeks, Harry didn't see Stan, even though he was only standing a few feet away, eyes blank, stewing in his own thoughts of missing rings, false names and deception.

His anxiety was melting, the circulation in his limbs was returning, the memories of Zayn were fading, all he could see was Louis.

His heart gave a sudden thump, and the overwhelming rush of heart burst into his chest at the unexpected realisation.

Louis loved him.

And Harry loved Louis. So so much!

The sudden sound of a throat being cleared made him jump, as did looking up to find Stan's eyes boring into his own.

"So?" he asked, slightly cold in a tone dripping with scorn and sarcasm, "Where exactly have you been?"
Chapter 14

Louis instantly felt a bit guilty. He was so preoccupied with Liam's reappearance he'd actually forgotten Stan was still there.

In fact, he was so relieved that his Curly was here and hugging him, he didn't notice how Stan was pretty much eyeballing his friend.

He did notice however, how Liam was twitching in his arms, tensing and relaxing in equal measures, especially when Stan questioned (rather rudely if Louis was honest), where exactly had Liam been?

"Doesn't matter" Louis rushed to say, immediately looking fondly into Liam's face and caressing his cheeks with his thumbs, adament that he was going to fuss over Curly all day, to apologise for being such a shit the other night.

"I'm just glad he's back" Louis beamed up at Curly once more, who's smile was a little on the weak side, but then again he did look quite tired.

"Are you doing much today?" He asked hopefully, wondering if curly would want to do something with him.

"Probably got to unpack his...oh...you have no luggage?" came Stan's voice once again, in the style of a mock surprise.

Louis looked at Stan in the upmost astonishment. Where had all this rudeness come from? Then again...

"Er...didn't you take anything with you?" Louis asked, realising that Liam didn't even have a bag with him.
Stan smirked. Liam began to cough, shuffling his feet, straining a little to move away, trying to get out of Louis' arms.

"I'm gonna go in," Harry said quietly to Louis, avoiding Stan's eyes. He didn't like the way he was looking at him, "Need a shower"

"I bet you do!" Stan muttered just enough to be audible, "But it doesn't take just a shower to wash guilt off!"

"You can shower at mine" Louis offered immediately, not hiding how he was glaring at Stan. What was with him today?!

But Liam was already pulling away from Louis and almost running to his own front door.

The moment it shut, Louis grabbed Stan's arm and yanked him inside his own house, slamming the door with a loud bang.

"What the fuck was all that about?" he demanded crossing his arms across his chest, his eyes glittering yet barely visible though slits, "Why were you starting on him? You were being so fuckin' rude!"

Stan levelled his glare with one of his own.

"Don't trust him" he stated bluntly, "And I don't think you should either. I don't think he is who he says he is"

"Oh really?" Louis mocked, "And who exactly do you think he is?"

"Well I don't think his name is Liam for a start..." He muttered to himself.

"What?!" Louis barked. Stan had lowered his tone and he'd barely seen his lips move, "This is not a time to mess about" he snapped, "Curly has just got home and I want to go and spend the day with him, and make sure that he and I are ok and..."

"I don't think things will ever be how you want them to be with him" Stan sighed, sitting down uninvited, "He's never going to say yes to bring your boyfriend"

"Oh really?" Louis asked sarcastically, "And where was this little gem of information all weekend? I've been with you the whole time and you never said that once! What could have possibly changed in the whole ten minutes that we were with him outside for you to come up with that?"

Stan looked down at his feet. Once he said this, there was no going back. But he'd seen the mark on Liam's ring finger, he'd smelt the woman's perfume. It would be cruel to not say anything and have Louis find out another way.

"He has the mark of a wedding ring on his finger Lou," Stan said gently, not able to look up in fear of seeing the look of utter devastation in his best mates eyes, "I think he's married, and he's removed his ring to make you think he isn't."

Now he had started, it was easy to steamroll though the rest. He mentioned the fragrance he was suddenly wearing that didn't smell like him, and how he'd gone away without telling Louis. He said how he thought his name was fake, that he didn't live next door properly at all, and his reasons why he thought this. Lastly he explained why the real reason was that Liam claimed he didn't have a mobile or a passport and couldn't drive.

There was a silence when he'd finished.
"I'm so sorry Lou," he said, finally looking up at Louis, "But I didn't want you to be messed...."

The sight that met his eyes was not what he was expecting. He had pictured Louis to look heartbroken, tears streaming down his face. Not...livid and trembling with rage!

"Get the fuck out!" Louis snarled nastily, "How dare you come in here and say those things! You've got no proof! You have nothing to back you up other than speculation!" he laughed darkly, "That really is the biggest load of bullshit I have ever heard!"

"When have I ever lied to you!" snapped Stan jumping to his feet, aghast at Louis' response, "Never! Why would I do that? I'm only trying to protect you!"

"From what?!" Louis burst out, "From a sweet, loving, charming, single, kid who has done nothing wrong? Fine, he fucked off for a couple of days! But he's completely in his rights to do so! I don't fuckin' own him! And you want me to believe he was with his wife?!"

"Well how do you explain it?" Stan snapped, "He's probably nothing more than a devious, cheating little con man! He has a massive stash of money under his bed! Probably from the last guy he screwed over! You might be next!"

The blow to the side of his face caught him off guard and almost sent Stan flying! Louis stood inches away from him, the shock and dismay of his own actions stunning him into silence.

"You punched me..." Stan gripped his jaw with his hand, in the whole seventeen years that he and Louis had been friends, Louis had never even threatened to hit him. His eyes widened in disbelief.

Louis seemed to give himself a little shake.

"I'm going over to Liam's" he spat out, his lip curling as he stared at his former friend. "When you want to apologise for talking shit to me, you know where I am" he stalked off towards his front door, nursing his hand, as he went.

"Just look at his fucking hand Lou!" Stan shouted at him, "Ask him! Just fuckin' ask him!"

Louis said nothing, just held his fist up behind him, his middle finger prominent and mocking. The door slammed.

"And I'll be still here when you find out" Stan murmured to himself, sitting back down on the settee, furious with himself for handling it so badly. He should have waited, should have dug deeper and found some actual evidence. But was it such a crime to have his best mates best interests at heart?

Harry went straight to the living room window and watched Louis pretty much drag Stan into his house, slamming the door behind him with force. Had Louis picked up upon Stan's strange questions? He definitely had, he held his hand up in front of him, to see it trembling.

Now what? Shower. That was probably the best idea. After all, he had said he was going to take one.

He tried to think of an alibi whilst he was in there, trying to convince himself that everuthing was going to be alright, trying to reassure himself that he was safe. Hoping that Louis really would come over later, hoping he'd want a cuddle - Harry really needed one! But he'd understand if he didn't. He wondered if things could be like they were before, he wondered how long someone as desirable as Louis would be willing to wait, or had he already given up? He had been away a long time...
As he was getting out of the shower, and drying himself with a towel, he heard a shuffling downstairs...the sound someone would make if they were in his house!

Harry was just about to dive head first into panic mode, when he remembered, Louis had a key! It was probably just Louis...but what if it wasn't?

"Curly?"

Just Louis.

Harry released the breath he had been holding. It was just Louis. He could relax now. He was still safe.

Knowing it wouldn't be long until Louis came looking for him, Harry quickly pulled on a fresh pair of boxer briefs.

It was funny how he still regarded wearing them as a luxury, and a daily reminder of how different his life was now. Looking in the mirror, he smiled a little as he fingered the soft cotton that snugly covered everything. He wondered fleetingly if Louis would like them, would they even get to the stage where Louis would see them? Was it wrong that he wanted him to? Like, soon? Fuck! He was getting ahead of himself! What was it about Louis Tomlinson that made his common sense disappear?

Whilst he was looking in the mirror, Harry leant towards the glass to inspect his contact lenses, then gave his left eye a vigorous rub to soothe the itch. He usually took them out every night once Louis had gone home, but whilst he'd been in the meadow, they had completely slipped his mind. Now they were just irritating him.

"Nice pants Curly!"

Harry almost leapt out of his skin, snatching up his discarded towel and throwing it around him. When he'd considered Louis seeing him in his boxers soon, he hadn't wanted it to be now!

"Sorry, sorry!" Louis said quite cheerfully, clapping his hands comically over his eyes and backing out of the bathroom, obviously sensing the boys discomfort, "I'll be in the kitchen whenever your sexy little arse is ready!"

A moment later, his head reappeared, eyes still covered.

"Psst!" he whispered loudly, a huge grin on his face, "Curly?"

"What?" Harry squeaked, pausing mid bid to yank his trousers on as quickly as possible.

"Nice little body you got there!" he whispered conspiringly, running off laughing when Harry's towel hit him in the face.

Louis ran downstairs, laughing the whole way. He knew seeing Liam would put him in a better mood, and he was right - even if he had come over all unnecessary when he'd accidently walked in on the lad in just his underwear - fuck he looked fine! It brought the memories back of seeing him in those tight little shorts, now he had another nice little addition to his wank bank!

Sitting expectantly on the settee, he got out his phone, needing something to occupy his mind whilst he waited for Curly to come join him, and distract him from thinking about how much of a prick his
It didn't work, there was already a message there.

Stan: Don't let what you want to see blind your judgement. I love you and I don't want to see you getting hurt. When you need me, I'll be here.

Well he might be there, but Louis certainly wouldn't be! If he wasn't at Liam's he would be most certainly obsessing over everything that Stan had said, getting angrier and insulted that his best mate could even think about doing this to him! He just didn't understand why? Was Stan worried that Louis was replacing him, and they weren't going to be friends anymore? If so then why hadn't he just sat him down and talked to him about it? But instead, Stan had to go and attack the one person who, Louis would fight tooth and nail for!

Louis ground his teeth in frustration. There was nothing he could do about it now however, today was all about Curly coming home, and nothing, especially not bullshit claims from Stan were going to ruin their day together! The whole story Stan had invented was just ludicrous! Louis decided then and there, that he was just going to ignore it, after all, it wouldn't take long for Stan to come running back to him and admit he'd made the whole thing up out of jealousy - just because he hadn't found his soulmate yet!

"Aww!" He pretended to moan, furrowing his brow and pulling a sad face, "You put clothes on!" then he chuckled, openly laughing at Liam's surprised face as he came to sit down with Louis fully clothed. He was sat about three inches away from Louis, but that was far too much space.

"Get here!" Louis demanded, grabbing hold of Liam's forearms, then falling back on the settee, bringing Liam crashing down on top of him, their faces now only an inch apart, "That's better" he smiled as he whispered, giving Liam a little peck on the nose, "Nice and cuddly."

He could feel Liam fidgeting, muscles stiffening uncomfortably, his eyes darting about, unwilling to settle. Was this about the other night?

"I'm sorry," Louis said quietly, moving his hands from Liam's arms and sliding them to his shoulders to his face, where he gently cupped his cheeks. Liam froze, hovering over him, his back arched, knees bracketing Louis' hips.

Louis half wished there was a mirror behind him so he could see just how good his bum looked stuck up in the air!

"What for?" Harry asked warily, he was feeling far too comfortable, almost laying on top of Louis, trying so hard not to concentrate on the perfect shape and colour of his lips and wishing they were pressed against his. He'd zoned out, Louis was trying to get his attention. Every time he moved his eyes, Louis would move his whole head, trying to catch his gaze.

"The other night" Louis replied sombrely, he began to comb his fingers through the sides of Harry's hair.

"I'm so sorry about how I acted," he sighed, "It was all my fault, and I'm sorry if I upset you" he looked downwards, Harry could almost count every single one of his eyelashes, "I've never had a boyfriend before" he explained with difficulty, "I've never wanted one. But then you came along, and I realised.." he broke off suddenly,"Are you comfortable love?"

Louis was starting to babble like he was stalling.

"You don't look comfortable. It's a bit of a tight squeeze on here isn't it? Can we lie on the floor for
Harry's eyebrows knitted together frowning.

"More space" Louis explained distractedly, he needed a few seconds to get his wording right. He was trying so hard not to mess it up.

Still frowning, Liam clumsily clambered off Louis, standing up, then without saying a word, picked up Louis' hand, giving it a small tug. He wanted to hear the rest of that sentence!

"Are you sure?" Louis asked as Liam quietly led him into his bedroom and over to his bed, "Really, I would have been fine on the floor!"

Liam shrugged, "We've been in bed together before. Room to spread out"

His eyes did look a little on the anxious side, and his tone was so drawling and slow and husky. He was just so effortlessly sexy...all the time!

"Right..." murmured Louis when they were comfortably situated on top of Liam's covers. "Where was I?"

They were laying on their sides, legs slightly tangled together, one of Louis' hands was stroking Liam's waist, the other was stroking his soft cheek. Liam's weren't on Louis at all, but on the small strip of bedding between them. But that was ok, he must just be nervous. Louis didn't need to be touched all the time. He was just grateful to be here.

"So, I was saying" Louis continued, trying not to smile as Liam instantly perked up slightly, "That when I met you, I realised that you are everything, that I never knew, I always wanted. There is so much to you that makes you so different to everyone I have ever met - and then we kissed..."

Louis took in a deep breath. If he was to close his eyes, he could remember every single second of that incredible kiss they had shared, and how much he really would give his arms and legs for another one!

So would Liam, by the look of it, since his eyes were half closed, and he was biting down hard on his lower lip - Louis needed to stop fixating on it!

"Well, I can't speak for you" he whispered, "But I have never ever experienced that type of kiss with anyone before, and to be completely honest, I never want to even attempt to have one like it with anyone else! And that was why I couldn't help myself, and I had to just blurt it out and ruin everything, and I was so sure you felt the same..."

"Lou..." Liam was trying to interrupt him, but Louis couldn't stop now, he was actually saying things as they should be said.

"Please curly," Louis almost pleaded, "You have to let me say this. It's really important me that you know what I'm thinking right now - and believe me, I have had a lot of time to think about over the last couple of days"

Liam had opened his mouth again, but quietly closed it without a word. He did however, move his hand slightly, lifting it off the bed, letting it hover for a few seconds mid air, before gently placing it on Louis' hip.
"The first thing I heard you say, although you didn't say it," Louis continued quietly, "Was that you didn't want me. But you didn't say that. You just said that you didn't want us to be a full on couple now. And I was devastated because...well...because for me, all I want is you. But you're not ready. And I respect that, and I respect you for telling me, and I should have let you know that at the time, and I'm so sorry I didn't."

He thumbed at Liam's cheek, looking into his warm brown eyes that were locked on his.

"When I realised you were gone," he continued, his voice so soft, "I missed you so much" he gave a sad little chuckle, "I didn't move from the doorstep waiting for you to come home" he confessed, feeling stupid, "I wanted to wait for you so I could tell you as soon as possible how sorry I was - and to tell you, that I realised, that because I believe..."

Louis started to stutter a little, the emotions that he never believed he would feel flooding to the surface.

"...that you are the one for me, and because of that, if you forgive me. If you give me another chance for us to stay exactly how we were, before I fucked it up! I will wait for as long as it takes, even if you never want to put a label on us, I will promise to prove to you every second of every day that I deserve you."

Louis gave Liam a half smile, "Do you think you can forgive me? Do you think we can go back to how we were?"

Harry was stunned. Absolutely speechless. Completely overwhelmed. Louis thought he was the one? Louis wanted to wait for him? Louis waited on the doorstep for hours so he could apologise?

"You never asked where I was?" was all he could say. How could he really put his feelings into words? He didn't even know what he was feeling, Louis' words just weren't sinking in.

Louis snuggled closer to him, nuzzling into the crook of Harry's neck. Harry adored the closeness between them, the way his skin tingled under the slightest touch, and he got goosebumps whenever he felt the boy breathe on him.

It was as though Louis was programmed to say everything that Harry needed to hear.

"If you want to tell me where you were, I'm all ears." Louis mumbled sleepily, wrapping his arm around Harry's waist, "But if you don't, that's fine with me. I don't own you, you don't have to tell me anything. The most important part is that you came back."

"Lou?" Harry whispered, feeling so happy, so stupidly, crazily happy, that he could barely think straight. He couldn't see Louis' face, and if he couldn't see his face...

Louis' little face popped up, grinning like crazy when he saw Harry's dimples.

Louis was so perfect, and the words he spoke were always of substance and so genuine. He was handsome. He was funny, cheeky, and he was kind. But most of all he cared about him, treated him like a human being, instead of some kind of property. But most of all, Harry wanted him!

Harry wanted to be kissed by Louis exactly as they had done on this very bed three days ago!

"Kiss me"
Louis didn't need to be asked twice. One moment he was looking all sleepy and cute, with his fluffy hair and cheeky smile, then a split second later, his face had morphed into one of alluring seduction, flipping Harry gently onto his back and straddling him, pressing their mouths together in a long, slow, passion fueled kiss that left Harry reeling.

Harry couldn't help but let himself fall further and further into the amazing world that was Louis Tomlinson, feelings that he'd thought had died long ago springing to the forefront of his mind.

For the first time in years, he could feel a certain part of him waking up, aroused by how Louis' tongue was licking into his mouth, little fingers tugging slightly on his curls, the way his crotch was teasing him by ever so lightly grinding his hips.

All too soon, Louis rolled off him, laying at his side and pressing one last long kiss on his lips.

"Sorry" he whispered, breathing hard, "I was enjoying that way too much!" his eyes flickered down to his crotch, and the obvious reason he had to move. Harry wondered what it would feel like in his hand. He wondered if he'd noticed what similar action had happened in his trousers - something he also kind of wanted an eyeful of, it had been so long since he felt the need for physical affection, and Louis made him feel like a boy his age should feel: hot blooded and horny!

Harry shook his head in disagreement, yanking Louis back on top of him, making his intentions clear by angling his hips upwards, making Louis gasp out in obvious surprise as their crotches collided, his hands forcing Louis' face in the position for him to properly kiss.

"Want you!" his voice was so rough, and desperate, needy and longing. He was desperate for Louis, tugging at the back of his t-shirt, wanting to feel his skin under the palms of his hands, wanting to feel his skin against his bare chest. Wanting to remember what it was like to writhe underneath someone he was infatuated with as they sucked...

If it had been anyone else, Louis would have had the lads jeans and boxers off his legs, and his knees up against his chest in seconds.

But this wasn't a one night stand! This was his Curly, and he was not just someone to get his dick wet over - no matter how much he wanted him!

Liam had tugged his t-shirt up so far that it was up around his ears. Liam looked like his wet dream, cheeks were flushed, his mouth was partly open, and he was obviously unaware of both the whines coming out of his mouth and exactly how desperately he was grinding up against Louis' dick - driving him to distraction!

"What do you want?" Louis breathed, giving in by removing his t-shirt, chucking it onto the floor. Liam looked up through his heavy lidded eyes.

"Touch me" he begged, once again, hoarse and desperate, "Please Lou!"

Now it was Louis who was overwhelmed, so taken with how gorgeous his Curly looked, that Liam was forced to take matters into his own hands, snatching up Louis' hand, and placing it on his obvious bulge, instantly rutting up against it, moaning in the most obscene fashion.

It would have been offensive of Louis not to continue what Curly had started, knocking Liam's hand out of the way, who immediately started to fumble with the button of his jeans, wriggling his hips to try and get them off.

"You want me to actually touch you?" Louis kissed into his open mouth, licking his lips nervously
when Liam nodded emphatically.

"Fuck curly, what you do to me!" Louis' eyes rolled to the back of his head as he felt Liam's lips attach onto his neck, "Don't you want to wait? I can wait! If you want to take this slowly!"

Harry did not want to wait! He was so hot for Louis, he felt like he was burning from the inside out! His jeans and boxers finally around down around his thighs, Harry grabbed Louis' hand, leading it finally to his hard aching cock, moulding his fingers around it.

Harry came so fast it would have been embarrassing, but it had been so long! Once Louis' hand was wrapped around him, all it took was a couple of well pressured pumps until he came with an ear splintering shout, spurting hotly and somewhat aggressively all over Louis' hand and chest.

He felt drenched in sweat, out of breath, he could barely remember his own name, completely and blissfully fucked out for the first time since his honeymoon.

"You ok?" Louis breathed, combing Liam's hair off his face, eyes full of love and adoration as he drank in how beautiful his baby was. He didn't give a shit if they weren't in a relationship - Curly was his baby!

"Was that good for you?"

Louis had never wanted to please anyone so much in his life!

"You know it was good" Liam grinned a lopsided, sleepy smile up at him, slightly slurring his speech.

Louis chucked a little, rolling a very pliable Curly over onto his side, and plastering himself to the taller lads back. He may be the smaller one out of the two, but he was just built to be the bigger spoon - and Liam just snuggled back into his chest, sighing with contentment.

"I wouldn't know" Louis admitted, apart from the fact he always topped during sex, Louis wasn't exactly used to "giving", "I don't go jerking off every 'Tom', 'Dick' and 'Harry'!"

Liam gave a little snort of laughter, Louis chuckled too, snuggling into the back of his babies hair, pulling him closer to him.

"You're so funny" Liam murmured, "Don't know where Tom fits in, but you did jerk off Harry's dick!"

Liam laughed again, low, and almost half asleep.

"I don't get it" Louis whispered kissing the shell of Curly's ear, "You do talk some crap sometimes"

"You jerked off my dick" Louis could hear his smile, "And I'm Harry you...idiot...you jerked off Harry's dick!" he snorted again, "Tommo jerked off Harry's dick!"

As what Harry murmured aloud, whilst buried in the dark brown curls on his head, Louis' eyes snapped open:

Harry?
Chapter 15

Just want to say a massive thank you to everyone who has been reading, sending me lovely messages, leaving kudos and subscribing! It's been a massive surprise, and I hope I don't disappoint you as the story unfolds xxx

It turned out to be barely more than a forty minute nap, but when Harry awoke, he felt more rested and revitalised than he had done after a proper eight hour sleep. Bright sunshine flooded his bedroom, stinging his eyes, but for the first time he felt safe and comfortable - because he was still in Louis' arms.

Choosing not to move, Harry basked in his thoughts of what his future could hold. For starters, this was something he could quite happily get used to, waking up to actual sunshine, with his sunshine - maybe wearing a few less items of clothing, he couldn't help it, he shouldn't be, but sometimes all Harry could think about was what Louis looked like naked, he had to stop though...his mouth was starting to salivate!

Still smiling, still slightly giddy from the memories of their little unplanned adventure, Harry watched, somewhat mesmerised as Louis' hands twisted and entwined their fingers together, where they lay almost in front of his nose.

"I know you're awake," he felt Louis whisper in his ear, "Are you ok?"

Harry nodded, a big stupid grin stretching muscles in his cheeks that had been rarely used. He was more than ok, he felt incredible - Louis made him feel incredible.

"Good"

Soft lips fluttered upon his cheek. They felt heavenly.

Louis began to play with his fingers again, flexing them open and shut, holding them up, seeming to admire them from every angle.

"Baby?"

Harry's eyes opened ever so slightly wider at the new term of sentiment whispered from his Louis' mouth.

"Hmm?" he asked, still sounding a little drowsy, it hadn't been much, but he was really worn out from it. Worn out and blissfully content.
"Do you wear jewellery? I've never seen you wear any before"

Harry shook his head. The only piece he had ever worn had been his wedding ring - nothing since then. He watched as Louis twisted their fingers together again, the little pale strip on his finger highlighted that little bit brighter as he looked at it. He couldn't wait for that final reminder to finally fade into oblivion!

Louis hummed a little, as though deep in thought, and pressed another kiss to his temple, a slightly rougher one than before.

Harry stretched out his legs a bit, still watching their hands move. There was such a size difference between them, whereas Harry's had always seemed a little bit large for him, Louis' were absolutely tiny in comparison - in fact he was a lot smaller to Harry in a lot of ways, but he was such a huge personality that it seemed fitting for him to cuddle Harry from behind. His hands were really quite sweet though - just like the rest of him.

Suddenly he frowned, examining the skin of Louis' right knuckle. There was a mark on it, not very large as such, but there was definitely a bruise blooming below the surface of his skin.

"What happened to your hand?" he asked softly, bringing it closer to his face so he could kiss at the inflammation. He felt Louis shift slightly behind him, taking a look himself.

"Wow" Harry heard him mutter, "His face must have been harder than I thought!"

What?!

Harry was still laying down in exactly the same position, but all of a sudden he felt as though he was moving, invisible walls closing in on him, compressing him to the bed, Louis' hands feeling like a shackled weight holding him down, numbing him, chilling him, blood draining from his face. Louis couldn't have said that! Not his Louis! Not his Lou!

"What did you say?" he choked out, finally finding his voice, "Who's face?"

Maybe he'd heard him wrong. Yes, that had to be it, he was so scared of hearing that, Louis wouldn't do something like this unprovoked, would he? Surely everything he believed he had seen in this boy hadn't been a lie?

"He said something I didn't like" Louis said burying his nose into the back of Harry's hair, making Harry stiffen with fright.
Thay was it? Stan had said something wrong and Louis had punched him in the face?!

It was history repeating itself! Underneath his cute, cuddly exterior, Louis was just as vicious and cruel as Zayn had been! How long would it be before he had turned his hand to Harry!

"Get off me!" Harry yelped, struggling to get out of Louis' arms and throwing himself across the room, stumbling over his own feet, before turning around to stare - wide eyed and terrified - at Louis, who had leapt onto his knees in astonishment.

"You need to leave!" Harry stuttered, suddenly very aware that if Louis was to attack him, there was only the open window as an option for escape.

"Curly?"

Louis was looking so confused - as though he didn't have a clue what was going on.

"Get out!" Harry gasped, wrapping his arms tightly around himself, "Get out of my house!"

Louis was inching himself to the edge of the bed, getting off it slowly, approaching Harry with caution.

"Baby? What's wrong?" Louis asked timidly, approaching Harry with his hands outstretched, "You don't have to worry, everything's fine!"

"Don't touch me!" Harry backed himself into the far corner, beginning to hyperventilate, "You need to leave! Now!"

"What? Why?"

How could he really be standing there? Having the cheek to look confused? How could he possibly think that Harry would accept this kind of behaviour?!

"You punched your best friend in the face!" Harry spluttered in disbelief, his face reddening with anger, "Where do you get off thinking you can do that!

Louis stood open mouthed, his face turning paler by the second.

"You don't understand!" he protested weakly, "He was saying really horrible things! I couldn't listen to it! You have to believe me! I'm not violent!"

Harry was seeing Louis in a whole new light, he had been convinced that this boy was different, that he cared, that he was passionate opposed to violence, that he was loving opposed to cruel, but he wasn't! His beautiful face was just a mask! How long before the mask slipped and he started beating on Harry if he 'said something' Louis didn't like, or didn't do what he wanted?

It made Harry sick to the stomach. He was caught in a vicious cycle, only destined to meet people exactly like Zayn - but Louis? Why Louis?

"Baby listen to me" Louis pleaded, getting closer to Harry, whose legs felt like they were cemented to the floor, "Please listen to me, he said that..."

"I don't care what he said!"

"But it's important..." Louis was struggling to say, trying so hard not to raise his voice and make this situation worse!
"There is never an excuse for domestic violence!" Harry spat out, he was trembling from head to toe, but he was not going to lie down and take it this time, "You're just no better than him!" he stated hysterically, "I am not going to let someone like you ruin my life again! I've suffered too much, and I'm not going to let you hurt me! Now get your disgusting morals out of my house!" He finished with a yell.

Louis was too close, he was right in front of Harry, he was lifting his hand high in the air.

"No!"

Harry tried to run, but the jeans that had already been lodged around his thighs, slipped, tangling around his feet, sending him crashing to the floor.

Tears filled his dry, staring eyes, and he rubbed the left one, trying to dislodge the gritty sensation he was feeling in it. He couldn't think properly, his limbs were refusing to co-operate. The panic he had begun to feel was increasing, he couldn't take it if Louis hurt him, not his Louis!

Louis was on the floor now, creeping closer to him, frowning so hard, there was a sharp defined crease down the center of his eyebrows.

"Don't touch me!" Harry gasped out, his chest tightening, throwing his hands up over his face, hardly able to breathe, salty tears streaming down his face, "Please Louis! Don't hurt me!! Please don't hurt me!"

Louis, wide eyed and slightly shaken, kneeled down slowly in front of the seemingly traumatised boy and felt ever single crack as his heart broke for him. It all made sense, getting him to the horrifying conclusion.

The lad in front of him was called Harry.

One of his brown contact lenses had been rubbed out of his eye and was stuck to his cheek that was only just visible where his arms were shielding his face.

Louis had seen the mark that Stan had been talking about when he'd been playing with Harry's fingers - which had worried him at the time, so scared that his picture perfect Curly was actually deceiving him and was going to break his heart. But this was so much worse.

Domestic violence. Someone like him. Suffered too much - all the things that Curly had shouted at him, as he looked so petrified, and so suddenly so small.

"Harry?" he asked quietly, gently touching the lads arm, quietly absorbing the shell shocked gasp, "Your husband abused you didn't he? That's' why you moved into this house so suddenly, with nothing isn't it? That's why you're here"

And just like that the walls protecting Harry tumbled down. Louis just got the tiniest glimpse of one tear filled jade green eye, before the lads large arms were wrapped around his head, pulling his legs up to his chest, rocking erratically as he sobbed desperate and broken, finally allowing Louis to wrap his arms around his tired, weak body, clutching hold of him so tightly.

"Everything's going to be ok baby" Louis whispered fiercely, struggling to hold back tears of his own, "You're safe here, I won't let anyone hurt you ever again."
Neither Harry or Louis kept track of exactly how long Harry sat and cried for, at first huge, hiccup-inducing sobs that shook his whole body, subsiding over time into quiet whimpers, then silent tears that made him shiver.

Louis didn't say one word the entire time. Just held him tightly, letting the lad turn in his arms, wrapping his own around the smaller boys torso, burying his face into his neck, letting Louis stroke his back, and nuzzle gently into his hair.

Hours passed, Harry's tears stopped, and silence fell around them, neither of them breaking away from each other.

"How...did you find out?" Harry eventually croaked out, mouthing his words into Louis' shoulder, "What did I do wrong? I've been so careful!"

Louis pressed a small kiss to Harry's temple.

"Stan might have had a few questions about you" he admitted, "He thought that you were using me to cheat on your wife, and you had some kind of second life somewhere else. It's why I hit him..." He explained as an afterthought, "I thought he was bullshitting me and just didn't like you"

"Why did he think...?"

Another small snuffle prevented Harry from finishing his sentence. Louis adjusted his position a little, Harry felt so uncomfortable, all tense and coiled in his arms like a spring, his wiry body all hunched. Louis was strong, but when it came to lifting Harry up in his arms - even from a starting sitting position - he didn't need to be, Harry barely had any weight to him at all, despite his height.

Harry let out an anxious squeak as he felt himself being hauled off the safety of the floor, unsure if he should grip Louis tighter to prevent himself from falling, or try to get away - it was so hard to forget that he wasn't in trouble and he wasn't about to be punished.

"Just relax baby, I've got you," Louis soothed him, sitting him on the bed gently. He frowned, and Harry looking at him, visibly flinched away. To his surprise, Louis' hands went straight to the waist band of his jeans that were gaping around his calves. Surely Louis wasn't thinking of...!

"Just a sec" Louis muttered, tugging them upwards instead of down, tapping Harry on the hips as a signal to lift them off the mattress, then pulling them back into their rightful place, smartly doing them up.
"Better?" Louis asked him gently, giving his knee a little squeeze.

Harry nodded. This was much better, he was already feeling a little less vulnerable. But as he watched Louis examining his face, he began to fee uneasy, feelings of insecurity, creeping up his spine. What was he meant to do now? What was he meant to say? Why was Louis frowning at him?

"You have green eyes," Louis remarked, sitting at the bottom of the bed, crossing his legs under him, "Why are you hiding them?" he leant forward, removing the discarded lens from where it was still stuck to Harry's cheek, holding it out for him to take.

"I...disguise...I guess..." Harry mumbled, rolling the small piece of plastic between his fingers, "Didn't work too well..."

He fell silent again, his - now odd coloured - eyes darting between the sheets and Louis.

"I don't know what to say to you" he muttered, feeling defeated.

Louis agonised over what was the best thing he could do for his Curly. He really wanted to hug him, but the lad's body language was closed off and he didn't want to invade his personal space without being invited.

"How about introductions?" he suggested brightly, "As everybody knows, I am the one and only Louis Tomlinson, or, 'The Tommo', as I'm known in certain circles! And who might you be? Curly stranger?"

Harry looked up, he couldn't help but smile a little bit. Louis was using both his index fingers to point at him dramatically.

"Erm...I'm..." he faltered, eyes watering again, quickly looking away.

"Harry, it's ok. You don't have to tell me if you're not ready" Louis' heartfelt tone cutting into the confusion of his brain, "Do you want me to go?"

"When did Stan find out my name?" Harry asked suddenly, not understanding how that bit of information had gotten to Louis at all. He had been so careful!

Louis gave him a small smile, "You didn't tell Stan," he confided, "You told me. Earlier...after we...after you had..." he allowed himself a little chuckle, "Let's just say, I don't think you had any idea what you were saying love!"

Harry blushed deeply, it was hard to forget how good he had felt with Louis' hand on him - embarrassingly good!

"It had...erm...been a while" Harry commented shyly, watching Louis out of the corner of his eye. He was confused and worried, and he wanted Louis to just get up his end of the bed and cuddle him!

Louis grinned to himself, but didn't comment.

"I think it suits you" he revealed suddenly, and met Harry's eyes, his own radiating so much warmth, "Harry, much more fitting."

Harry smiled. He looked so sweet and bashful, over something so simple as what his real name was.
"Harry?"

Louis loved the way his name sounded coming out of his mouth. His lad looked up at him curiously.

"Should we talk about this?" he asked carefully.

There was so much he wanted to say to Harry. So much comfort he wanted to give him, but it didn't seem appropriate unless Harry "allowed" him to. This was Harry's story, and he was entitled to tell it if/when he wanted to.

"We should" Harry curled his legs up to his chest, and wrapped his arms around them, "But..."

"You're not ready?" Louis asked, he inched a little bit closer to Harry, his heart gravitating towards the young lads, "That's ok. You take all the time you need. I'm not going to force you to talk about it."

Harry's face was a picture of puzzlement.

"You're not?" he asked, furrowing his brow, "But I lied to you! You're not mad? Don't you think I owe you an explanation?"

Fuck it! Louis thought seeing Harry's crestfallen face, abandoning his plan to keep his distance, scrambling over to Harry and pulling him into his arms.

"I don't know what people expected of you before" Louis told Harry so lovingly, massaging his shoulders with his nimble fingers, "But when it comes to me, the only person you have to answer to is yourself. You can tell me anything you want," he gave Harry a little smile and kissed the tip of his nose, "But you can also tell me fuck all of you think it's none of my business! Whatever you want!"

Harry's entire face warmed and opened up at Louis' words, like a beautiful exotic flower.

Louis was saying, everything that Harry needed to hear, and he believed him, he believed every word.

How had he gone from being trapped under Zayn's thumb, to the top of Louis' pedestal?

For years all he had craved was his freedom, but he had expected to continue his life alone.

Truthfully, he had never foreseen meeting anyone. Let alone Louis, he didn't feel privileged to be in this position, having someone so precious and understanding giving him so much care and affection.

Harry wanted to give him something. It might be small, but to Harry it really was a huge moment.

Not only was he exposing his true identity to Louis, but by saying it aloud, he was confirming to himself who he was going to be in his future.

"Lou?"

His voice sounded so strong making Louis pause from where he was kissing Harry's knuckles.

"Harry Edward Styles" he told the boy shyly, pinching at his right eye until the other contact lense came out, then looked up unblinkingly into Louis' inquisitive cobalt orbs.

"That's my full name...I...I want to tell you...stuff...whatever you want to know...I just..."
"Need some time?" Louis offered kindly, he nodded kindly, then held out his hand officially.

"It's great to meet you Harry Edward Styles," laughing a little, as Harry shook his hand, already smiling a little bit more than before.

"Cuddle?"

Harry nodded, curling up and laying down in Louis' lap, grabbing at the boys hand and making at it paw at his head - he loved it when Louis stroked his hair/gently scratched his scalp.

It felt like pure, undiluted intimacy.

Louis carded his fingers through Harry's thick hair, making sure he scratched his nails in Harry's favourite spots, not taking his eyes off the beautiful green eyes that he now, could not live without.

"I like this" Harry breathed, as he nuzzled into Louis' tummy, "Feels...good..."

He opened his eyes once more.

"How did I tell you my name?" he asked softly.

Louis smirked down at him, happy to repeat every word that Harry had said to him, loving how the lads face cracked into a huge smile, then hid his grinning face in Louis' tummy once more, muffling the next words that he uttered, as he kissed Louis' stomach through his t-shirt, setting a thousand butterflies flutting within Louis' insides.

"I think it was because I was happy" Harry decided aloud when Louis asked him to repeat, and stared up at Louis, jade eyes full of wonder, "You let me be me...whoever that is...I'm not sure...I wasn't allowed for so long...what do you think?"

"I think a lot of it had to do with me jerking you off!" Louis smirked, still itching at Harry's scalp, "But also" he heaved Harry into sitting position and dragged him into his lap, "I think that you are going to be really happy for a very long time" he rubbed their noses together in an Eskimo kiss, "Because you get to discover who Harry Styles is. What you like, what you don't, what you want to do with the rest of your life. I think that's pretty exciting. And I think you're very brave." he finished with a somber smile.

There was only one way to respond.

Harry smiled, feeling the shivers of fear he had felt, turning into tinges of excitement. It was something he liked, it was something he wanted, so he did it.

Harry kissed Louis - something he wanted to do for the rest of his life.
Chapter 17

"Sounds pretty far fetched to me, some would say 'convenient',"

Stan sat back in his chair and eyed Louis warily. His face looked absolutely fine. Louis may have slightly bruised his own knuckle, but hadn't left a single mark on Stan's cheek - something they were both grateful for.

Harry had pretty much ordered Louis to go and apologise to his best mate, which Louis was more than willing to do.

After all, Stan had only said those things because he cared about Louis' wellbeing. Once he heard what Louis knew, he had no doubt that Stan would apologise for what he had said, and the conclusions he had jumped to.

That was Louis' theory, the reality however, took a different turn entirely.

Stan still thought Harry was lying. Louis being unable to answer his questions on the topic, only cemented his beliefs.

In truth, Louis still didn't know the whole story, only what he had guessed.

Harry had been in an abusive marriage, and he'd left. That was all. He didn't know when it ended, how it ended, or where Harry's husband was now.

Did he live in the same town? The same county? Was he trying to track Harry down? Was he breaking into the lads house at this very moment? What if something happened to him whilst Louis was at work, and Louis had no clue?

It all weighed heavily on the lads mind, and he now dreaded going to work every day, knowing it would be eleven long, painful hours until he would see his Curly again, and know he was alright.

Louis wanted to ask the questions, but he didn't want to push Harry when he wasn't ready. It was getting on for three days, and he still hadn't said a word. It was so difficult to keep his mouth shut!

Louis also sat back in his chair, rubbing his face with his hands. He looked stressed, Stan observed, and very tired.

"Talk to me," he commanded, "You look like something's eating you alive. You can still talk to me you know. I am your best mate remember."

"My best mate who doesn't believe me." Louis muttered sarcastically, "I'm fine" he said a little bluntly, "I'm just worried about Hazza. I want to keep him safe, but I don't even know who, or what I'm protecting him from!"

"Talk to him then" Stan told him usefully, "Communication is key"

"Thank you 'Oracle Stanley', I'll get right on that!" Louis retorted, dripping with sarcasm, "I don't want to push him. I think he's had enough of that, besides..." He allowed himself a little smile, "I think he's happy now. I don't want to ruin that by bringing up the past"

"Even though it's making you look and act like shit?" Stan rolled his eyes, "Look mate" he said bluntly, "You do what you think is right, but I can't help but think there is more to this. It's still
weird. You look out for him all you want, but you are my priority."

"Why would anyone lie about that?" Louis questioned, "No one is that good an actor - not even me!" He was referring to Harry’s panicking in the bedroom.

"I don't know" Stan answered honestly. Still thinking inside that he would get to the bottom of whatever this was. Louis shut up after that. There was no point in confiding with Stan about something which his best mate still considered to be bullshit. Talk turned to football, and Harry's name didn't come up again during the rest of their lunch break.

"Curly! I'm home!" Louis sang out joyfully, letting himself in the kitchen door of Harry's house, feeling the tremendous feeling on relief when he laid his eyes on the lad who was - despite his worries - perfectly fit and happy, carefully stirring a delicious smelling something on the stove.

"That smells amazing!" Louis stated, bounding over to the lad, and wrapping his arms around his waist, standing on his toes to peek over his shoulder, gently kissing his bare skin.

"I like your cooking attire! You should dress like this more often!"

Louis stroked Harry's bare stomach with the tips of his fingers.

Harry had got into the habit of cooking wearing a pair of shorts and nothing else, which from where Louis was standing, was no bad thing in the slightest - even if he did look more mouthwatering to Louis than the food!

"Taste test," Harry nudged Louis' chin with his wooden spoon.

It was delicious, so much so, that Harry had to shoo Louis away from the saucepan when he attempted to sneak his own spoon into the sauce for an extra taste!

"What have you created today Chef Styles?" Louis teased, almost bouncing in his chair as Harry approached the table with two large steaming bowls.

"Udon noodles, chicken, beansprouts, sugar snap peas and red onions, in a chilli broth," Harry replied nervously, which was silly because Louis had already sampled the broth, and that was a winner on its own!

It was with amusement that Louis watched Harry go through his 'serving food' routine. He did it every meal that he prepared.

First he would make sure the table was correctly set, everything perfectly aligned and in its place. Condiments were never just put out in their original containers, but dabbed in small quantities in little dishes.

Lastly, he would place the dish directly in front of Louis, always handy with a cloth in case anything splashed, and got on to the rim, then he would stand next to Louis' chair - like a waiter in a posh restaurant.

"What are you doing?" Louis asked curiousl, putting down his spoon and folding his arms, "Sit down love, your food's gonna get cold."

Harry fiddled with his fingers, bit his lip, and looked down at the floor. He never sat down at his
own seat until Louis had eaten at least one mouthful and stated his approval. Old habits were hard to shake sometimes.

"Try it" he urged, mumbling into his chest.

Louis sighed sadly, swivelled around in his seat, and placed both of his hands on Harry's hips, pulling him closer, so he was standing between his slightly opened legs, then slid his hands up his waist.

"What's wrong baby?" he asked gently, "You've gone all tense. I'm sorry if I've offended you, I just haven't gotten used to your little ways yet."

Harry exhaled hard, his eyes rolling upwards. It wasn't Louis that had to get used to his ways, it was he that wasn't used to Louis'.

"I wasn't allowed to eat unless he liked it" he whispered finally, referring to his marriage for the first time, avoiding Louis' eyes, and trying to removed himself slowly from Louis' hands.

"If he didn't like what I cooked, I'd have to make something else...old habits...I'm sorry"

"Oh baby," Louis whispered, standing up and wrapping his arms tightly around Harry, peppering kisses all over his face, "Oh baby, I am so sorry, I had no idea."

"I tried so hard" Harry's voice was cracking, "I really tried so hard. In every possible way. Everything had to be perfect, the food, the table, me. I tried so hard. But it wasn't enough."

"Look at me curly?" Louis took Harry's cheeks between his palms, gently pulling his face down to look at him, "I am two hundred positive when I guess that it wasn't you who was the problem. The food you cook is incredible!" he grinned through the feelings of helplessness he was feeling, "You even make vegetables taste good! And I never eat vegetables!"

Harry managed a small smile at the corners of his mouth. Louis was trying so hard to make him feel better.

"Your dinner's getting cold," he told Louis quietly, giving his waist a little squeeze, stooping to give him a little kiss - one of the few things that was guaranteed to stop him talking.

"So's yours" Louis remarked, reluctantly letting Harry go, but was relieved when he went and sat down in his own chair, and picked up his spoon, "Tell you what," he lightly exclaimed, after taking a mouthful, "Fuck this is so good!" he distracted himself, spearing a piece of chicken on his fork, "How about, you stop fussing over me and panicking I'm going to reject your food - which I can assure you will never happen! And if I hate it, I'll do the old fashioned trick of pretending I'm full, then sneak out for a burger later!"

He reached for Harry's hand over the table.

"I'm really sorry baby" he reinforced, "I didn't mean to be a dick."

To Louis' relief, Harry pinched a noodle with his chopsticks and gave his hand a squeeze.

"Tell me about your day," he asked simply. His full attention on Louis, but not on what he was eating.
"We've been invited to a party on Saturday." Louis reported to Harry, reading a text as he helped Harry with the washing up, "You up for it? It's at Nialler's, so should be a good night!"

Harry frowned into the cupboard where he was putting away the clean and dry plates. A party? With more of Louis' friends? He wasn't sure in the slightest?

"Who's Nialler?" he asked instead, trying to sound neutral.

"The guy who helped me cook you dinner" Louis reminded him, hopping up on the counter besides the taller lad, smiling as he found a good picture on his phone of himself and Niall to show Harry.

"He's a good lad, he likes to eat almost as you like to cook!" he frowned to himself, "It's almost a perfect match..." He stated uncomfortably. He waved off his own comment with a wave of his hand, "You'd really like him," he assured Harry, "His mates are sound. You might make some new mates whilst we're there" he added, thinking it might be nice for Harry to get to know some new people other than himself.

Harry looked uncertain, but he nodded slowly.

"I need new clothes," he remarked, once again uncomfortable, "Could you come choose some stuff with me?"

Harry just lacked so much confidence, and by the sounds of it, the ex also had a large impact in what Harry used to wear - which was sad, and so...cringy. But he guessed he would see the full extent of this issue when they went shopping. Louis was unsure if he was looking forward to it, or dreading it.

However, they could think about that later, right now, he was going to cuddle up with his baby on the settee, and kiss him until all thoughts of his past were out of his mind...for a little while at least.
So, this chapter, as a warning, is pretty long, so I'm really sorry if you were after a quick read! I just got really carried away because I was enjoying writing it so much! Anyway, let me know what you think, your comments really help me decide what to do in future chapters. I really hope you enjoy this one xxx

Clothes shopping for Harry was an experience for Louis to say the least. It was almost as though he was watching a build up of an anxiety attack, as he flicked through rails, constantly looking to Louis with his wide jade eyes for reassurance or opinion.

"Whatever you like is fine love," Louis found himself saying on multiple occasions, such as when he caught Harry eagerly eyeing some bright patterned dress shirts, then shaking his head, and unenthusiastically reaching for some boring black and white ones.

"You'd look really good in those" he rushed to compliment, "If you want to wear them, and they make you feel good, you wear them!"

"But do you like them?" Harry asked nervously, fingering the bright red and black silk.

"Curly, this is all about you. You shouldn't give a fuck what I think" Louis stated, finding Harry's size and pushing it into his hands, "I do really like it, but if I didn't, you are the one wearing it. I don't ask you if you like my clothes do I?"

Harry shrugged, but took the shirt, along with some of the other ones, which Louis took straight back, holding them with the pairs of jeans, shorts, t-shirts and a couple of jackets that Harry had already painfully selected.

"What should I wear tonight?" Harry asked, before they made their way to pay, "Should I get something else? What do you want me to wear? I want to make a good impression."

Louis rifled through their collection of garments.

"You have plenty of options here babe" he smiled, "They all look great, stop worrying!"

Louis waited whilst Harry paid for his purchases, holding out his hands afterwards, both to take the bags in one, and Harry's hand in the other.

"Ok," he said brightly, giving the curly haired lads hand a squeeze, "Where to next? Shoes? You said you needed shoes."

Harry lifted Louis' wrist to read the time on his watch. He didn't wear a watch, since his old one had broken whilst in the sea. Instantly he felt guilty. They had been shopping for roughly three hours. Three hours of Louis' time he'd just monopolised.

"I didn't realise we'd been so long," he muttered, pushing his long hair out of his face, "Let's go and do something you want to do" he tried his best to insist, "You only get two days off a week, and..."
"And I want to spend them with you" Louis replied, steering Harry into the shop he brought all his footwear in, "Come on Haz, we've got plenty of time before the party" he stopped in the doorway and looked around, "So what kind of shoes are we looking for?"

"Ok, maybe we should skip the party and just stay in!" Louis stated, accidentally dropping his keys, and openly gaping at Harry, who scurried into his living room, and skidded to a halt right in front of Louis.

"What?" he asked, pushing the hair on each side of his head behind his ears, "Why?" he looked down at himself, instantly self conscious, "It's the outfit isn't it!" he exclaimed, "I'll go...

He turned to run off, but with lightning fast reflexes, Louis hooked his fingers down the waistband of his skinny jeans with one hand, and spun him around with the other, unashamedly pressing himself against the taller lad from knee to chest.

"Don't you dare!" he growled playfully, a slow, sexy smile rippling across his cheeks, pinching at Harry's till he smiled.

"Maybe I just want to keep you all to myself," he murmured, pressing his lips to the underside of his freshly shaven jaw, dotting a line with his mouth along his chin, then drawing his face away, his expression one of pure appreciation, as he went in for a seductive, passionate kiss, that made Harry come across all unnecessary.

"Fuck!" Louis swore, nipping Harry's bottom lip playfully as he drew away, running his hands across his broad back, "You certainly know exactly what to do to make my dick pay attention, don't cha!" he pulled Harry's face down towards his, pressing their bodies close together, licking hotly into his mouth.

Whenever Louis caught Harry off guard with an unexpected kiss like this one - where he was practically climbing the taller lad like a monkey climbs a tree - Harry always started off so hesitant and nervous. He wasn't sure where to put his hands, was unsteady on his feet, even his tongue seemed to want to hide!

But there was so much satisfaction for Louis when he could literally feel Harry melt under his touch, gaining more confidence as he explored Louis' mouth with his tongue, letting his large hands slide down Louis' waist, and grab hold of his ample backside. Louis thrived on it, there was nothing more gratifying than feeling and seeing his shy, timid boy turn into a man.

"Just relax love! You look great!" Louis assured Harry a couple of hours later when they finally arrived at Niall's house. He swung himself out of the car, picking up the eighteen pack of beer bottles from the back seat, locked up, then tucked the large box under his arm, and took up Harry's hand with the other.

"Just relax"

He went to walk up the drive, but Harry squeezed his hand, and didn't move. He looked anxious again.

"We haven't talked about the plan" Harry whispered to him urgently, "What do you want me to do?"

"Plan?" Louis turned to Harry, sticking out his bottom lip to blow the fringe out of his eyes, "What
"For tonight" Harry sounded and looked so serious, "Who can I talk to? What am I allowed to drink? How will I know when you want to leave?"

"Is this the plan?" Louis hissed, trying not to look dismayed once again as he realised another tidbit of Harry's past, "Because I don't like it. It's just a party Curly. You can talk to whoever you want, drink whatever you want and we can leave when we feel like it...if you want to leave, just say so."

"But...rules?" Harry had gone back to being timid and shy, "Don't you have any rules?"

"One massive rule" Louis chirped, letting go of Harry's hand, to cup his cheek and stand on his toes for a kiss.

"Be yourself and have a good night. That'd all I want!"

"That's not a rule!" Harry protested weakly, his words muffled when Louis was kissing him.

"My rule Curly!" Louis kissed him smartly one last time on the mouth, then led the now, slightly dazed lad to the front door.

The party was already in full swing. The music was loud, and Niall's house was swarming with people.

Louis led Harry from room to room, looking out for his blonde haired friend, seeing lots of people he knew, then finally they found Niall in the kitchen, pouring drinks at the makeshift bar.

"Loueh! You came!" he cried out happily, bounding over to the pair, and releaving his mate of his large box of beer, "Curly! Great to meet you finally!" he then exclaimed, almost dragging a very surprised Harry into a one armed hug.

"So, beers are in the fridge!" he told Louis, "Spirits and mixers are on the table and food's in the living room," he helpfully pointed out, "What you having Curly?" he asked, still with his arm around the taller lad, "Beer? Cider? Cocktail, Mocktail?"

Harry had no idea what to say. He really liked the look of the yellow and red drink that Niall had just handed to a pretty girl, but he wasn't sure what to ask for.

He did however, really like Niall. He might be loud, but he had such an infectious smile, and pretty much laughed his way through every sentence, in his thick Irish accent.

"Make me one of those," Louis decided, pointing to the drink Demi had just been handed by Niall. He had no idea what it was, but it was yellow and red, and Harry had been eyeing it, "Want to try one too love?" he asked Harry, who grinned happily and nodded.

"The Musketeers were looking for you Lou" Niall stated as he got busy with the cocktail shaker, "Out in the garden if you want to check in with them,"

"Musketeers?" Harry asked, accepting the paper cup Niall handed him with a smile. He had been right, it tasted really good.

"Alberto, Calvin and Stan," Louis replied automatically, "You wanna come say hi..." he instantly saw anxiety flash through Harry's eyes - they were not Harry's favourite people, "or hang out with
Niall for a bit? I won't be long"

"Leave him with me!" Niall enthused, "I'll keep him safe! Do not worry a bit Tommo."

Louis had been right. Niall was most definitely his type of person. He was just so warm, friendly and didn't seem to care where he came from or who he was - very much unlike the "musketeers".

Another thing about Niall was that he never stopped talking. As he pulled Harry from room to room, greeting every person in it with a full on hug, introducing Harry to everyone, he chatted away seemlessly changing topics, from food to golf, so quickly it make Harry's head spin.

Harry thought he was wonderful.

"Grimmy!" Niall pretty much shouted into Harry's ear, as they entered the living room on their third loop around the ground floor, "Thanks for coming mate! Aww you brought Pig!"

He dived down to pet the small black and white dog who was excitedly pawing at his leg at the mans feet.

Harry eyed the man curiously. He very tall and quite thin, made to look taller by his thick black hair, which was styled up in a huge quiff, although he wasn't that much taller than Harry.

He grinned at Harry joverly, flashing him s set of perfectly set white teeth.

"Who's this?" he asked Niall, who was on the floor laughing as Pig licked his face, full of excitement.

"Sorry mate, this is Curly! He's here with Lou. Curly, Nick Grimshaw"

Harry shook the hand held out to him, not missing the look of surprise on the mans face as Louis was mentioned.

"You mean Tommo?" he asked Niall, looking between the blonde and Harry, "Didn't realise he was here" he sounded a smidgen displeased at the news.

"He's outside with his lads" Niall shrugged, "Doubt he'll be long before he comes to find this one!" he gave Harry's shoulder a little squeeze and a knowing wink, and then a further shoulder nudge.

It was fair to say, that Niall was delighted that Louis had foume someone like Harry. He had seen his friend work his way through too many of his aquaintences than he was comfortable with, and this green eyed youngster seemed to be just the thing to get his mate back on track again.

Niall eventually excused himself when some new people showed up, leaving Harry and Nick to get to know each other - and Pig!

"What are you drinking?" Nick asked, taking a peek into Harry's empty cup, "I'll get you a refill," Harry had no idea what it was, but strangely felt comfortable to say so. He had instantly warmed to the man, with his easy smile, drawling voice and his cute puppy.

"I'll surprise you" Nick promised with a little chuckle, "Hold onto Pig whilst I go will you?"

Harry sat down obiediently as Nick handed him his squirming puppy, and disappeared out into the kitchen. If he craned his neck, he could see through the window across the room, and outside to where Louis was stood in the middle of his friends, talking and laughing about something that was obviously hilarious.
He would never tell Louis, or even think it out loud. But Harry didn't care much for 'the musketeers' - especially Stan. Even though he had stuck up for Stan, when he'd heard that Louis had punched his face, he still didn't like the feeling he felt inside when Louis either brought him up in conversation, or the little looks Stan gave him when he was around when the boy called by.

Distrust, suspicion and dislike radiated out of the boy like laser beams - Harry was more than happy to stay out of his way. But. He was Louis' best mate, so Harry would put up with him. After all, it meant that he got to be around Louis, so really it was Harry who was winning.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

Nick's voice cut through his musings, handing Harry a clean cup full of a bright turquoise liquid. Out of politeness, he took a sip, and then another.

"Good innit?" Nick chuckled, "My own secret formula!"

Harry grinned, sucking the pleasantly tasting alcohol concoction through his straw, and listening happily as Nick started to tell him a story about himself, Niall and some guy called Matt attempting the "Lord of the Rings" cocktail challenge at a local bar.

Four more of Nick's special cocktails later, and Harry was feeling...different...or to everyone else, slightly tipsy!

It wasn't a bad different, it was nice. His mind was oddly relaxed and unconcerned, and everything just seemed to be much more funnier than usual, especially when he noticed he was being so much clumsier than usual - such as when he accidently tripped over Pig to get to the food, then completely forgot what he was doing and proceeded to pat and cuddle the little yelping puppy, until Nick managed to get him back to his chair.

In short, it was the first time Harry had ever been drunk in his life - but he didn't associate his behavior with the potent cocktails Nick was consistently providing him - he thought it was because he was happy.

Alcohol as it turned out, as with everyone else, let Harry release his inhibitions, and Nick was a great guy to talk to - full of chat about anything and everything, and was quick to bring Harry into conversation, which Harry was happy to do so with gusto - leaving behind his slow, stuttery, normal way of speaking, in which his words would roll around in his mouth for a long time before they made it past his lips - and instead, poured out of his mouth in torrents, gesturing with his hands, his mind having trouble keeping up with him.

"There you are!"

It was the most magical sound to Harry's ears, shutting him up instantly as two arms looped around his torso, and he felt that familiar scratch of scruff to his bare cheek.

Louis was here!

"Loooeh!" Harry babbled, clutching both of his hands sloppily to Louis' forearms, and nuzzling into the boys face, so hard, Louis almost toppled over!

"You're here!"

Louis stumbled as Harry leapt out of his seat, two hands planting themselves on his muscular shoulders, and shoving him into the chair that Harry had just vacated, only to have the wind sorely knocked out of him, as Harry plonked himself down onto his lap, and got a mouthful of his hair as
Harry stuck his nose into his neck, breathing him in loudly and sighing just as loud in happiness.

"Easy love!" Louis laughed, wrapping his arms easily around his Curly, and smiling slightly bemused as Harry's head jerked backwards, grabbing his cheeks and thumbing over the scuff that outlined his chin and jaw, gazing at him as though he was the most spectacular something that Harry had ever laid eyes upon!

"Isn't he stunning?" Harry gushed, unashamedly petting Louis' face and hair, whilst leaning back, somewhat erratically, and turning to Nick - who, would, undoubtably, as his new amazing friend agree.

Louis looked over at Nick, who was sat right opposite them, his lips tightly pressed together, trying desperately not to laugh. Then looked back at Harry, who was teetering on the edge of his knees, clinging, almost painfully tight to the back of his neck with one hand, and actively searching the floor with his other.

"What are you doing?" Louis asked in amazement, quickly making a grab for Harry's bum, as he began to feel him slide off his lap and head for the floor.

"Ma dink!" Harry muttered, grinning widely when Nick produced a half empty cup, and with little difficulty, pressed it into Harry's grabby hand - who's eyes had lit up when he saw it.

Louis' eyes narrowed. Ignoring the whine that came out of Harry's mouth, and dodging a flailing hand as he plucked the cup out of the lads hand, Louis maintained eye contact with 'Grimmy', and gave the contents a deep sniff.

"What's in this?" he asked irritably, then took a small sip.

"Nonono!" Harry shook his head wildly, smacking Louis in the face repeatedly with his long curls, "That's a secret Lou! It's a special drink! Tastes so good! Gimme some!"

"Oh really baby? And how many of these "special" drinks have you had?" Louis asked, shooting Nick the most filthy of looks, before turning sweetly to his baby, who was draining the cup already, and leaning back to pass the empty to Nick, who had already gotten up to make him a refil.

Louis' hand shot out, and closed around Nick's forearm, stopping him in his tracks. It was no secret that Louis had no time for Nick Grimshaw, and if he had expected Harry to be with anyone other than Niall, he would not have loitered in the garden with his friends for such a long time - he was most definitely regretting it now!

"What's in that, and how many have you given him?" he asked quietly, and firmly, "You had better not be trying to take advantage of him Grimshaw!"

"Aww lighten up Tommo!" Nick smirked at him, "It's just a few mixed spirits, lime cordial and sugar! Don't be such a killjoy! He's having a good time!"

His eyes rested pointedly on Harry who was playing with Louis' hair, and looking absolutely delighted as the quiff he was styling Louis' fine strands into, fell over his face.

With Louis' eyes safely diverted back to Harry, Nick made a quick escape into the kitchen - seeing it as a small personal victory that he'd managed to piss Louis "I'm a God" Tomlinson off, without actually meaning to!
When Nick returned to the pair, his stomach turned at the nauseating sight that met his eyes.

Harry was not only straddling Louis, and grinding down on the lad in the most obscene, enthusiastic fashion, but he was also seemingly taking a tour of the older lads tonsils! Feverently kissing him and moaning in a way that Nick had only heard whilst watching gay porn!

"Get a room lads! You're stealing away my Pig's poor innocence!" he made himself cackle, clapping Harry on the back, and pretending he didn't feel a jolt in his cock, when Harry finally came up for air, face flushed, pupils dilated, and his lips the most vivid shade of red, breathing hard.

Louis, who also looked pretty much the same, shifted Harry on his lap, whilst sorting out the "problem" in his trousers, smirked at Nick as though he truly was the cat who had all the cream - then, went to prove how Harry was all his, as he slowly and seductively, began to devour the expanse of Harry's neck - all the while glaring daggers in Nick's direction.

As far as Nick was concerned, Louis might have well flopped his cock out and pissed all over the lad! There was no doubt about it, Harry was Louis' property, and Nick had been trespassing.

"Oy! Tommo! Get a fucking room you filthy wank rag!" boomed a cackling voice. And into the room marched Alberto, Calvin (the eloquent one which had shouted), and lastly Stan.

Nick didn't miss the audible groan of dismay that escaped Harry's mouth, or how he shot off Louis' lap, and sat on the floor at Nick's feet, grabbing Pig close to him, and pretending to play with her.

This was interesting.

Louis, frowning himself with concern at Harry's flighty rearrangement, went to join him on the floor, but two hands shot out from behind him, and kept him upright.

"Mate! You are seriously behind!" Alberto noted, taking in Louis' distinctly sober existence and shoving a shot glass into his hand, to which Louis tried to hand back. He wasn't interested in getting drunk tonight, especially since Harry had seemed to have consumed enough alcohol for the two of them, and ok, he seemed fine now, but would need someone to take care of him later - and that someone was not going to be Nick Grimshaw!

"Not tonight mate" he insisted, wriggling to get out of Calvin's vice like grip, so he could see what was suddenly bothering Harry, whose eyes were darting between the scruffy little shit dog in his lap, and his mates.

"Don't be boring Tommo!" Alberto insisted, shoving the glass once again into his hand, "We're starting up a game in a sec, and you'll want to be nice and lubricated for that!"

Louis gave Alberto a meaningful look. He knew very well what type of games his lads liked to play - and they were usually ones to ensure they got a hook up for the night! Games which unfortunately Louis had used to take much pleasure in participating in, but he had Harry now. What was the point of trying to hook up, when the one person who he had wanted to kiss all night, had just done so of their own accord, arousing him to the point of distraction.

He looked down at the floor for Harry, but he was no longer there - and neither was Nick!

"Where'd Harry go?" he asked anxiously, looking around wildly for his curly haired baby. He didn't trust Nick with a sober, sensible Harry, let alone a drunk and easily influenced version.

"Relax Lou" Stan came into his eyeline and gave him a reassuring smile, "Nick's gone outside for a joint, and to let the rat have a piss." he smirked, and then whispered into Calvin's ear, who burst out laughing at what Stan had said:
"The dog rat, not the human rat!"

Fortunately for Stan, Louis didn't hear him.

"See!" Stan suddenly pointed through the window, and out into the garden, "He's fine! Come on mate, just loosen up a little. I know you worry about him, but you're just going to piss him off if you act like an overprotective dad all night! Just have a bit of fun with us," he gestured to his mates, "We've missed you a lot mate" he wheedled compassionately, "We accept that you're taken now, but don't fully abandon lad time!"

Louis looked out into the garden where Stan pointed, seeing Harry sitting on the grass - another cup in one hand, petting the dog with the other, and laughing and joking with Niall and Olly, who were supervising the BBQ.

Maybe if Harry wasn't alone with Nick, Louis would feel better. He watched carefully as Niall slung an arm around Harry's shoulders and presented the lad with a freshly made hotdog. Harry definitely needed to get some food inside him to soak up the alcohol.

"Come on Tommo? What do you say?" Calvin interrupted his thoughts and featuring to the shot of tequilar still gripped between his fingers, "One really good night, for the lads?"

Louis sighed, rolled his eyes, and with carefully crafted enthusiasm, knocked the shot back with ease, the empty glass instantly replaced with another one, as the lads cheered and clinked their own glasses together!

"For the lads!" he joined in, only half his heart with them, as he watched Harry through the window, looking so blissfully happy, and wishing he was sitting with him.

"So, tell me about you and Tommo?" Nick asked Harry, waiting for the lad to organise his bambified legs as he sprawled out on the grass, leant up against Niall's fence. He handed Harry the plate of food Niall has rustled up for him, and then his paper cup. This lad can certainly drink, he thought to himself, holds it pretty well too!

Harry took a gulp of his drink, the sweet liquid easily slipping down his throat, and feeling the buzz from it instantly, he wondered for a moment if this was what being drunk felt like, but he quickly dismissed it. Whatever the cause, he was feeling wonderful.

"Me and Loueh?" he slurred a little, taking a large bite out of a sausage, and chewing thoughtfully.

"Yes, you and Louis" Nick grinned, sitting down next to him, so close that their shoulders were pressed together, "You like him?" well, he thought to himself, thinking skeptically of the physical display on affection he'd been 'treated' to earlier.

"Louis' amazing!" Harry gushed, all bright eyed and rosy cheeked as he thought of the boy who had undoubtedly stolen his heart, "He's the sweetest, kindest, caring, thoughtful..."

"I don't think we're discussing the same lad!" Nick cut in, with a sly smile dancing on his lips, "I was talking about Louis Tomlinson - 'Man Whore' of Doncaster!"

The look that scrunched up Harry's face in disbelief was comical. He gave Nick a long, slightly unfocused look, then shook his head wildly, hair flying all over the place.

"Nah!" he scoffed, turning his attention back to Pig, who was snuffling at his plate, and trying to
steal the remains of his burger, "You have the wrong boy! I'm talking about Loueh! You!" he poked his finger into Nick's chest, "Obviously have him confused with the rest of his Brat Pack!"

Nick swallowed his laughter along with his drink, both of which unsuccessfully sputtered out of his mouth shortly afterwards.

"H, I hate to break it to you, but the lad you think is so cute and adorable, is the head Brat! He's fucked more lads than the rest of us here tonight put together! You're playing with fire when it comes to that one kiddo!"

Harry's brow creased into a frown, pouting, his brain trying in vein to untangle the information and put it into a legible sequence. That was so unbelievable. He and Louis hadn't slept together yet. Sure, Louis had jerked him off - once. But nothing else had happened, Louis always stopped before things accidentally went too far! They didn't even sleep over at each others place, unless they fell asleep watching a film, or they had a little nap in the afternoon together. That was not the act of the sex crazed whore that Nick was making him out to be.

"He hasn't fucked you yet has he?" Nick questioned, watching Harry pout and look saddened by his words. He eyed a little smearing of ketchup on the corner of his mouth that Nick really wanted to lick off. There was something so sweet, innocent and vulnerable about him - from the way he pouted his delicious looking lips, to how gently he stroked and petted his puppy. His whole aura, just screamed 'virgin', which was probably why he was the perfect target for someone with the cruel and calculating reputation as Louis.

Harry blushed deeply, and shook his head looking a mixture of embarrassed and cheeky.

"Can I give you some advice young Harrold?" asked Nick seriously, taking Harry's chin between his fingers, and waiting patiently for his big green eyes to focus on him, "Don't let that lad use you. Once he gets his well worn prick into those tight little pants of yours, he's gonna be onto the next guy quicker than it's gonna take you to wash his spunk out your ass hole!"

Harry shook his head, whole heartedly disagreeing.

"Look around" Nick invited him, and began pointing out random people, milling around the patio, "See that lad over there talking to Niall? Louis fucked him. See that guy with the hat? Caught him sucking Louis off at the last party - three months ago. See the lad who keeps looking into the kitchen door, and keeps fidgeting because he wants to go in, and can't bring himself to?"

Harry nodded numbly. The happy buzz he'd been feeling was freezing off him rapidly, and he was starting to feel sick instead of elated.

"Caught him about an hour later at the same party, whilst I was helping the guy with the hat look for his "new boyfriend" in Niall's bed" he paused, and put an arm around Harry's shoulders, as if to protect him from the blow he was about to deliver, "Louis' cock was rammed right up his ass" he finished, "Louis didn't even look guilty. Just smirked at the poor heartbroken guy and kept on thrusting!"

Harry shrugged away from Nick. He really was feeling sick now. Sick, dizzy and miserable. This was not the Louis that he knew! But then, why would Nick lie to him? It couldn't be true, could it?

"Hey lads!" Niall jogged happily up to them, slowing down dramatically as he approached, glancing with a slightly raised eyebrow at Nick's arm around Harry's shoulders, which he quickly removed.

"The lads are starting something up inside" he told them, before crouching down in front of Harry,
"You alright buddy?" he asked kindly, instantly recognising how out of it the lad was, and wondering if he was going to make it inside without his legs giving way, "Want me to get Louis for you? He's disappeared somewhere, but I'm sure if I shout your name out, he'll come running!"

At his words, Harry's eyes widened, and looked quickly at Nick, who shrugged and gave him a look that clearly said, "Yep, I expected this to happen".

Niall turned to Nick suspiciously, "What have you said to him?" he asked, then turned back to Harry, offering his hand for the lad to take, "Come on Curly, let's get you inside"

He couldn't help but laugh as Harry grasped at his hand, trying to haul himself to his feet, with the huge handicap of his legs suddenly working independently to the rest of his body. Finally, Niall had to shout for Olly to come help him, and together they managed to loop a very intoxicated Harry's arms around their shoulders and half carry him towards the house. As he got to the patio, he turned a very sickly pale, his feet no longer wanting to go a step further, almost pulling the two boys supporting him to the ground as he sat abruptly down on the paving slabs.

"I'll go and get Tommo," Nick smirked to himself, thinking of how delighted Louis would be, to see his latest bid for a conquest completely legless and incapacitated. This was possibly the best cock block ever!

It wasn't that he had anything against Harry. He was a really sweet lad with such a charming personality - who really didn't deserve being prayed upon by Louis. Nick despised Louis!

"Wait a sec!" Niall had grabbed Nick's shoulder before he had a chance to put one foot inside the kitchen door, leading him a little way away from where Olly was keeping Harry sitting upright, and encouraging to drink from a bottle of water. He was already looking a lot better, the colour had returned to his cheeks already, maybe he'd gotten up too quickly.

"Are you being a prick and shit stirring?" Niall asked sternly, giving Nick a disapproving eye, "Louis isn't the guy that fucked you about," he told him, "I know there's a lot of bad blood between you both, but you assured me that you had put all that in the past. Don't screw things up between him and Harry"

He paused as Nick huffed out a breath, distracting himself by scratching Pig's head where he held her in his arms.

"Seriously mate," Niall put a hand on Nick's forearm, "Louis' a changed man now. Don't fuck this up!"

Nick looked up at Niall, "If Louis is such a 'changed man', then why isn't he spending time with Harry?" he asked pointedly, "You said he'd disappeared, how do you know he's not getting stuck in to someone else?"

Niall scraped both hands down his face.

"Look, Nick. I know he fucked you over at my last party, and I know you walked in on him fucking some other guy, hours after you sucked him off! And I'm so sorry about that, because I know how much you liked him! But seriously mate, you knew what you were getting into. Tommo couldn't be tamed - until that curly haired miracle turned up. I can assure you that he's been keeping an eye on Harry all evening - but he didn't want to ruin his night by being 'an over protective dad-type prick' " he finished quoting.

"Now what's it going to be?" he asked flatly, coming up with an ultimatum, "Are you going to man
Nick took in a deep breath, and nodded, feeling as stupid and embarrassed as he had done after walking in on what he had considered his new boyfriend. He'd never been more humiliated in his entire life! But he had sworn that he would have his revenge.

However, now didn't seem to be the time. But it would come. And Louis wouldn't know what hit him. The stuff he'd shared with Harry, had just been the tip of the iceberg!

"Good man" Niall nodded as well, clapping his mate on the back, "Lads got a game starting, you in?"

"What game?" Nick asked, weighing up the benefits of joining in.

"Either truth or dare, or spin the bottle" Niall shrugged, "Whichever ends up with people consuming more shots probably!" he laughed, then looked back at where Harry was being helped to his shaky feet by Olly, "Maybe that one should sit out the shots though!"

Nick nodded in agreement, then laughed as Harry looked around him in a very confused manor, then gave him a little wave when he spotted him and Niall. He's such a nice lad, he thought, as he and Niall went to help him into the house.

"What the fuck have you done to him?" Louis hissed angrily minutes later, settling a beaming, but wasted Harry down on the floor, and turning on Nick for an explanation, trying not to be distracted by how Harry was gripping hold of his leg and pulling on it.

In the end, Harry won, and to his pleasure, Louis was sitting down next to him, feeding him from a bottle of water, and listening to him babble happily, full of nonsense about how gorgeous Harry thought he was, and how much the lad wanted to suck his....

"Whoa! That's enough babe!" Louis exclaimed, covering Harry's loose lips with his hand, "Let's save that little conversation for when we get home eh?"

Harry, feeling suddenly much better now that his blue eyed angel was back in his arms. Nick was a naughty man for telling him those stories, Louis would never be so nasty and mean to anyone, especially him!

After making sure that Harry was feeling quite all right, not being able to help smiling as the boy snuggled into Louis' lap and grinning up at him as he Louis stroked his hair, Louis realised that both he and Harry, had joined a little circle had been formed whilst he was paying attention to his baby.

"I don't think we'll be playing lads" he told them, already thinking about getting Harry home, but deciding his lad could probably do with sobering up a little bit first.

Being the decent lad that he was, Niall was already getting him a little plate of dry toast for Louis to feed him. That should help.

Why had he spent so long with Calvin, looking after him after he'd taken too many shots, when he could have been looking after Harry and keeping him away from Nick!

"Aww come on mate! Just a couple of rounds!" Stan piped up from next to him, "Let Curly sleep it off or something" he indicated to how Harry was curled up in Louis' lap, looking up at his face like a loving puppy.
Nick (on the other side of the circle), was close to projectile vomiting, just to show off his distaste without actually saying it aloud!

"Are you sure you are all right babe?" Louis bent his head down, whispering softly to his boy, threading his fingers through his hair, "You don't feel sick do you?"

If Louis had been this drunk, all he would have been seeing would have been the inside of a toilet bowl! But to his immense relief, Harry shook his head, and lifted a clumsy hand to stroke Louis' face, smiling as though Louis was covered in gold dust and sprouted angels wings.

"Alright" Louis conceded, "I'm in. He looked around the circle sternly, "But I'm not gonna move and disturb Harry, so don't even bother asking!"

The game went smoothly for the first few rounds. Alberto, Calvin, Stan, Nick, Olly, Niall, Daisy and Jess were all pretty tipsy themselves, daring each other to do stupid dares, such as drinking a "dirty' cocktail - which sent Calvin and his delicate stomach dashing for the bathroom, or eating a sausage out of one of the girls cleavages (Olly and Daisy).

Stan was made to get his cock out and do an impression of a helicopter taking off, and Alberto was dared to blindly drink cream from a shot glass which he was told was a collection of the lads jizz! Even though it was blatantly a lie, the whole circle gagged a little at the thought as he knocked it back - surprisingly quickly!

"Ok, Tommo, truth or dare?" Nick drawled when it was his turn, watching as Louis' bright blue eyes hardened and glared at him.

"Well I'm not moving an inch, so it had better be truth" Louis growled, instantly wishing he had softened his voice, because Harry, still curled in his lap, was patting his face again to get his attention, his beautiful jade eyes, wide and concerned at why Louis sounded so pissed off. Had he done something wrong? Was he a bad boy? Was Louis mad with him?

"Shhh, baby, everything's alright," Louis soothed him, kissing each one of his fingers and stroking his face lovingly once more - which brought the rest of the circle to fits of disbeliefing laughter as they watched the usually hard face, brash lad turn into a tender, loving softie!

"Truth" he said, not paying much attention to Nick anymore, but choosing to make silly faces at Harry, who giggled charmingly, rolling around a little in his lap, puckering his lips, and straining to kiss him.

"How many people, in this circle, and this audience, have you had an intimate encounter with?" Nick drawled, leaning forward and giving Harry a little poke, to see if he was paying attention.

Louis immediately slapped Nick's hand away, but Harry who had indeed heard the question, even through his hazy and foggy brain, and was struggling to sit up.

Louis' face deepened into scarlet with anger. He knew exactly what Nick was up to!

"Define intimate" he asked, lips tightening into a thin line.

Nick smiled lazily, watching with satisfaction, as Harry curled a hand around Louis' neck, and was using it to leverage himself up into sitting position. This was going to be fun!

"Any encounter that resulted you blowing your load!"

Louis looked around the circle, red faced and absolutely mortified. Niall was sitting with his head
down, whispering profanities under his breath, Daisy and Jess just looked sympathetic and embarrassed for him, and Alberto, Calvin, Olly and Stan all had identical 'this is going to be a car crash' grimaces on their faces.

"Shut up Grimshaw!" Stan spat to Louis' relief, "What do you have to go and be such a prick for!"

"It's not a difficult question" Nick shrugged, "He can tell the truth, or he can say that it's a big fat zero and take the penalty for lying!"

Louis looked quickly at Harry, who was pretty much nose to nose with him right now, his eyes, bigger and wider than he'd ever seen them, looking quickly between himself and Nick, who was still smirking away. Nick was up to something, and from the look of it, he had already started to slow poison Harry against him!

Fuck his stupid judgement about letting Harry make friends - regardless of who he was making them with! Niall had assured him that Nick would be fine with Harry! Fuck that for a laugh!

"What's the penalty?" he bit out. He did not want to admit the actual truth in front of Harry, that out of the seventeen people in the room, Tommo had been 'intimately involved' with nine of them - Harry not included! The lad would never look at him in the same way ever again!

"Harry does a little dare" Nick responded sweetly, taking a big risk by leaning over once more and stroking Harry's cheek, which earned his hand a loud, stinging slap, "That's all right with you, isn't it cupcake? If Louis wants to be boring and doesn't play!"

Louis bit his lip hard. He had a pretty good idea of what kind of dare the lads would cook up for Harry - who made it blatantly obvious that they didn't care much for him. Regardless of what Louis had patiently tried to explain to them about what little he knew about Harry's past.

But he didn't want Harry to hear him tell the truth either. He was about to tell them all to go 'fuck themselves' and get Harry home, when the lad in Louis' lap, rubbed his eyes with the back of his hands, clumsily shuffled off him and onto the floor.

"I'll do the dare" he announced, sounding distinctly out of it, and leaning heavily upon Louis, since he could barely hold himself upright.

"Don't be silly babe" Louis rushed to say, pulling the lads head into his chest, and cradling him in his arms, "You get some sleep sweetheart. They're just being stupid pricks"

But Harry, wriggled his head free, took a deep breath and sat up, nosing at Louis' cheek.

"I don't want to know how many," he said quietly, but loud enough, so that the whole of the room could hear, each one of the others holding their breath, straining to hear his words, "You have a past, I have a past, all I care about is our future" he looked around, unfocused and sleepy, "I'll play!" he slurred a little louder, "Dare me!"

"I dare you to kiss Nick!" Daisy blurted out, giggling, after receiving a subtle instruction from Calvin who was sitting next to her - which Louis didn't see.

Louis had to remind himself that he didn't hit girls. Daisy was a very lucky lady to possess a vagina and a pair of tits! One of the lads would have lost an eye for that request!

He wanted to clamp his arms around Harry's waist, and keep him seated. His stomach was churning with jealousy as he watched Harry unsteadily, get up on all fours, knees and arms quaking with imbalance as he tottered towards the massive dick in the circle with stupid ass quiff and smug,
gloating smile, all ready for his kiss, with his eyes closed and puckered lips!

Harry was right in front of Nick now, and the coils of jealousy and bile were contracting tighter and tighter deep in Louis' insides. He felt like a venomous snake ready to strike, a bull on a rampage, a....

But at the last second, Harry let out a snort of laughter and pecked Nick smartly on the cheek, before turning his back on the disappointed man and scrambling back into Louis' arms - who had never felt more relieved or delighted. He even tuned out of the playful shouts of "cheat!", and "Forfeit!"

"Only kissing you" Harry mumbled happily to Louis, his face being the only thing in the entire room that was properly in focus for him, sitting back in his lap, nosing at his cheek, crushing their mouths together, in a very messy, but much needed kiss, "Love you"

"I love you" Louis practically purred back at him, his heart swelling almost out of his chest for the lad, "Come on baby" he wrapped his arms around Harry tightly, "Lets go home eh?"

"Erm.. as much as we hate to disrupt this beautiful vision of vomit inducing love an affection" Stan cut in suddenly, "Harry needs to do his forfeit before he leaves!"

Louis turned to say that Stan could stick his fucking forfeit up his arse! But just like last time, Harry clung to Louis' neck tightly, and nodded. He looked awful, Louis realised, so tired, so dizzy. Louis should have taken him home ages ago. Why was it only hindsight that was 20:20? He really was the worst person in the world!

Alberto and Calvin were both whispering in Stan's ears, smirking slightly when they pulled away.

The look in Stan's eyes was enough to laser through Louis' protective shield around Harry, who's green eyes pinged sharply into focus, every single one of his senses zoning in on his mouth as it began to open in slow motion.

"So Harry?" Stan asked, looking like less of a human to Harry, and more like a venomous snake, coiled and ready to bit. He wasn't even bothering to hide his glee, "Where does your husband think you are right now?"
Chapter 19

The room had turned so silent that you could have heard a pin drop - for about five seconds - then uproar!

"That's enough!" Niall exploded, jumping up from the floor, and rounding on Stan, "Get the fuck out!"

Daisy and Jess, squealing with alarm, shot out of the circle and pounded up the stairs in fright - they had seen Louis' face. They knew they needed to get out of the way.

"Everybody leave!" Niall demanded to the other guests who had been watching the game, and then went about shooing them all to the front door.

Harry had gone as stiff as a board, everyone being able to see quite clearly, how instantly the colour drained from his face, gulping madly, eyes widening into two glassy jade saucers.

"You fucking little shit!" Louis bellowed, his eyes glittering like a scalding blue flame with rage, as he grabbed Olly roughly by the neck of his t-shirt and dragging him a few feet closer, so he could push his poor baby into arms that could hold him upright, whilst he went and showed his "mate" what for.

"How dare you!" Louis raged, bringing his fist up to punch the lad, who had stood up hurriedly and had his hands outstretched towards him, no doubt attempting to calm him down - but Louis would not be calmed down, after that disgusting display of foul play.

"Lou, please! I'm sorry!" Stan pleaded, dodging Louis' first attempt of smacking him in the face, then stopping as Calvin and Alberto managed to grab and hold back each one of Louis' arms whilst he fought and struggled with all his might, growling and snarling through all the profanities he could think of!

"You're sorry! You're fucking sorry!" spat out Louis, deaf to the sounds Alberto and Calvin were making, to try and calm him down, "What the fuck has he done to you? Fuck all! I told you! I fucking explained to you! He's been through so much shit! Harry needs support! Not your fucking bullshit fucking theories!"

He let out a loud groan of pain.

"Get off me!!!" he roared in anguish, as he found him self face down on the floor, arms pinned tightly behind his back, Alberto sat on his legs to prevent him from kicking out, "I swear to God! I will kick the fucking shit out of both of you if you...."

"Louis!"

It was the only sound that would quieten Louis and make him stop shouting.

Harry.

Louis craned his neck, as far around as it was allowed to go, under force to be immobile on the floor. Harry wasn't on his own.

Olly was sat on the ground, Harry sprawled between his legs and leaning against his chest for support. He was breathing hard and labouredly, mouth open, trying to suck in as much oxygen
around him, his chest rapidly expanding and depleting.

Nick was crouching next to him, rubbing his hands, whispering words of encouragement to him, and every now and then, smoothing back his hair that fell into his eyes. Harry was a good person, Nick just wanted to make sure he was alright.

"Louis don't!" Harry croaked out, "Please don't hurt him. He doesn't know. Don't hurt him."

"But..." Louis was still seething with rage, which was rapidly changing to confusion when Harry tried to sit up a little bit more, leaning back heavily on Olly in the process, and beckoned to Stan.

"Want to show you something" he whispered, swallowing hard, tears in his eyes.

"I can't see!" Louis growled, his neck was straining at such a weird angle he was loosing focus, what was Harry going to show Stan?

He felt the relief to his legs as Alberto got up, but they didn't let him go, although they did sit him down and turn him around so he could see Harry, with Stan now hovering above him.

Harry was searching in his hair for something, right against the scalp, turning his head and pointing at something, which Olly, Nick and Stan bent over to look at, listening to what Harry was painfully whispering.

Louis couldn't hear a single word. But he did hear the reactions!

Olly winced hard, covering his mouth with one hand, turning his head away, the other arm protectively clasping around Harry's chest.

Nick let out a gasp, his whole face contorted with anger and a deep sadness, clenching his fists, then running his fingers through his hair, effectively destroying his quiff in the process.

And Stan? Stan looked shocked, rocked to the very core, shaking his head in disbelief.

"I'm so sorry" he muttered, his hand visibly shaking as he inched it towards the part of his head that Harry had been pointing at, and carefully smoothed his curls back into place, kneeling in front of the boy and looking straight into his tear filled eyes, "I'm so sorry Harry, I don't know what else to say."

"What's going on?!" Louis burst out, out of his mind with worry and curiosity, "Harry! What's wrong?" He struggled against Calvin and Alberto, who were still reluctant to let him go.

Stan got up and turned to him, still shaking his head in disbelief.

"You should have told me," was all he said to Louis, before striding quickly towards the front door, leaving it wide open as he escaped into the night.

The moment Stan left, Harry crumbled, chest heaving, eyes streaming as he sobbed, and even though Nick and Olly both wrapped their arms around to comfort him, it was Louis who he clung to, when he finally broke away from his mates steel grip holds, and dragged his baby away from his new friends and into his arms.

"Lou, I don't feel good" Harry moaned brokenly. His vision was out of focus, his head was swimming, and everything felt like it was spinning around him at lightening speed.

Louis hugged him close, but the small squeeze to his body, had his stomach lurching, and with one painful wave of nausea, Harry promptly vomited, all down Louis' back, crying pitifully as the haze
of the alcohol he'd been trying so hard to fight, took advantage of his emotional weakness, and he passed out in his blue eyed angels arms.

"How is he?" Niall asked, poking his head around his bedroom door, and creeping towards where Louis lay in his bed, cradling a disoriented and distressed Harry against his bare chest.

"I don't think he's going to be sick anymore," Louis whispered, but he still looked worried as he carded his fingers gently through Harry's curls which were damp with sweat.

Harry moaned fretfully, clinging tightly to Louis' arms, tossing his head back, muttering nonsense under his breath.

"Poor mite, you'd think he'd never been drunk before" whispered Niall, beginning to dab at the lads face with a damp cloth, in the attempt to cool him down - he just looked so hot and clammy.

"He probably hasn't" Louis murmured, leaning down to press a kiss to the lads forehead, "Shhh baby," he soothed, as Harry began to whine again, 'I've got you, nothing's going to happen to you, I promise.'

He looked up at Niall, "He thinks he's dying" he explained, thinking back to how Harry choked the words out half way between the toilet and the bed, scared to go to sleep incase he didn't wake up.

"Poor kid," Niall sympathised, "Can I get you two anything else? I've got you some towels and some bottled water and..."

He was interrupted by a soft knock on the door, which was slowly opened by Olly, followed closely by Nick.

"Is Harry ok?" Olly asked, approaching them quietly, "Can we get him anything?"

Nick was not Louis' favourite people, and he openly blamed him for helping to get Harry in this state to begin with - but he couldn't deny - even though he wanted to - that Nick had been pretty good to Harry since Stan had left, as had Olly.

Even though Louis had turned into someone with all the protection instincts of a lion with one of its cubs, Niall, Nick and Olly had all run around, doing whatever it was to help - holding him briefly whilst Louis threw off his t-shirt, fetching him a bucket, water, holding doors open whilst Louis carried a poorly Harry to the bathroom (only Louis was allowed to carry Harry).

In short, they were doing all the things that Louis would expect his friends to do in this situation, only it was awkward, because only Niall was really his friend. Louis hadn't been blind to the fact that he hadn't seen either Alberto or Calvin since they had let him go, and they were supposed to be his best mates!

The three boys, sat on the bed, close to Harry and Louis, silently, Harry seemed to be quietening down, no longer whimpering, and his breathing was slowly starting to even out.

"We're going to stay over," Nick finally whispered to Louis, "Just in case."

"You don't have to," Louis hissed, annoyed that Nick didn't seem to think that he would be able to care for Harry on his own, "He's got me with him! I can look after him just fine! This is your
fucking fault remember! If you hadn't have gotten him so wasted, we could have left before the
game started!"

He glared at the man icily. He was not needed here. He'd caused enough trouble.

Nick looked at Harry, then quickly down at his feet.

"You're right", he mumbled, hastily getting up, "I'll...well, I'll be off then." he quickly looked from
Harry to Louis, "I hope he feels better soon. If he...er...needs anything..."

"If he needs anything, I can do it for him!" Louis glared.

Nick nodded numbly, then slowly got up and walked to the door, shrugging off Niall's hand that
darted out to grab him, and hastily made his exit.

"What?" Louis exclaimed, a little louder than he had meant to, when Niall shot him a look of
complete exasperation, watching cluelessly as Niall followed Nick out at a quicker pace, obviously
aiming to catch up with him.

Olly shifted on the bed uncomfortably, then got to his feet.

"I guess I should get going to" he said nervously, "Would you...would you text me or something?
Let me know how he's doing?"

Louis sighed quietly and nodded.

"Thanks for everything you did for Harry tonight" he told the lad, "You were really kind to him.
Really appreciate it. Harry will too." he added, "Not many people are as nice to him as he
deserves!"

His tone was bitter and angry once more, especially as he looked into Harry's blank, innocent
sleeping face.

"I gathered," Olly said sadly, and took a step closer to them, "I had no idea he had been through so
much, when he showed us..."

"What did he show you?" Louis interrupted, suddenly remembering how Harry had shown Stan
something on his head, which he was still in the dark about.

Olly looked marginally surprised.

"His scar" he whispered, "From the glass."

Louis' eyes widened.

"What?" he hissed, feeling his own muscles stiffening, "What scar? What glass?"

Olly gulped. Clearly he hadn't realised that Louis hadn't seen it.

"His husband. Threw him through a double glazed glass door." he quietly explained, having to look
away from the sheer look of horror that was quickly spreading across Louis' face, "Harry said that it
split his head open...it's huge Lou...the scar. He must have so many stitches!"

Olly looked sick at the thought, "He said that, then he looked at Stan, and said, 'that's why my ex
husband doesn't know where I am'"
Louis' swallowed hard. He could almost see in his minds eye, a video of his baby crashing through glass, lying motionless on the ground, blood matting his perfect curls.

"Show me"

Olly looked uncomfortable.

"You don't really want to...."

"Show me" Louis repeated, his voice thick with emotion, beginning to rifflle through Harry's hair, "Please Olly, I need to...."

Olly gently tapped at Louis' fingers, to try and get them out of the way. Then very carefully, he parted his hair in the same place as Harry had done earlier. It was enough for tears to form in Louis' eyes, when he saw it with his own eyes. It was so unfair! So inhumane! How could someone be so cruel to someone so sweet?

"I don't know Lou" Olly answered, making Louis realise he'd said his thoughts aloud, as he watched Olly carefully rearrange Harry's curls so carefully, hiding the white, hairless tissue from view once more. He looked uncomfortable again, watching as Louis gently kissed the tips of Harry's curls, so engrossed with his baby, his mind whirring a mile a minute, wanting so desperately to be able to go back in time and prevent Harry from experiencing that pain.

"I'm staying in the living room by the way" Olly told Louis, getting up to leave, he paused, "What does Harry like to do for fun?" he asked curiously.

Louis tore his eyes away from his baby. "Why?" he asked, frowning a little, feeling wary - although he wasn't sure why.

"I was thinking that we could hang out sometime" Olly offered, "Do something Harry likes, make him some nice memories"

"Yeah," Louis nodded, honestly glad that Olly was there, "We'll sort something out soon, I'll grab your number tomorrow"

Olly was half way out of the door when Niall slipped back inside, patting his mate on the back and saying goodnight.

"Nick's on the floor" Louis heard Niall whisper to Olly, "Don't trip over him"

"What is he still doing here?" Louis hissed, immediately feeling irritated. Why didn't Grimshaw just go home?

Niall gave Louis a disapproving look and sat down besides him, a little heavily because Harry moved for the first time in ages, screwing his face up a little, squeezing his finger around Louis' arm.

"You should really be kinder to Nick" he told Louis carefully, "Believe it or not, he does have his heart in the right place.'

Louis rolled his eyes with a slight sneer, "Yes, he really showed his caring heart when he was shoveing cocktails down Harry's throat."

"Louis..." Niall warned, "Don't be a prick. He's really sorry about that. That's all he was saying to
me downstairs. He really wants to apologise to Harry." Niall paused, "For a number of things...he'd really like to get to know Harry better, help him through this."

"You mean shit stirring about me?" Louis hissed sarcastically, "Harry doesn't need people like that around him!"

Niall's expression changed to one of sympathy. Louis first thought it was for the benefit of Harry, but he was sorely disappointed.

"Why do you dislike him so much?" Niall asked sensibly, "Is it because you really dislike him? Or is it because you feel guilty about what you did to him?"

Louis' eyes darted down to Harry, checking that he was still asleep. He was.

"I'm not like that anymore!" he muttered, he wasn't proud of himself looking back.

"Oh, I know" Niall nodded in agreement, "And no one is happier about that than I am, but you have to admit, you treated him in a disgusting fashion. And I know he said some crap to Harry about you, but he could have said a lot worse, and to be honest, you would have deserved worse!"

Louis' mouth tightened into a thin line. This was not what he wanted to hear.

"I just don't want that kind of influence around Harry" he said quietly, "I've changed a lot since Nick. Harry doesn't need to know how I was."

"Which is a good thing, because to be honest mate, that little stunt you pulled, almost cost you mine and Liam's friendship" Niall admitted regretfully, "We thought we had lost you for good"

"What are you talking about?" asked Louis, absolutely aghast at this piece of information. "Why?"

Niall gave him a look that clearly said, "Are you kidding me?"

"Then why didn't you then?" Louis asked, gritting his teeth, "Why didn't you just ditch me? Both of you?"

"Because," Niall continued patiently, "We hoped, that somewhere in that screwed up little head of yours, there was still the fun, kind, caring mate that we took into our group" he indicated to Harry, "And we were right, because this little miracle came along, and the decent part of you decided to run along with him! And trust me, we were beginning to think he'd never come back!"

"I wasn't that bad was I?" Louis asked nervously. Ok. He had been a bit of a shit...and a bit of a slut...but it wasn't just him...he was just being one of the lads! His mates were exactly the same as him.

"Think about how you treated your 'conquests'" Niall said, making speech marks in the air, "Now think how you would feel if someone treated Harry like that"

The penny dropped. There was nothing Louis could say in his defence. He had no defence.

"You know how Al and Cal were towards Harry?" Niall asked carefully, "That's how you acted towards so many of my friends Lou. It was fucking embarrassing mate. And I tried to stick up for you - and there were times mate, when I couldn't do it! You know how much I love you Lou, but when you get with those lads, you are someone else. Someone who is not likeable in the slightest" he paused again, "You're having doubts about if you like them or not now aren't you?"
Louis nodded sadly. He’d been trying not to think about it ever since he realised that the only people helping him with Harry were Niall, Nick and Olly - it should have been Alberto, Calvin and Stan. The fact that it wasn’t, felt like a very harsh lesson to learn.

"Lou, I wouldn't blame you if you were" Niall assured him, "You have changed so much since Harry came along, and to be honest, they are going to resent Harry for that. He has effectively taken their leader away from them. Like it or not, you were their leader. And now, instead of late night drinking sessions, and being their wingman and pulling left, right and centre. You are suddenly practically married, you don't go out anymore, and you are expecting them to support you in something, which they do not have the mental capacity to understand.'

In Louis' arms, Harry began to shuffle uncomfortably, beginning to cough a little in his sleep, his whole body contracting as he retched, finally spitting up a mouthful of yellow bile, right onto the middle of Louis' chest.

It smelt vile, and Niall instantly pinched his nose, handing Louis a damp cloth, who was far more concerned with gently turning Harry into his side, nervously rubbing his back.

"Do you think we should get him to hospital?" Louis worried, examining the vivid yellow of what had come out of Harry's mouth, "What if he's...."

Niall's face wrinkled in distaste, "Nah, it's fine" he confirmed after taking a reluctant look at the cloth Louis held out to him, "Trust me, Nick and I have cleared up worse that came out of your mouth?"

"When?" Louis had no idea what he was talking about.

"Lord of the Rings cocktail challenge" Niall smirked, "You were so hammered, you couldn't even get past Frodo!" he chuckled quietly, "That was the night that Nick properly fell for you. You keep patting his bum, and saying "my precious"! Trust me, everyone knew what you were referring to!"

"I don't remember" Louis whispered quietly, stroking Harry's back, grateful he hadn't properly woken up.

"Well, he carried you home, put you to bed and stayed up all night with you" Niall told him gruffly, "I hope you're feeling guilty. He really did have feelings for you. And you insisted on leading him on, and broke his heart"

"I'm sorry" Louis whispered, indeed feeling very guilty.

"Not me you need to apologise to" Niall needlessly stated.

"I just don't want him around Harry" Louis burst out as quietly as he could, "Harry needs positive people around him...who aren't out for my blood! Is it so wrong to want that? It's not like they are going to be friends with loads in common."

"I beg to differ"

"Ni, I'm thinking about Harry's best interests. I think it would be a mistake"

Niall carefully thought about what Louis had said.

"You've told me about how controlling you think Harry's ex husband was" he said finally, lowering his voice so quietly that Louis had to strain to hear, "Wasn't allowed to choose his clothes, what food he ate, who he talked to, where he could go" he paused, "Don't get angry with me" he pleaded, knowing how angry Louis was capable of getting, "But if you choose which people are around him.
Doesn't that make you just as bad?"

"Are you fucking...."

"Let Harry choose" Niall told him gently, "If he wants to be friends with Nick, let him. He doesn't say anything about you being friends with the musketeers, and I don't think he likes them at all. But he puts up with them because they are important to you"

"Were important to me" Louis mumbled, "I'm not so sure anymore. Since this thing with Harry, I've been seeing them in a whole different light. And it scares me."

"Why?" Niall asked, interested.

"Because, sometimes, when I hear them speak, or see them look at each other when talking about Harry...I see myself, talking about someone else" Louis confessed sadly, "And I don't like it"

Niall leaned over and patted his shoulder.

"Then I guess you have a lot to think about" he shrugged, "Maybe work out who are the best people to be around you. Because no offence mate, but who were the ones running out the door tonight, and who were the ones who were genuinely concerned for Harry's wellbeing? Not the Musketeers that's for sure."

Louis nodded, shifting so that his arms were fully around Harry, and buried his nose into the back of his hair.

"I wish I knew what I needed to protect him from" he murmured, "I don't want to scare him off, and think I'm just like the person he left"

"He won't" Niall assured him, "Just let him decide a few more things for himself. He'll thank you for it. Anyway," Niall got up and stretched, "I'm gonna get some sleep, if you need us. Just bang on the floor and we'll come running?"

"Us?" Louis questioned, "Nick and Olly are really staying?"

"Of course" Niall looked slightly exasperated again, "They want to be there for him. It's what real friends do. Even if it is just to nurse his hangover in the morning!"

He left the room, leaving Louis alone with a sleeping Harry in his arms, wondering about the life choices he had made, and trying to work out if it was ever too late to apologise for things he did to others, which he felt so ashamed about now.

He wondered if Alberto, Calvin and Stan would apologise to him and especially to Harry...but right now, he would bet a single penny on that happening.

Maybe it was time to re-evaluate who his real friends could be.
Chapter 20

Now he'd experienced how it felt like to be drunk, Harry awoke the next day to experience the next step. A hangover from hell!

His head pounding, eyes dry and aching, his stomach particularly delicate, and with the added bonus of his throat feeling like he'd swallowed a few dozen razor blades, Harry awoke to an empty bed.

A bed in a room he did not recognise!

Where was he? How had he gotten here? Where was Louis? Why couldn't be remember?

Zayn!

Zayn must have tracked him down, found him and brought him here! Wherever here was! Where was Louis? Had they been together when it happened? Was Louis hurt?

The last memory he'd had was being with Louis! So where was he?! Had he been drugged? Was that why he felt so painful and out of it?

His heart catapulting into his mouth, Harry scrambled to get out of the bed, he had to get out of here! He had to find Louis! He knew what Zayn was capable of, and he knew what Louis would have tried to do. Louis would have tried to fight him, but he wouldn't be strong enough - Zayn was like a wild robotic cat on steroids!

Harry knew he was panicking. His head was thumping, and as he finally detangled himself from the sheets, the extent of his headache was almost incapacitating - but he couldn't think about himself right now.

The sound of a door opening had his whole body spinning around on the spot, just the soft click of the lock sounding like a gun shot to Harry's frightened and confused mind. Eyes widening with terror, his feet suddenly bolted to the floor with fear, terrified of the dark brown eyes and furious expression that he was so certain he was about to face!

Louis had woken up a little before Harry. In all honesty he hadn't gotten much sleep to begin with, constantly on the alert in case Harry was poorly during the night, and needed help getting to the bathroom, or even had a bad dream and needed an extra big cuddle.

Being as quiet as he could manage, Louis slid out of Niall's bed, creeping over to Niall's ensuite, intent on freshening up. He was just drying himself off, when he heard a thump from the bedroom, reaching for the door straight away. Harry must be up. The sight that met his eyes when he opened the door, was not what he was expecting.

"Harry? What's wrong?"

Seeing Louis would usually put everything right in Harry's world - but right now, he couldn't think about anything other than Zayn, and one of his fears being realised.

Harry couldn't get past the thought that he was trapped somewhere against his will, and that he needed to get himself and Louis out of there before his ex husband came back from wherever he was.
"Lou! Are you ok?" Harry hissed, finally finding some strength to move his legs, and hobble over to Louis, who was looking very tense and nervous, and grabbing his hands, "He didn't hurt you did he? Can you run? Can we even get out of here?"

"What?" Louis asked him, frowning instantly, eyeing Harry with concern whilst squeezing his fingers, which seemed to have developed a tremor, "Who wants to hurt me? Why are we running? Did you have a bad dream?"

He was almost knocked off his feet as Harry violently shivered, then threw himself at the smaller boy, huffing out breath after breath of absolute relief, almost squeezing Louis' rib cage up his throat and out of his mouth, his grip was so tight.

"Bad dream" he mumbled, oblivious to Louis wincing in his arms, and trying to systematically rub Harry's back whilst gulping down much needed oxygen, "Very bad dream, didn't know where I was when I woke up!

"Ah! I thought I heard voices!" Niall chirped, sticking his head around the door, and surprising Harry enough to make him jump and release Louis from his monster of a hug.

Grinning as always, Niall pushed the door open and bounced over to the pair.

"Man!" he grinned, going straight to Harry and patting him on the back, "You do look rough mate, think you can handle a bit of brekkie? Might make you feel better!"

Harry breathed a huge sigh of relief as everything started coming back to him piece by piece. Everything was ok. Zayn hadn't found him. Zayn still had no idea where he was - and he hadn't hurt Louis either - which was the biggest relief. Harry would go through any amount of torture so long as Louis was safe from harm.

Now he was thinking a little clearer, it all made sense. Going to Niall's for a house party, Nick, Pig, accidentally drinking way too much, Louis, Alberto and Calvin, hotdogs, Olly, water, playing truth or dare, Stan, throwing up all over....

"Oh my God! I am so sorry!" Harry spluttered, absolutely mortified as he remembered how he had vomited all over Louis, "I'll get you a new shirt! I'm...

"Don't say another word Curly" Louis smiled fondly at Harry's agonised expression, "If you buy me a shirt, Niall's gonna start claiming on all the ones I've thrown up on! I can't afford to get him a whole new wardrobe!"

Harry suddenly turned to Niall.

"I'm so sorry," he whispered, feeling incredibly embarrassed about everything he might have done whilst intoxicated, "I didn't break anything did I? Ruin anything? Say anything stupid?"

"You were the perfect drunk!" Niall assured him, "Minimal damage I promise. Now, what do you lads want to do? Nick and Olly are downstairs cooking, you want to come down?"

Harry considered the pain in his head, the dry scratchy sensation of his throat, and the dodgy squirmy feeling in his stomach. Food would not be a good idea right now.

"We're gonna flop afterwards and watch films" Niall coaxed, "On a very low volume to accommodate your little noggin!" He chuckled, ruffling his curls, "I'm sure Nurse Louis will be
happy to look after you all day!"

"Oy!" Louis said, pretending to be outraged, but really grinning and wrapping his arms around Harry's waist, "That's Dr Tommo to you!"

Harry nodded at Niall happily - he liked that plan immensely.

Considering what could have happened, or what he had feared had happened. The reality was absolutely perfect.

It was amazing to Louis how his life has dramatically changed since Harry had moved in next door.

The biggest change had to be how he now spent his free time.

Before Harry, he would hang out with the Musketeers on a daily basis, either at their houses, or at his, drinking, playing computer games, watching the football, playing football and clubbing.

Since Harry it couldn't be more different.

At first, it was just the two of them, enjoying quiet nights in every night (except Monday, Wednesday and Friday when Louis had footie practice), cooking, talking, cuddling up together on Louis' settee with a film playing unwatched in the background.

Louis had never been more content about doing so little.

Things changed again after Niall's party. It was no longer the two of them.

True to his word, Louis had exchanged numbers with Olly the following day. He had been hesitant at first, but during their lazy day of nursing Harry's first hangover, Louis watched how the younger lad - who he had never bothered to get to know - made Harry laugh and smile, and how could he deny Harry of someone who made his dimples pop out of his cheeks. He also thought of the chat he'd had with Niall, and his own thoughts about re-evaluating his friendship circle. Olly seemed like a good start - and the lad liked Harry, which was most important in the qualities he was now searching for.

Nick had taken a little while longer for Louis to warm to the idea of Harry being friends with, and watched him more intently than Olly, to make sure that the man's intentions were honourable towards Harry.

He had to admit, Nick did start off on the right foot.

The moment Harry had shuffled into the kitchen, feeling horrible and looking significantly worse for wear, Nick had leapt up from his seat, immediately apologising for making the cocktails that Harry had consumed, so strong, asking if he was ok, and telling him that to make up for it, he would be Harry's slave for the entire day...something Louis wasn't too mad about, but willing to step aside and let Nick carry on...to a certain extent. Although Harry definitely deserved the attention.

In the end, it was Niall's words echoing around in Louis' head that made him finally relax and see Nick for what he was. A man who Louis had done wrong by, who actually was a fun, friendly guy who actually did have a lot of shared interests with Harry, and most importantly, someone else that Harry actually liked, and wanted to spend time with.

Before Louis and Harry left that day, Louis knew he had to do something. So, whilst Harry and
Olly were discussing driving schools - with Olly shyly offering to give Harry a few lessons - Louis quietly asked if he could have a quick word with Nick in the kitchen.

He could feel Niall's eyes boring into the back of his head as they left the room.

Nick was instantly on his guard. What could Louis possibly want?

"So, you and Harry?" Louis started, leaning on the kitchen table and looking seriously up at Nick, "You get on really well"

Nick's eyes narrowed, "He's a good lad" he responded, leaning back against the kitchen counter, "I like him"

"He likes you too" Louis casually commented, letting out a breath. He looked nervous.

Nick nodded slowly, he was certain that Louis had a point. He just wished that he would get to it.

"I'm really sorry!" Louis burst out in a rush, "What I did to you! You did not deserve that, and you have no idea how much I regret it. I really hope that you recognise that I'm not that guy anymore, and maybe give me a chance to give you the respect I should have given you to start with?"

Nick was stunned. He had never witnessed Louis Tomlinson apologise for anything. Louis saying sorry to him? That he would never have expected!

"What brought this on?" he asked, cocking his head suspiciously. There had to be a catch somewhere. What could have happened for Louis to have such a change of heart in such short a time.

"My life has changed, and I like it" Louis said quietly, "So I need to change to make sure it stays this way"

It could have not been more clear.

"Harry?" Nick asked, knowing the answer before Louis had even had time to agree, "You want to change for Harry?"

Louis didn't even consider the question.

"Yes, and I think he could do with some good friends around him, and I think you could be one of them. So I was thinking it might be a good idea if we could try and get along for his sake, even if I don't deserve it."

"You don't," Nick said shortly, running his fingers through his hair, "I'm not the only one you screwed over for sport"

Again to his surprise, Louis didn't even try to defend himself. He just looked guilty and sad, staring at the table top, playing with his fingers.

"I'm really sorry" he muttered, sounding so uncharacteristically small and insignificant in his own skin.

The sound of laughter reached their ears, making both Louis and Nick look towards the kitchen door with a smile.
Harry was laughing.

"Ok", Nick nodded after a pause, "I'll give you a chance, for Harry. But if you dare pull with him what you did with me, my foot is going to be rammed so far up your..."

"Message received loud and clear" Louis nodded hurriedly, as the door swung open and Niall appeared, wearing his practiced owlish expression.

"All ok in here?" he asked, "Only I was going to start a bit of dinner. You staying Lou? Nick?"

Louis and Nick exchanged glances, heavy with their silent acknowledgement of their mutual understanding. They may be wary of each other. They may not be entirely trusting of the other ones motives. But they had something important in common.

Harry. Who they were both willing to put aside their past for, and see what would happen.

Which was how Louis and Nick both arrived at Niall's house as enemies, but left as people who could be friends.

Following Niall's party, when Louis arrived home from work, it wasn't just Harry he returned home to.

Sometimes he would find Harry and Niall cooking together in the kitchen, making lots of delicious, mouth watering treats for Louis' mum to sell at her weekly charity coffee mornings.

Sometimes he'd walk in on Harry and Olly in his own house playing on the Xbox. Harry trying and failing to beat Olly at Mario Cart, and getting his hair ruffled as he pouted when his car, yet again was the last to cross the finish line.

Sometimes, no one would be home, because Nick had taken Harry with him to walk Pig, or go and buy plants in the local garden centre for Harry's garden.

Louis had never realised that Harry was so green fingered, relieving Niall no end, when the lad took it upon himself to take on maintenance care on the garden he had painstakingly designed for Louis. Including the greenhouse - if anyone was going to convince Louis to start eating the homegrown, fresh salad and vegetable ingredients that were growing right under his nose, it could only be Harry.

Trips out for two, turned into excursions for five. They would all go and watch a film together at the cinema, or just go out for a drive - where Harry would try really hard to remember the last lesson Olly had taught him about three point turns (Harry didn't have the heart to tell Olly that he would never be able to pass his test because he would never be able to have a drivers license).

Harry would no longer be sitting in the stands on his own watching Louis' football practice or games, because his three new friends almost always accompanied him, cheering Louis on loudly!

The day of his first game since meeting Harry was particularly special for him - seeing Harry, Niall, Nick and Olly all standing at the side of the pitch, all wearing his teams shirt with his name on the back.

Whatever they were doing, it was always full of fun, and laughter, without a single bitching session or rude comment.
Niall had been right, Louis had now succeeded in surrounding himself and Harry around the best people. Harry's constant smile just proved just how right Niall had been.

The Musketeers didn't try to make any contact with any of them since the night of Niall's party - which Louis noticed and was hurt by every single day. No calls, no texts, Stan didn't even turn up to practice. It was like they had just dropped off the edge of the earth - which just proved how wrong Louis had been about them all along.

Sometimes, often after he had thought about his former friends, Louis' head space would go a little dark, and he'd think about Harry's head scar, and want to question the lad on how it had happened and why. There was so much he didn't know about Harry's past, so many things he didn't understand about his marriage, their break up and exactly where his ex husband could be right now. Was he still a threat? Was he out there looking for Harry? Would he ever find him?

But Louis would never ask. He didn't want a second to tick by where Harry wasn't happy and smiling. When Harry was ready, he was certain that he would talk - he obviously just needed more time.

The best part of every day though for Louis, was when everyone had gone home.

Then, it was just Harry and Louis, snuggled up on the settee, nose to nose, whispering into each others ears how happy they were, and chatting about what they did that day, holding each other impossibly close, smiling into their kisses, and strangely, for Louis, it was almost enough for him, almost...

Ever since Louis had properly discovered how his dick worked, if there was an opportunity to satisfy it, he would.

It wasn't something he was addicted to or something he 'needed' to get through the day. But if someone offered to jerk it, suck it, or let him fuck with it, Louis wasn't going to turn it down, and maybe he based his choices of dates and hook ups on who was most likely to do the most for him. Kissing was only done to initiate sex. That was all.

That had changed too.

All of a sudden, all Louis could think about was kissing. Kissing Harry.

Harry had the sexiest lips, so full and plump, and the most delicious shade of red that Louis always just wanted to sink his teeth into, and he did, at every opportunity. If his lips weren't slotted together, Louis was definitely thinking about it.

Lazy kisses on the settee, Harry pressed with his back against the cushions, his hands gently caressing Harry's shoulders and neck.

Needy kisses on the floor when they were too engrossed in each other to make it anywhere else, Louis trying to resist so hard to not grind his hips down, especially when Harry would cup his arse in his hands, kneading into the muscle with his thumbs, throwing his head back, almost inviting Louis to devour and decorate his swan like neck, every little whine and whimper tugging at Louis' heart, riling him up, making his pulse race and blood rushing to his dick.

That when he knew that it was time to stop, before he went too far and put Harry into an uncomfortable position. They weren't even properly together yet, who knew where Harry drew the physical line.
But it was fine.

Louis may leave Harry every night with a raging hard on in his pants, furiously jerking off as soon as he was in the privacy of his bedroom, all the while thinking of full, kiss swollen lips, parted and longing, with dark lustful green eyes peeping at him through long thick eyelashes, writhing underneath him as Louis gripped his thick throbbing length in his hand, tugging and stroking, biting his own lip hard as he pictured bringing his perfect lad to the leg quaking, spine tingling climax, covering his soft lily white skin with white.

Dazed and breathless, Louis would collapse into bed afterwards, hugging his pillow close to his chest, and wishing that the cotton his nose was buried in, was soft brown curls.

Little did he know, that in his own bed next door, Harry had just finished doing the exact same thing. Only in his head, it was a blur of cool cobalt eyes, tanned skin, scruff scratching between his thighs, taunt muscles pinning him willingly to his bed, and the seductive sting of a mark blossoming on his collarbone.

Harry had been convinced that Louis wouldn't be able to wait this long before going further with him - if he waited any longer, Harry might need to take matters into his own hands!
Jay Deakin hummed happily to herself as she bustled up the stairs carrying the three large cake tins that Louis had just dropped off at the residential home that she worked in.

"Knock, knock!" she sang out cheerfully, tapping on the wooden door, then waiting for a response which almost instantly came.

"Good morning love, how are you this morning?" Jay greeted Anne, giving her shoulder a gentle squeeze, "Ooh new project?" she asked, referring to the brightly coloured balls of wool surrounding her friend.

"Thought I'd get started on baby blankets" Anne told her as she clicked her knitting needles, "Can't be sitting around idle Jay!"

Jay shook her head, chuckling. Anne could not be called idle in any way, shape or form - she may have difficulties with movement, and visually impaired, but she refused to let that get in her way. There was always a charity she was actively supporting, either by creating knitted crafts for their shops and stools, recruiting sponsorship for events - and nine out of ten times taking part in the occasions themselves. Anne may have handicaps, but there were so many worthy charities out there that were screaming out for volunteers, some of them supporting causes that were painfully close to her heart.

Jay adored Anne. In her eyes, she was a strong, independently willed, gutsy lady, who had a bright infectious personality - which was why it had only taken a few hours for Anne and Jay to become friends. Best friends.

"My Louis just dropped by some cakes for our coffee morning" Jay told Anne, setting the tins down on the table and lifting the lids to take a look.

"Ooh these will sell well" she smiled approvingly at the selection, "Butterfly cupcakes, homemade chocolate chip cookies, and a black forest gateaux," she shook her head fondly, "I expect Louis' friend had a nightmare making those cookies - Louis does like to eat the dough raw!"

Anne chucked to herself as she knitted, a smile on her face because she loved to hear Jay's stories about her son. But quite sad at the same time, because she still hasn't seen hers.

Every week, a delivery would be made to her of fresh flowers, with the loveliest of fragrances with an unsigned note from her Harry.

The day that she had received the first one, with the note that told her that her son was alive and had escaped, truly was the best day of her life since the day Harry had been born.

Knowing that he was finally out of the clutches of that monster was enough to let her finally relax to sleep properly at night, instead of experiencing the nightmares of waiting years and years for a message Harry couldn't send, because he wasn't alive to send it.

"Here my love, taste one of these cupcakes", Jay suggested warmly, "I know for sure Lou didn't
make these - they are far too delicious for his kitchen skills!" she laughed again, "And he would be the first to tell you that too!"

One bite into the soft, moist sponge cake, with its velvet smooth and rich butter icing, and Anne felt tears welling up in her eyes. They tasted exactly like the cupcakes Harry used to bake for her when he worked in the local bakery at the weekend.

Always that little bit more creative, Harry would drizzle a caramel sauce into the centre of the cupcakes, so it would soak into the sponge, and add vanilla pods instead of essence to the butter icing filling to turn what would be a delicious cup cake into an extraordinary one.

Just like the one she was eating now. Even though she knew Harry was ok. She missed him. So much. If only she was able to just spend a few minutes with him, to tell him she loved him, to hear his voice, and hug him so tightly.

Would she ever see him again? Hear his voice? His notes always hinted that one day they would be reunited again, and in all honesty there was nothing stopping her from going straight to his home. But she knew her son, and if Harry hadn't come to see her in person, there was a very good reason. Anne would just have to be patient, and wait.

"Anne? Love are you ok?" Jay asked, suddenly concerned when she saw Anne begin to cry and went to give her a hug, "Maybe I gave you the one in the batch that Louis had a hand in making!"

"Ok, so I've dropped the cakes off to mum, now we've got to go to the shops for..." Louis checked the list Harry had given him, "What does that say? Curly's handwriting is shit when he's rushing!"

He shoved the note into Olly's face who was pretty much jogging to keep up with Louis' enthusiastic strides.

"Erm...dried pasta, furniture polish, clothes pegs, extra virgin olive oil, and... er... erm...something else..." Olly finished, saying the first few items confidently, then completely clamming up after he read the last two.

Louis glanced at his mate curiously, then snapped the scrap of paper in front of his own face. He blinked. He stared. He came to a complete stop in the crowded street, making Olly almost walk into him. Did that actually say what he thought it did?

Condoms. Lubricant.

"Did you write this?" Louis demanded, trying to see if the handwriting was any different to how the words above them looked.

"No!"

Olly replied, aghast at the suggestion. His ears were all ready turning a little pink at the suggestion, he had been too embarrassed to read the words out loud, let alone write them on the list as a joke.

"Harry wants sex," Louis had the expression on his face like he had just discovered the meaning of life, "With me!" he stared at Olly in disbelief, "Harry wants to have sex with me!"

"Erm..." Olly wasn't used to how vocal Louis could be sometimes - especially in the middle of a busy street.
"But...but...I didn't think he was ready!" Louis babbled, suddenly looking and sounding a little hysterical, waving the list around in the air. "He never said anything! He's never suggested anything! I haven't even blown him yet! I've only given him one hand job! We're not even...I'm not even officially his boyfriend! Does he want to make it official? What does this mean?"

Very calmly, Olly took Louis by the shoulders, leading him to a nearby bench, and getting him out of the way of the other shoppers who he was blocking the pavement for.

"Oh my God!" Louis was wide eyed, "What if he wants me to get them for him!"

"Well...I...er...I expect he thought he'd get some use out of them," Olly input, feeling he sounded very lame and self conscious, "I mean, it is Harry's list. He...er...asked you to...well...get them..."

"That's not what I meant," groaned Louis, rubbing his face that was getting hotter by the second, was he sweating? He felt like he was sweating!

Olly raised his eyebrows and looked a little pained.

"What did you mean?" he had the feeling that Louis was not going to be leaving this bench any time soon, or lower his voice. People were staring!

"I just wasn't prepared for this!" Louis stammered, "Why wasn't I prepared for this!" he demanded at Olly, who shrank back a little on the bench, "I mean, does he want me to get them for me? Or for him?"

"Both of you?" Olly offered shyly, "I mean you both..."

"Ugh! You are so straight!" Louis complained, unscrewing the shopping list and re-examining Harry's rushed scrawl. Maybe it didn't say that at all, maybe it said something that looked a lot like it.

Cannons?

Laminent?

No. That was ridiculous. It definitely said condoms and lubricant.

"It's alright for you, you don't even have to ask who they're for!" Louis moaned bitterly, biting on his lower lip, "It's bloody obvious innit! But with Curly? Are these for me to wear? Or for him to wear? Oh my God! What if he wants to top! What if this is going to be his way of establishing control in a new relationship because his last husband treated him like shit? I'm going to have to say yes aren't I! I want him to be happy! And comfortable! You can't shoot your load if you're not comfortable - I mean some guys can...oh fuck! What do I do if he starts putting it on? Me not topping is not fucking natural! I'm the fucking pin! Not the cushion!"

"So, you prefer to top then?" Olly asked weakly, knowing he would soon regret doing so, and his question was blatantly obvious, but he just felt like he had to make the right sounds, and to be honest - this was more information about Louis' sex life than he was comfortable with knowing.

Louis groaned again. His eyes darted back and forth.

"I've never bottomed in my life!" he murmured, looking into the distance and shaking his head slowly, "I always top! Every single time! There's never been any question about it!" he turned and grabbed at Olly's denim jacket, accidentally shaking him with more vigour than he had intended to, "What if Harry wants to top! I don't think I can take it! He's huge! It would be like trying to force a
water melon into a key hole! A perfectly intact, perfectly formed key hole! It's all my own fault" he
finished sadly, "My ass is so misleading. It's just one huge, delectable, neon sign indicating that I
take it" He groaned again, face hidden in his hands. When had the thought of having sex ever been
this stressful?

"Maybe you are thinking too much into this" Olly suggested, half hoping the ground would swallow
him up, "Why don't we go and get the other stuff, then think about this afterwards? In our heads?
Quietly?"

The sooner they left the bench, the sooner Olly could go home and pretend this had never happened.
This was possibly even more uncomfortable than the conversation he had endured with Harry the
previous day.

Olly thought that he was being invited over to sample cakes and another driving lesson, but had
turned into an hour of Harry agonising that Louis wasn't making a move on him, and what could he
do to get things started.

It had been awkward then. Luckily, if Olly kept his mouth full, and nodding now and then, Harry
kept speaking his thoughts aloud, and seemed to come to a conclusion without him having to input
much at all.

Obviously, this was his conclusion. Harry couldn't have been any more blatant - Olly wondered if
the reaction he was witnessing from Louis right now, was what Harry had in mind when he wrote
the shopping list out. He doubted it very much. In fact, Olly wouldn't have believed it himself,
unless he had seen it first hand. When it came to sex - Louis was not shy!

Louis pretty much sleepwalked through the rest of the shopping trip, Olly picking up everything that
Harry had requested. Until he had to take a deep breath and lead Louis into the pharmacy isle.

"Here we go" he said shiftily, looking anxiously around to see if anyone he knew recognised him,
"Knock yourself out"

Louis looked at the vast range of condoms and lubricant in front of him. Featherlight, ribbed, dotted,
extra strong, tingle, mutual climax, extra thin, extended pleasure, latex free, magnum sized, flavoured
- and that was just the choice of condoms! The choice of lubricant was just as extensive.

"But he never told me which ones!" he yelped, "What do I get?"

"What do you usually get?" Olly asked patiently, wondering if there were such things as trap doors
that appeared under your feet when you wanted them. He was way too shy and reserved for this
kind of thing.

"The cheapest," Louis mumbled, embarrassed, "I used to get through a lot of them remember!"

Harry did not deserve cheap though. Harry deserved the best ones. But what? Was he allergic to
latex? Would he want ones with gimmicks on them like ribs or dots? Did they even do anything
anyway? Were the natural ones really that natural? Should he try the ones that made you last longer
in case Louis got too carried away and couldn't help finishing before Harry? This was not an easy
decision. For the first time, Louis was on the brink of having sex with someone he actually cared
about - the pressure was immense - what if he couldn't perform properly when it actually mattered?
Almost an hour later, and his wallet considerably lighter, Louis finally left the store, waiting for Olly to catch up with him from where he had chosen to go and hide when Louis started piling his basket high with a selection of different condoms and lubricant - or to be more precise seven different varieties of each.

"You are seriously too shy for your own good mate," Louis told him, suddenly sounding a lot more bolshy and confident now he had time to get used to the idea of him and Harry being a lot more physical.

"What are you going to do when you get a girlfriend? Get her to buy them?"

They started to make their way back to the car.

"Maybe I should get Harry some flowers." Louis mused as they past a florists, realising he barely lavished much romance on Harry in the tangible sense. Fine, he lavished love and affection, but Harry deserved someone who would really turn it up a notch and buy him flowers, flowers with meanings. Could you buy flowers that said "I love you for feeling strong enough for being ready for sex with me, but would you be alright taking it? Because your junk is gonna split my ass in two! Ps, I know I'm big too...but I still have to top! Ok?"

"I've never brought a lad flowers" he commented warily, then turned to Olly skeptically, "You can choose flowers can't you mate? You're not gonna fall to pieces again like you did earlier?"

Olly was about to retort, when Louis suddenly grabbed his arm, preventing him from pushing the shop door open and dragged him behind a large stand of carnations outside of the shop.

"Harry's in there!" he hissed, "I can't let him see me!"

"Why?" Olly hissed back. He was having doubts about ever helping Louis with his errands again, so far he was getting pulled about and embarrassed every few feet!

"Because he's probably in there buying flowers for me!" Louis whispered loudly, "What's he getting?" he took a chance and peeped around the stand into the shop, "Wow!" he whispered, "He must be planning something for tonight! Those are extreme!"

Olly squinted and raised his head a few inches to have a look too. Harry was indeed standing at the counter in front of a very spectacular arrangement of white, green and purple, bent over he counter, seemingly writing out a card.

"Fuck! Ok, we have to leave now!" Louis decided, realising that what was happening tonight was going to call for some serious effort on his part, and grabbing Olly's arm and dragging him down the street, "I'm gonna need to get a hair cut, get some romance shit, and then get down to some serious personal grooming!"

"I'm not gonna ask about personal grooming" Olly muttered, that was way too much information, letting himself be dragged away once again, listening to Louis go on and on about how much he adored Harry, all the way around town, then all the way home.

Now that Louis had preened himself to perfection he was kinda at a loss of what to do until Harry came over.
Should he light candles he'd got now or later? Should he order takeout? Or was Harry going to cook for him? Should he put the condoms and lubricant in a place that Harry would see? Put them on the bed? Or should he put them in the bag with the rest of the shopping?

Shit! He hadn't taken Harry the shopping yet! And it probably had ingredients for the nights dinner in it what with the pasta and the oil. In fact, the whole list must have been in preparation for tonight. Furniture polish to clean the house, food for a special meal, pegs... pegs? Louis' eyes widened with apprehension, automatically clapping his palms over his t-shirt covered nipples protectively. Was this some kind of kink? Did he want kinky sex? Kinky topping sex?

Shaking his head, to clear his sudden fearful thoughts, Louis grabbed the bags. Then, as an after thought, left the one with the more thought provoking purchases behind and made for the door. Then be stopped, back tracked and stuck one pack of feather light condoms and mint lubricant into the large pockets of his shorts - just in case!

Harry might want it to happen at his house, and he didn't want to ruin the moment by being unprepared! Or did he? Who knew what Harry had planned for him...one thing was for certain, if it was as he was expecting, he would never be able to call him the sweet innocent name of Curly again - that would be ruined!

On the way over, he practiced his "surprised" face, grinning giddily at how Harry was going to be the first person to ever buy him flowers, and despite his inner worries about how exactly this was going to take place, butterflies in his tummy were reminding him of what a life altering night this was going to turn out to be. However it took place, whatever Harry wanted, it was going to be everything that Louis wanted - it was already just enough that Harry wanted to be that close to him. Maybe it would also be the night that Harry asked Louis to be his officially.

Of course, in Louis' heart, he already was.

However, sometimes things did not go as you expected them to.

"Hey baby!" Louis smiled lovingly, finding a topless Harry in the kitchen chopping up some peppers. He positioned himself behind the lad, slipping his arms around his waist and nosing into the back of his neck, he didn't smell the same as usual, but he pressed a small chaste kiss there anyway, whilst depositing the bag with Harry's shopping on the counter. "Good day?"

Harry turned around in his arms, already smiling wrapping his own around Louis' shoulders and dipping his face for a proper kiss. Louis swore he felt the lad melting into his arms already. He loved how Harry obviously felt exactly the same as he did.

"You've been ages" Harry complained teasingly, rubbing their noses together, then pulling back a little and toying with the ends of Louis' now slightly shorter hair.

"You got a haircut?" he asked in conversation, "So that's why you were ages"

Louis bit back from stating exactly how much hair had disappeared from his entire body that day, and just nodded.

"Just wanted to look good for you"

"You always look good to me" Harry smiled fondly, trailing his fingers through Louis' hair, "I wish
I'd bothered to go into town now, could have got mine done - but didn't have time to go in the end."

He turned around and continued chopping, missing the slight frown that was twitching at Louis' eyebrows. Now he began to think about it, Harry smelt odd again - and yet familiar. It was the same scent that he had smelt when Harry had come back after the weekend he had spent awol. The one that Louis still knew nothing about.

Also, Harry had been in town today. Louis and Olly had both seen him. Why didn't he say?

Patting Harry's bare stomach gently, Louis made up something about needing the bathroom, wondering out of Harry's kitchen, through the living room, then finally upstairs looking for the flowers. There was no sight of them anywhere.

"Thanks for getting my shopping" Harry smiled as Louis re-entered the kitchen, feeling quite confused. "Did you find everything on my list?"

It didn't escape Louis' notice that Harry looked and sounded incredibly shy, bright eyed, pink cheeked and very bashful.

At Louis' nod, Harry abandoned looking into the bag, and crept towards him, bending down to snuggle into Louis' rather stiff arms, which only got stiffer when he breathed Harry in, and his nose filled with more of that flowery scent.

"So you didn't go into town today?" Louis asked bluntly, waiting for Harry to backtrack and admit that he did. He didn't even care about the flowers at this point, or the stench, just that Harry was blatantly lying to him!

Harry didn't even bat an eyelid. How used to lying was this lad?

"No, I thought about it, but you were getting everything I needed, so I just pottered around here all day." he shrugged, his beautiful jade eyes not even giving him away - or his body language!

"Doing what?"

Harry faltered, off put by Louis' slightly sarcastic tone.

"You want a run down of my day?"

Ok. Maybe he had said that a little too sarcastically, judging by how thin Louis' lips had shrunk to as a slight scowl darkened his baby blue eyes.

"No!" Louis rubbed his face. He was irritated. Why was he irritated? Was there something he was meant to do for Louis whilst he was out? He hadn't said anything. Was he meant to be a mind reader? At least Zayn had always....

At the mere realisation that he was actually comparing Louis to Zayn, and almost in a way that made Zayn sound better than Louis, sickened Harry to the stomach. He turned abruptly, stalking into the kitchen and with a shaky hand, picked up the knife he'd been chopping with, to continue with dinner.

Well actually Lou, I did go into town today! Harry revealed in his mind of what he could have said, I went to send some flowers to my mum, and then I went to smell her perfume because I miss her so much, and it's the only thing I can do to feel closer to her!

That would have gone down well! Especially since he hadn't said a word to Louis about his mum,
and Louis being Louis would suggest that he went and saw her! And he couldn't do that! Not yet, because she was meant to be dead...and so was he...even going into town could be dangerous! Anyone could have seen him! Anyone! Even...

Harry's heart began to thump faster - had Louis seen him? He would have said...wouldn't he? Or he was waiting for Harry to tell him...and he had just lied about it. Louis knew he had lied. Louis had seen him!

Harry's suspicions were only confirmed when Louis stalked into the kitchen, eyes glittering and narrow, radiating hostility.

"I feel sick" Louis claimed offhandedly, looking everything but sick, and everywhere but at Harry, "I'm going home. I'll see you whenever."

Harry stood wordlessly as Louis turned on his heel and stropped back out of the kitchen. He was about to go after him, when he heard the few words the boy uttered under his breath:

"I can't believe you fucking lied to me!"

At the slam of the front door, Harry dropped the knife, picked up Louis' house key and hurried after him.

"Hey."

Harry had eventually found Louis, sprawled face down on his bed.

"Go away" Louis mumbled into his pillow, "I want to be alone"

If it had been Zayn who had told him to go away, Harry would have fled. But this was Louis, who he had legitimately upset - so he wasn't leaving. His insides were squirming, his brain was clouding, but all he could see was Louis - lying hurt and upset on his bed, trying so hard to shut him out.

Quietly he shut the door, from the inside, Louis turned his head, raising it off the pillow a few inches and full on glared at Harry.

"Go away!" he repeated firmly, "I'm busy!"

Harry hated how furious and hurt his Lou looked, especially because he was looking at him like it. His squirming insides were becoming visible on the outside, he could feel his palms sweating, his nerves tingling, his hands shaking.

"I'm sorry," Harry whispered, wondering where all the courage he was demonstrating was coming from.

"Fucking figured it out did you?" Louis growled, slamming his face back onto the pillow, "Good for you. Now get lost. I have no time for useless bullshit!"

"I don't have to tell you everything!" Harry snapped, surprising himself, "If I want to keeps things from you I can and I don't have to explain myself!"

"I fucking know that Harry!" Louis exclaimed sitting up, "Keep whatever you want from me as long as you're honest about it! How do you think it feels for me to ask you something fucking pathetic like 'did you go into town?' and have you lie to my face? There's so much about you that you don't
tell me, and I respect you enough not to ask, and you know what, even if I did...I now know what an expert liar you are! You didn't even bat an eyelid!"

"I have only ever lied to you once!" Harry agonised, shaking slightly, "You know me Lou! I have always been honest with you!"

"Only because I don't ask you shit!" Louis snapped back, "I don't know you at all! I only know the part of you that you choose to tell me about! You have so many secrets, and you matter so much to be that I trust you and let you keep them, but then I begin to wonder about everything, your name! Where you came from! Where you vanished to that weekend! The shit you came back smelling of, which you even smell of again now! I know you had a shit relationship, and you have no idea how much I wish I could just ask you why you are you scared that you had to create a whole new identity, or why your husband threw you through a fucking window! Yes I know about that!" he confirmed, seeing how Harry's face paled, his fingers automatically darting up to where his scar was hidden beneath all his hair.

"Olly showed it to me! You showed Stan! You showed Olly and Nick! But you didn't show me did you? And I have wanted to ask you! But it's not my fucking place! Why didn't you show me? Don't you trust me? Don't you think I will understand? I promised I would wait for whenever you were ready! But I don't think you will ever be ready - and I don't want to live our life constantly in the dark - especially when all you do is make up more lies, and expect me to swallow them!"

Now it wasn't just Harry who was visibly shaking. Louis was too. Completely submerged in his own thoughts of hurt and betrayal. Why wouldn't Harry confide in him? Why didn't he trust him?

"Maybe there's a reason for all of that," Harry stumbled to say, "Maybe you should, just trust me"

"Trust you? I have never doubted you!" Louis gasped jumping off the bed, "Until today! You lie about being in town - Olly and I saw you in the florists - buying flowers for fuck knows who! Then you come home and you smell all weird, and I don't even ask you why!" he grabbed at his own hair in frustration, "And it bothers me! It scares me! I worry so much about you, and you hiding things from me..." he shut up suddenly, and plucked the box of condoms and lubricant from his pocket, chucking them at Harry's feet.

"I'm not even going to entertain this idea!" He snapped, "I know I've been a massive tool, and a cock slut in the past! But I changed for you, and believe it or not! You asking me to get these, for us, was a big fucking deal to me! I refuse to enter any further act of intimacy with you whilst you are refusing to tell me even the smallest of truths! Now can you do me a favour and get out?" his voice trembled with unshed tears, "Before I say anything else that I regret!"

Harry leaned back against the wall. Internally his head was all of a dither. It was now or never. He could either take a massive leap of faith and tell Louis absolutely everything, or he could kiss whatever was between them goodbye. This was it had come down to. The truth of his past that was long gone, or the unknown future with Louis, which up to now, had been everything he's dreamed about.

"What if I explained?" he asked weakly, sliding down the wall and sitting on the floor, "But I warn you Lou. Once I've told you, I can't ever take it back. I'll never be able to come back to this moment and undo it"

Louis was about to scoff, but then he recognised the desperation in Harry's eyes that rippled through his whole face.

"You're not being dramatic are you?" he asked, feeling weakened by how defeated Harry sounded,
"This is serious isn't it?" he asked, a lot more gently than he'd envisioned he would after such a confrontation, sinking down onto the side of the bed, and realising he had never been more scared at the prospect of words coming out of Harry's beautiful mouth. But he had to know! He didn't want to be in the dark any longer.

His long body folded into a ball against the wall, Harry could barely look at him, jutting his head in a nod.

"What do you really want Lou?" he asked, "Do you want me to tell you all and risk the consequences? Or do you want me to leave?"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone for being so nice to me. A couple of you have asked about Zayn. Yes he will be back, and I'm thinking in the next couple of chapters. Hope you liked this instalment. (Fingers crossed!)
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

I hope this meets expectations. I did work really hard on this, so I am really hoping I did the situation justice. It was pretty hard to be honest, so I'm sorry it took so long to update xxx

Harry was trembling, violently trembling, clearly very upset by the impending conversation.

"Come here baby," despite patting the bed next to him, Harry didn't move, encouraging Louis to get up off of the bed, offering the lad his hand, and helping him to get shakily to his feet, and leading him to the bed.

"I can tell you are scared baby, and I would never normally push you," Louis told him softly, sitting with his back to the headboard and pulling his lad into his side, "But this conversation is a long time coming - and I think we need it. Just know, that whatever is about to come out of your mouth, whatever reasons you have - I will support you. I only want to help you Harry" he finished squeezing him close and kissing his temple.

"You can't promise that" Harry mumbled, looking decidedly sick at the thought, "For all we know, this could be it for us. You won't want me after this." he turned his face away from Louis, he didn't think he could look him in the eye, his new found confidence quickly depleting.

"Harry, baby, look at me." Harry felt small strong hands press against his cheeks, coaxing him to turn his head. Tears prickled at his eyes. He was so scared that this would be the last time Louis would speak to him so fondly.

"Baby, I sincerly doubt that anything you are about to say is going to make me want to push you away. If anything, I'm expecting it to be the exact opposite."

If only Harry could take a picture of Louis looking so sincerely at him, his whole face open with such love.

"I warned you" he pressed one final time, "Don't say I didn't warn you!" then he rested his head against Louis' shoulder knowing that soon enough he would have revealed everything.

"When I was little, my family used to go camping a lot. Usually by the sea. One year, my dad and my older sister Gemma were really into learning how to surf, and spent nearly all of their time in the water"

Louis watched as Harry gazed into the corner of the room, but seeming to see so much further than the wall.

"I was too young" Harry remembered, his words spoken so slowly, so carefully, each sylilbol emphasised as they rolled off the tip of his tongue.

"I couldn't swim, so I used to play in the surf watching them. I found it fascinating - how they would paddle with their boards and jump up just as they hit the curl of the wave. It looked so high! Gemma used to say she felt like she was flying!"
Harry paused to smile at the memory, a tear welling in the corner of his eye.

"On that day, the weather was beautiful, clear skies, hot sun, a nice breeze. Mum was sunbathing on the sand, I was paddling in the shallows with my arm bands on, Dad and Gemma were surfing"

He trailed off, Louis giving him a gentle squeeze of encouragement, staying silent. Letting Harry collect himself before continuing.

"Suddenly the sky darkened. Clouds rolled in from nowhere, there was thunder, then the rain just poured."

It could have been Louis' imagination, or could he actually see said clouds darken the light in Harry's eyes.

"I was about to run back to mum when I noticed something was wrong. Gemma had always been fearless, and instead of following dad who had called to her to get out of the water, she had just gone to jump on her board for another wave. I think a roll of thunder surprised her at the pivotal moment. I saw her slip, fall, she went under the water."

Louis bit his lip, closing his eyes. He was no longer in his bedroom. He was on the edge of stormy beach, standing with little Harry, tasting the salt of the spray on his lips, feeling the rain fall like needles onto his skin, watching a faceless child fall into the churning waves.

"I completely forgot where I was" Harry recalled faintly, as though he was trying to claw back the exact memory from a box he kept locked in the far corner of his mind, "I just ran to her, I loved her so much, and I needed to save her - but of course I couldn't get very far" he stifled a small sob, tearing his hand away from Louis' to wipe his eyes, then grabbing at it once more and squeezing it tightly. "I couldn't swim, the current got hold of me and dragged me under. It was absolutely terrifying."

"The roar of the water in my ears, the tug of the ocean pulling at me from all directions, I couldn't breathe, my lungs felt like they were going to burst, then something snatched hold of me, dragging me upwards. Dad had got me. We broke the surface. I was trying to catch my breath, and scream out for Gem at the same time. I couldn't see her. Neither could Dad"

For a moment Louis thought that it was getting too much for Harry. Still staring into the past in his minds eye, squeezing Louis' hand so tightly that it was starting to loose feeling. He may have been crying, but his face was set strong, determination to continue radiating in high volume. It was clear that Harry had to tell Louis this story, for reasons that Louis was only too afraid to think about.

"Dad had seen me run into the sea, but he hadn't seen Gemma fall, because he was in front of her at the time. When he got me back to the shore, my mum was screaming, pointing, and running into the water. Gemma had surfaced and had been struggling to swim back, but the waves were strong, and she was only young herself. Dad left me on the sand, racing out to get her - only, in a few seconds it was too late."

A loud startling sob shook Harry's entire body, squeezing his eyes tightly shut, letting Louis hold him close and rock him. But even with his face pressed against Louis' chest, nosing in the cotton of his t-shirt, smelling the comforting scent of his fabric softener, he didn't stop.

"Gemma has grabbed hold of her board, was using it to try and keep afloat, I expect the current was pulling at her legs something chronic. But then there was a massive wave, it was huge, it was strong. It tossed the board the into the air and when it fell, it crashed down on her head - I don't think she even had time to scream."
"Oh baby" Louis whispered, his own tears sliding down his cheeks and into Harry's curls, "Oh baby, I'm so sorry!"

"Mum screamed," Harry continued after a pause, "I can still hear her now, I've never heard anything like it since. I was so scared. All I could do was watch both mum and dad trying to get to Gem, but the waves were against them - and there was no one on our beach to call out to - by the time they reached her, it was too late. Mum managed to get her back. She tried CPR but she was...she was...already gone. Mum was crying so hard, and I remember looking for my dad, because he wasn't there. The rain was coming down in torrents - I don't know it was the rain drops blurring my vision or my own tears - the sea was so rough. Then I saw him"

"Oh baby," Louis murmured, just like he knew exactly what was coming.

"He was further down the beach, washed up on the sand. He must have swam there and just collapsed. He'd suffered a heart attack and...and died...we weren't even with him. He was on his own. In agony, and we didn't even notice!"

Harry struggled to sit up, Louis helped him, sitting up besides him, watching as Harry looked down into his lap, listening as the lad rasped out the next few words, wondering how he had ever thought he had felt his heart break before, when he looked into the eyes of someone who's heart had been well and truly broken, patched up, and splintering again before his very eyes.

"It was my fault," Harry whispered, his face snapping up as Louis began to protest immediately, "Don't" he stuttered, salty tears streaming down his cheeks, sliding over his lips, dripping down his chin, "I've had therapy - lots of it. They all said it wasn't my fault. But I know it was. If I hadn't have been so stupid as to try and get to Gem. If I hadn't put myself in danger, so that dad had to rescue me. He would have seen Gem. He would have gotten to her first. He would have pulled her to shore instead of me! Gem wouldn't have been knocked unconscious and drowned, and my dad wouldn't have been so stressed and exhausted that it provoked a heart attack. They said it was a freak accident. They said it was natural for me to act the way I did. But it doesn't matter what they say. I know, in my heart, that it was because I went into the sea that we came to the beach as a family of four, and...and left as a family of two. It's my fault why my mum lost her husband, and her daughter...it's my own fault that I lost my dad and my sister!"

The strength from Harry's face collapsed, washing away with his tears, gut wrenching, grief induced sobs quaking him to the very core, letting himself be pulled into Louis' arms.

They clung to each other.

Harry grasped at Louis' solid frame, digging his fingers into the muscle that would always protect him, pressing his cheek against his chest, where his heart strongly thumped, that would love him until long past its last beat, listening to Louis' tear filled soothing whispers that penetrated deeper into his soul than the loudest shout.

Louis clasped Harry to him, holding him so tight, wishing that he was able to siphon just a little bit of the pain away, unable to imagine what it must be like to carry that sort of agony around with him every day - then he realised, someone had decided that Harry hadn't been through enough just yet...there was still the story of his husband.

Louis' grip never loosened on Harry whilst he cried, he never stopped rocking him, never stopped whispering to him, gently pressing kisses into his hair, and in time, Harry fell quiet, still clutching at Louis, lapsing into deep thought.
"I need to do something," he finally mumbled, trying to get up, his limbs uncoordinated and clumsy, "Come on."

"Where are we going?" Louis asked, confused as Harry took his hand, bringing it briefly to his lips to swiftly kiss his knuckles.

"I need to cook dinner," Harry told him distractedly, stretching, so that his spine popped, then starting to lead Louis downstairs, "I need to be doing something. I can't just sit and talk any longer."

"Look, I completely understand if you don't want to talk anymore" Louis rushed to tell him, thinking that his lad must be emotionally exhausted, "And you don't have to cook, we can order in."

"I'd rather get it over and done with to be honest" Harry told him quietly, "Can you grab that colander?"

Louis picked it up instantly. Following Harry out of his own back door and towards the greenhouse.

"I don't remember much after that," Harry continued, "It's all a bit of a blur - I'm not even entirely sure how we got off the beach. I know there was a funeral, but I don't remember it. All I can really recall, is how mum and I just clung to each other, for days afterwards, and burying their ashes."

Harry let go of Louis' hands, which flew straight to Harry's hips, having to hold him in some way whilst Harry busied himself with examining tomatoes for freshness.

"Their plaques are in our home town of Holmes Chapel in Cheshire," Harry told him, cutting a vine of cherry tomatoes and putting it the colander, "Their ashes are in the Lake District, in our favourite camping spot in this meadow" he paused, and looked Louis straight in the eye, "The weekend when I went away without telling you, that was where I was" he revealed, "I needed to...talk to them...be with them...let them know I hadn't forgotten. When you love someone, even when they're gone, the love never goes. If anything, it only gets stronger, because they aren't there to absorb it. I just had to go there, to show them how much they mean to me, and to tell them their sacrifice for me wasn't in vain."

He added a large cucumber to the cherry tomatoes.

"I was sixteen when I met my husband," Harry carried on, picking up the colander in one hand, and scooping up Louis' hand in the other, leading him back out into the garden, but instead of going back to Louis', he led him over to his house.

"Don't get offended" he told Louis cautiously, "Whatever I say now, it's just a projection of how I felt back then, before I met you."

Louis nodded, internally worried that no matter how far in the past it was, his little green eyed monster would rear it's ugly head. He was already feeling a twinge already by Harry referring to "my husband"!

"I never expected him to like me. I was awkward and shy, and he was so confident and self assured," Harry told Louis as he reached into the fridge and took out a spatchcock chicken he'd been marinading, and preparing to cover it with tinfoil, "Could you turn the oven on please? So, we were together for two years before we got married - he actually proposed to me about six months after we got together, and I was absolutely infatuated with him."

Louis had to look away, his lip was involuntary curling at the revelation into his trademark sneer. He didn't give a shit that all this was in the past, and that the lad in question turned out to be a horrific piece of shit - Louis did not want to know about how "infatuated" Harry had been with this
"monstrosity of a human!"

"Louis?"

"I'm fine!" Louis squeaked, trying to look nonchalant and neutral, and trying so hard to stop being so selfish! Harry was sharing huge life changing moments in his life, and Louis was semi feeling sorry for himself over something that Harry had felt in the past? He was disgusted with himself.

Harry's face had been the picture of passive, it must be how he coped with these particular memories, or maybe he was just desensitised to it all. But upon seeing Louis' subdued little face, and a glimpse of something that could be described as jealousy, his features softened.

"Come here," he managed to smile, in a strange way thankful for how he was interpreting Louis' feelings. Louis being a little bit jealous, was just a huge sign that he cared about him, "Come and help me start the potatoes,"

"What are we having?"

"Roast dinner" Harry replied, "Once we get that on the go, we can start on lunch for you tomorrow"

Louis nodded, hopping up onto the counter top, watching as Harry salted the carefully cut potatoes, covering them in goose fat and then popping them into the oven along with the chicken.

"We got married on the day I turned eighteen," Harry remembered as he carefully slipped the tray into the oven, closing the door quickly to keep the heat inside, "Za...wait...would you prefer it if I didn't use names?" he turned back to Louis who made a small grimace.

"Probably safer if you don't babe," he confessed, "I'm already plotting his demise, and to be completely honest with you, I have a mate who's occupation is to track people down, and he's pretty good at it. This guy wouldn't have a chance! Might want to keep that one to yourself."

Harry examined Louis' face to see if he was joking or not, this was new information to him, but it didn't feel or sound like a lie. Besides, Louis had swarms of friends who he'd never heard of before.

"Ok. Well. Anyway...my...husband..." he paused again as Louis visibly winced again, as though he'd developed a tick, "Louis!" he complained, "I've got to call him something!"

Louis held out his arms, and beckoned Harry over, who dutifully came and stood between his legs that were hanging off the counter top, and let the smaller boy take him in his arms.

"I know baby, I'm sorry, I just don't like hearing it." Louis told him gently, "It does nasty things to my insides. But don't stop on my account. You're doing so well, trusting me like this. I promise to behave,"

"Never ever promise me that!" Harry warned him, sounding a mixture of sad and offended, "I don't want you to behave! I'm not that kind of person. I would never..."

"I'm sorry?" Louis had no idea why that had provoked such a reaction.

Harry shook his head, and started to wash the salad.

"Where was I?" he muttered to himself, "Ok. So we married on my eighteenth birthday. He was very traditional. He liked things to be done the proper way. He asked my mum for permission to propose, we didn't, you know, do anything before...what I mean...ugh...I'll just say it...I was a virgin until our wedding night."
He looked at Louis who was trying hard not to look both revolted and upset. He knew they would have had sex, being married and all, but actually hearing it was a lot worse than he'd expected. Still, he hid it the best he could, and even managed to smile encouragingly.

"It's so strange how people change as soon as they know they have nothing to prove anymore," Harry continued. He was still pottering around the kitchen, boiling a kettle of water, setting up a saucepan of dry pasta on the stove.

"I legitimately thought that nothing would change between us, but I was wrong. Or maybe it only changed from my point of view. I was the same boy that had met Za...him when I was sixteen. He wasn't. It was like..." Harry stopped talking and turned away from the vegetables he had been chopping, "You know when someone wants to sell you something huge," he tried to explain to Louis, "Something big like a house or a car, and the salesman really chucks the flattery at you, wooing you with all the good possibilities and making it sound amazing, and then you buy it, and the gear shift has a problem, or the pipes are leaking or something, and they don't give a shit because you've already signed and that's all they cared about?"

Louis nodded slowly, frowning.

"Well, that's how that's how I feel about what happened with our marriage" Harry shrugged, turning around now he knew Louis understood what he meant.

"What I got after I signed the 'contract' was not what I thought I was signing up for. I was expecting to have an equal relationship which was happy and loving. What he wanted was someone he could control and rule over. He didn't want a companion, he wanted a possession, and the moment that I signed that certificate that bound us together in matrimony, he didn't need to try with me. He didn't need to impress me or woo me. I was his. I was just another thing in his life that he had accomplished. He had sold himself so well to me, I didn't consider that he might be...just a really good salesman in disguise, selling me something that was defective."

Harry fell silent again, frowning hard at what he had just uttered aloud.

"How long after the wedding did that start taking effect?" Louis asked, his curiosity getting the better of him.

Harry pondered as he stirred the pasta, making sure it didn't come to the boil too quickly, and instead simmered gently.

"At the time it felt like a few weeks. But in hindsight, it was just a few hours. It didn't just happen all at once. It was a slow burner, I almost didn't notice. He used to correct me a lot, point out things the smallest things about me that I needed to work on, only he sounded kinder than he really was. Apparently it's called 'grooming', 'domesticating' - although, he just said he was helping me stand by my vows."

"Vows?" Louis asked dumbly, "Your wedding vows?"

Harry nodded, "Lou, you need to help me with this bit. I'm not sure how you want the seasoning on the salsa,"

Louis jumped off the counter, and smiled when Harry held up a teaspoon full of a delicious looking tomato salsa mixture, and watched him carefully as Louis took it all in his mouth in one go. It definitely didn't need extra seasoning, it was delicious! Harry was an amazing cook. He told him so. Harry smiled, obviously delighted. It was so strange. Doing something so completely normal, yet talking about a hugely sensitive topic as though they were just discussing what film they were going
to watch that night.

"Sorry, got distracted" Harry smiled shyly, looking a little subdued, "This is harder than I had imagined"

"You're doing really well," Louis praised, "Whatever you need me to hear, I'm listening. What did you mean? Stand by your vows?"

"I promised I would obey him," Harry said simply, running his fingers through his hair, "For as long as we both shall live. And if I didn't. If I chose to do something of my own accord instead of how he wanted it, he would remind me."

Louis' gut twisted uncomfortably, hopping back onto the counter top, "Remind you in what way?"

Harry chuckled darkly.

"It wasn't all physical abuse," he said bitterly, prising Louis' hands from where they were gripped tightly to the edge of the counter and kissing his knuckles, trying to be comforting, "I was new to relationships, I didn't know how they worked when they weren't in films or TV programs. Sometimes, he just needed to dent my self esteem. Make a comment about my weight, buy me clothes that were smaller than I was, and then make me believe it was my fault that they didn't fit - he was good at that, making me believe I was at fault, or maybe I was just too easily led. Trust me, when you have no friends, no job, and nothing to do but look after the house - you have a lot of free time to think about these things."

"He did hurt you physically though didn't he?" Louis gulped back the revulsion of having to even ask the question.

"Yes," Harry replied quietly, looking down at his feet as though he felt guilty and ashamed for having to admit it.

"How?"

Louis gripped Harry's hands tightly, nudging at Harry's chin with his forehead, he needed to see Harry's eyes, make sure that he was all right, hoping that he wasn't pushing his Curly too far.

Harry looked up, frowning slightly, his lips slightly pouting as though he was preparing to blow bubbles through a wand, internally weighing up the pros and cons of being that little more honest than he'd been planning to.

Louis had a fiercely protective streak, and he could see it beginning to surface. There was a glitter in his eyes that only appeared when he was frustrated or angry, a slight tick in his knee where he couldn't hold it still, when he was itching to do something to help, or holding something he really wanted to say back. Like now. In one swoop, Harry's arm had circled Louis' back, gently lifting him off the counter top and placing him on the floor.

Louis looked confused, but he wasn't for long. Harry traced his long fingers lightly over the left side of Louis' rib cage.

"I was kicked here when I used the wrong clothes detergent and he developed a rash,", his fingers moved quickly to Louis' forearm, "This was twisted behind my back if the house wasn't up to his standards,", he moved his attention to Louis' small and delicate fingers, "Slammed in the car door when I answered him back", he nudged Louis' toes with his own, "Trodden on at public events if I wandered off, or talked to someone I wasn't allowed to - even to say hello out of politeness."
"Baby, I..."

But Harry spoke over Louis, a little louder. He thumbed at Louis' cheek.

"Bruised here," he touched the tender, wafer thin skin of the boys eye socket, "Punched here. Pulled...hard," he added tenderly pulling on a few strands of hair, "And that was before he got serious,"

"Harry?" Louis just couldn't understand, "Why didn't you just leave him? Get a divorce? Why did you stay?"

"I tried" Harry told him, walking to the oven to check on the chicken and get the potatoes out to turn over, smiling fondly at how Louis shuffled after him, arms wrapped around his stomach, his face pressed between Harry's shoulder blades, "I packed my bag about six months after we were married, and I left," he shook his head, "He had my bag tagged. He found me almost instantly," for the first time, Harry shuddered at the memory, his hands shaking as he spooned the melted goose fat over the potatoes, before putting them back into the oven.

"I had no choice but to go back home with him...I don't want to say when happened there..." Harry admitted, obviously teetering on the edge of memories he didn't want to revisit, "But I knew, he wasn't going to let me go without a fight...he even said...hell would have to freeze over, twice before, I will let you go."

"Chase and Status" Louis murmured, clinging to Harry so tightly, "What did you do?"

Harry's face was passive and blank as he recounted his trip to see his mum, how she had guessed what was happening to her son, and how she had promised to fix it for Harry. As much as he had trusted and loved his mum with all his heart, he didn't see how it was possible. They were only six months into their marriage, but to Harry it felt like he had signed his own death sentence. There was no way that he was going to make it out of there just by leaving. Harry had been an investment to his husband, and Zayn expected to capitalise on it.

It had been on the drive home that his mind had began to tick over the possibilities, each more unlikely than the last. But in the end he realised, that was what he needed. For him to get out, unscathed, unnoticed and untraceable, he would have to do something incredibly unrealistic, outrageous, out of character, the last thing that his husband would ever expect - he couldn't risk the chance of faking his own death, and actually dying in the process, or getting caught trying.

"My husband knew what happened to my dad and Gemma. He knew I was terrified of the sea. He knew I couldn't swim. But that never stopped him forcing me to go sailing with him. It gave him the upper hand, made him feel powerful to put me out of my comfort zone. Because I had always been honest with him, and open with my thoughts and fears before we were married, he knew every weakness I had, although there were only two that really affected me. Can you guess what they were?"

"Well...obviously the sea" Louis replied, thinking hard, "And...well...I could be wrong, but I would say your mum."

Harry hummed approvingly. Louis was right of course. It just proved how well they were in tune with each other.

"My mum suffered a stroke" he told Louis quietly, "She lost her sight, and her left side was affected. She had to go and live in a residential home. I wasn't allowed to go and visit her much - at all even. My husband hated that I was such a 'mummy's boy'"
"There's nothing wrong with that!" Louis exclaimed hotly, thinking of how much of one he was himself.

"I know," Harry laid his hand on Louis' forearm, easing him immediately, "But if I was to get out of my relationship, I had to make sure that she was safe. If for some reason he couldn't get to me. He would go straight to her to smoke me out of hiding. This was a man who I both loathed and feared in equal measures, and by then I had a pretty good idea of what I was up against. I couldn't put my mum at risk - she had already done so much to prepare things for me once I had finally got away."

"What did you do?" Louis asked, not being able to help himself from taking Harry's hand and leading him into the living room so they could cuddle on the settee. Harry had finished with the food, and was just standing awkwardly.

"I was allowed a part time job. Three days a week at the local library" Harry recalled, sinking into Louis' embrace as they lay down, "Not because I wanted it as such - I mean I did want it. I had been wanting to work for a long time, but he only gave in because one of his colleagues at work started giving him shit for having a pretty boy with no brain as a husband." he laughed darkly, "He hated it. He would have hated it even more if he realised how much it had helped me get here today!"

Harry paused, murmuring with appreciation as Louis pressed kisses to his forehead.

"I planned everything. Then one day I just left early. Went to get my mum, and took her from her home, and traveled up country to her new one. I stayed as long as I could allow myself, knowing how much trouble I was sure to be in when I got home, and left her there" he stifled a small sob, "I haven't seen her since"

"Why didn't you just stay?" Louis asked, knowing there had to be a reason that he returned, but not entirely sure why, "Why didn't you just hide?"

"Because I had a plan" Harry whispered, "One I had been putting into practice for a while. Mum was the last piece I had to sort out, and then it was a matter of waiting. Although, I very nearly didn't make it. When I returned home, I told him that my mum had died, suddenly, and grief stricken I just went to her. I wasn't allowed a phone, or know what our home number was, so that was a good reason for not contacting him. He believed she was dead. But he didn't forgive me for leaving him." he shuddered, and his fingers wandered up to his scar, "He taught me a lesson that night. A lot of lessons, which ended up with me being thrown through the glass doors of the patio, and left me with my scar. He told the hospital that I had been in a car crash. He acted so upset, so heartbroken, so traumatised, they believed him."

Louis hugged him so tightly. He was so angry, his blood was boiling under his skin, his brain seething. His poor sweet little Harry having to go through all of this, because of someone like that!

"But you got away!" he said, as though he had suddenly realised, "You've been here for ages and he hasn't found you! How did you do it?"

Harry leaned up on his elbows, tracing the line of Louis' jaw with his index finger.

"Come on Lou, you're clever, surely you can work this out. I've given you so many clues. What type of person would you never bother to look for if they went missing?"

They stared at each other, blue eyes looking inquisitively into innocent green ones.

"I don't know," Louis admitted finally, feeling thick and stupid.

Harry kissed his nose fondly.
"You can be really innocent sometimes" he whispered, "My husband, or rather my ex husband" he corrected himself with a triumphant smile, "Thinks I'm dead!"
Chapter 23

Louis heard Harry's words, but they didn't penetrate into his brain right away. How on Earth could Harry's ex husband believe that this boy was dead, when he was sitting right on top of Louis? Breathing, talking, and very much alive.

"Eh?" he asked, his face screwed up with confusion, "How did you...?"

"We had a holiday home down on the beach," Harry told him, gently stroking Louis' cheek, trying to iron out the frown lines in the corners of his eyes, "Everytime we went, he would find some way of getting me out on a boat. I just had to wait for the right moment, and...well..." he held up his fingers into quotation marks, "Drown".

"But you can't swim!" Louis blurted out flabagasted.

"I learnt," Harry murmured, radiating pride in himself, "In secret. Took lessons before my shift started at the library three days a week."

Louis shook his head, as though he was trying to get water out of his ears.

"I'm going to need more information." he said slowly, "When did all this happen?"

Harry told him. It took a while, but painstakingly, he explained everything that had happened on that final day. Starting with the misunderstanding about the doctor next door, the boat trip, his perfectly planned escape, and ending on how he had moved into the house that his mother had set up for him all those years before - in hope that one day, Harry would have some place to run to and hide.

Louis huffed out a breath he'd been holding. This was the most outrageous, far fetched, complicated tale he'd ever been told - in real life! But it explained everything that had been puzzling him about the lad sitting in his lap. He just sat there, absorbing the information, his mind working out all of the kinks, replacing his questions with quiet promises of his own, about how he would do everything in his power to protect Harry and keep his secret. Because now he knew, he was involved, as though he had been right there alongside Harry the whole time.

Harry looked at him warily, "You don't believe me do you?" he asked, taking Louis' uncharacteristic silence as disbelief, "I can prove it if you want. Well I probably can"

"How?" Louis didn't correct Harry, there was no way anyone would be able to create something like this, there was no question that Louis believed every word that he said.

"Well, I'd like to think there was some kind of funeral for me," Harry shrugged, and dipped his hand into the pocket of Louis' shorts, retrieving his phone, "There might have been an announcement or something in the local paper about it. I mean, I did drown in a tragic accident!" once again he looked proud.

Wordlessly, Louis took his phone from Harry and opened his internet browser.

"What do I search for?" he asked carefully, realising he didn't know Harry's married name, or previous location.

Harry frowned a little, but took the phone, tapped at it, scrolled a little, tapped again, then handed it back.
"There" he said looking anxious, "Don't tell me what it says though, I think I would rather be kept in
the dark. That isn't my life anymore. That part of me actually did die that night."

Louis nodded, as Harry sat up straighter, leaning away from Louis, but tucking his legs under the
pair of the smaller boy. He didn't want to accidentally read anything on the screen, but he also didn't
want to not be touching Louis - who was currently his pillar of strength, quietly and compassionately
supporting him from the moment he...well...from the moment they had met.

Louis took the phone, but he didn't break eye contact with Harry, looking intently into his
mesmerising eyes, so full of innocence and sweetness, with the smallest hint of worry, as he nibbled
on his fingernails. Louis was sure that the worry part was because of him, because Harry felt like he
needed to give him proof.

"I don't need this," Louis stated, deleting his web history with the most fleeting of glances so he
wouldn't go back and look if his curiosity got the better of him, "You don't need to prove anything to
me Curly," he gave a small smile, holding his arms open wide, "You do need to get here though,"

Harry perked up slightly.

"You believe me?"

"What would you have to gain from making that shit up?" Louis asked gently.

Harry shrugged, a little more timid than before, looking longingly into the space between Louis' open
arms, that beckoned to him once again. He didn't need any further encouragement, laying himself
down between Louis' open legs, pressing his face into the soft cotton of Louis' t-shirt, enjoying
immensely how strong arms wrapped around his shoulders, forming a protective ring around him.

They sat quietly for a little while, Louis stroking his fingers up and down Harry's back, thinking back
over everything that had been said that evening.

"I wish I had met you when you were fifteen." Louis mused finally, "It would have been so different
for you. You have no idea how much I wish none of that would have happened to you baby. I'm so
sorry about your family, about your husband."

"Me too," Harry whispered back, not moving from the comfortable embrace.

"You must have been so scared," Louis murmured, kissing the top of his head gently, "You could
have actually died that night Curly, hardly anyone would have survived that."

"I had help" Harry said quietly, thinking of the Gods who had no doubt helped him with his escape,
"Dad and Gem were with me the entire time. They wouldn't let me down, they wouldn't let me die."

"Does your mum know?" Louis asked suddenly, "That you are ok and you're here? Have you seen
her?"

Harry shook his head, "Not seen her. I want to, but I'm so scared of something going wrong! I do
send her...."

"Flowers," Louis finished for him, realising what Harry had been doing at the florists that morning,
"You know I could help you. Which home is she in? Is she nearby?"

"Fairview" Harry answered, naming the home which he had painfully and lovingly decided on,
"It's...."
"Where my mum works!" Louis gasped out excitedly, gripping at Harry's back, "I've been there loads of times! Fuck! Harry I probably know your mum already! I've met everyone there!"

Louis' eyes sparkled as he began to picture the residents in his mind, narrowing them down until there was only one left who matched Harry's brief description.

"Your mum's Anne isn't she?"

Harry sat up, eyeing Louis with the upmost amazement, nodding frantically, tears welling up in his eyes. It was perfect. Louis was perfect! Out of everyone he could have met, out of anyone who could have lived next door, fate chose Louis. Maybe his Dad and Gem had a hand in that too.

"Oh Harry!" Louis murmured, grabbing his cheeks with both hands and pulling his lad into a messy kiss, "She's my mums friend. It's all going to be fine baby!" he whispered, dragging Harry's now teary and emotional body into his arms once again and rocking him back and forth, never letting his lips leave the lads forehead, "Everything is falling into place now. We'll sort something out, my mum will help us. We'll get you to your mum I promise! She's going to be so fucking proud of you baby!"

Louis paused, "I'm fucking proud of you too!" he whispered softly, feeling a lump of emotion in his throat as it finally hit him exactly what Harry had been forced to live through in order to be sitting with him here today.

"You are the strongest man I have ever met, and I will do everything in my power to protect you. I love you so much Harry"

"I love you too" Harry sniffed, so happy and full of hope for his future that he felt like he was going to combust into an explosion of glitter, "I really didn't think you would want anything to do with me. Though you would think I was going to be too much trouble and not worth it, I mean, I've got so much baggage, I'm pretty much a screwed up mess...."

"Don't talk about my Curly like that," Louis scolded him seriously, "If anything, I want you even more."

"Enough to make us official?" Harry asked hesitantly, dipping his face, no longer able to meet Louis' eyes, "I mean, you know everything now. I have nothing left to hide from you. Would you still..."

"Be with me?" Louis burst out suddenly totally interrupting what Harry was about to ask, "Please Harry? I don't want to beg you, but I will! We're already together, we're just not putting a label on it, can't we just say it? That it is what it is? That we are what we are?"

"Was going to ask you tonight" Harry murmured, "I felt ready. Ready for a lot of things," he added meaningfully.

"You really are ready to be my boyfriend?" Louis had to clarify, the words sounding so unrealistic as they came out of his mouth, "Honestly?"

Harry just nodded in response, a slow, excited smile dimpling his cheeks, "It just feels natural to me, to be with you. I didn't think I would ever meet anyone else, I didn't want to meet anyone else, I thought I would be scared and alone for the rest of my life, then, well, then there was you." he stopped, searching Louis' face who was looking a mixture of deliriously delighted and fearfully apprehensive.

"I don't think I could manage on my own now," Harry told him quietly as though he was sharing a big secret, "I don't know what the future will bring, but I want to face it with you"
"I'm going to make you so happy" Louis promised, massaging Harry's shoulders, "I'm going to keep you safe and happy and let you know every day how special and loved you are"

Harry smiled, a proper, wide, sunshine smile.

"You already do Lou!"

"Get here!"

Louis pressed his whole body against Harry's rolling him onto his back and straddling him easily, taking his face in his hands, kissing his mouth so carefully, so delicately, letting his passion for his Curly spiral out of control as Harry responded to each little lick of his tongue, reacted to every little stroke of his fingers, wrapping his long legs around Louis' hips.

Harry's mind was wirring a mile a minute. He'd had so many plans for tonight - cooking Louis a romantic meal, asking him to be his boyfriend officially, then taking him upstairs to his bedroom, which he had filled up with candles - hoping that Louis would instantly get the idea, along with the massive hint he had left on the end of Louis' shopping list!

So far, it hadn't gone exactly to plan. He hadn't expected to be spilling out his entire life story, or seeing and hearing with his own eyes Louis response to it - which had been better than he could have ever wished for - just proving that Louis really was one in a billion!

However, now the evening was back on track. Dinner was cooking nicely in the oven. Louis had already become his official boyfriend - and judging by how filthily his crotch was grinding down against his, Harry's perfect idea of an evening was quickly turning into a reality, only better, because by sharing the weight of his past, he now saw a shimmering golden haze in his future. With that thought, smiling into Louis' eager mouth, Harry wrapped his arms tighter around Louis' shoulders, and pulled him even closer.

As much as Louis adored kissing Harry, he couldn't stop himself from worrying over everything he'd learnt. How long would it be before Harry's ex finally figured everything out, tracked him down and punished him for deceiving him? Anger boiled his blood that rushed through his veins, hardening his kisses, blackening his passion, almost crushing Harry underneath his torso which was getting rapidly tense.

"Lou! Louis!" he heard Harry gasp underneath him, wriggling uncomfortably as Louis gripped his lad to him even tighter. No one was ever going to hurt his Curly! Louis would fight, Louis would defeat anyone - especially that disgusting excuse of an ex! Louis would reinact everything that monster had done to his Harry until he screamed and cried for his mercy - which Louis would never give him.

"Louis! Please! You're hurting me!" Harry whimpered, beginning to push weakly on his shoulders, "Lou!"

Louis hadn't realised he'd gotten so rough, practically bruising Harry's already plump lips with his own. Breaking away, he looked down into Harry's pale face with wide watery eyes. He looked terrified. Louis felt disgusted.

"Baby I'm so..." he began to say when a loud shrill ringing floodes his ears, chilling Louis to the core. It had happened. It was happening now! Wrenching himself away from Harry, he grabbed his lad by the shoulders, shoving him into the nearest corner and grabbing the heaviest thing he could see close by...a hardback book...might not be a shovel or a baseball bat, but it would throw an intruder off their stride if he chucked it at them!
"Louis what the fuck?" Harry spluttered, trying to push his way past Louis, holding his hands over his ears to muffle the sound of the alarm that was still wailing away.

"Don't move!" Louis hissed, eyes darting between the living room and the kitchen, waiting for whoever had set off the burglar alarm to make their appearance, "He won't get you baby! Louis promised in a low snarl, "No one will hurt you again!" he changed his stance, hovering, limbs loose, ready to strike at a moment's notice.

"It's just the cooker timer!" Harry insisted, finally figuring out what was going on, "It's just the dinner Lou! No one's here! No one's trying to hurt us!"

Louis froze, dropping his arms to his sides and book to the floor in instant relief. This was embarrassing.

Harry hurriedly kissed Louis on the side of the head, pushed his way out from where he was trapped in the corner, and jogged out to the kitchen to make sure the chicken and potatoes didn't get burnt, shutting off the oven timer from wailing any longer. Dinner, fortunately was fine.

"Are you ok?" Harry asked him, abandoning portioning up the chicken in favour of comforting his boyfriend who still looked a little shell shocked as he sat down at the kitchen table with his head in hands, "You don't have to worry about me" he insisted, pressing kisses to the top of Louis' head, "I'm safe here. I'm not going to get hurt, especially with you here" he added feeling a little emotional as he realised what Louis had been prepared to do to protect him.

"I'm sorry" Louis murmured, numbly reaching up and giving him a huge hug, "I was thinking about stuff and I lost my head a bit. I won't let anyone hurt you."

He looked so fierce that it made Harry's head spin. This was the face of someone who would fight tooth and nail for him, not against him.

"I know!" Harry assured him, leaning in for a proper kiss, that Louis more than deserved, "My boyfriend's a force to be reckoned with you know! Now, eat your dinner!" he commanded his new boyfriend with a smirk pushing a plateful of roast under his nose.

It was so silly, but he stood there, feeling so happy when he realised how there was gravy splashed on the rim of the plate, and the potatoes were all different sizes and Louis just dug in, chewing tiredly, but happily, waving his knife around whilst he exclaimed how talented his boyfriend was, insisting that Harry sat down to his own plate, who couldn't help but wonder if everything he had planned was going to happen that night.

xxxx

"Just text him!"

"You text him!"

"It would be better coming from you!"

"He's not going to reply"

"How will you ever know if you don't?" Calvin groaned in exasperation to Stan, juggling with his
own phone, "We all fucking miss him. Just man up and apologise to him and everything will go back to normal."

"I didn't do anything wrong!" Stan squawked with indignation, "All I was doing for looking out for him when that deceiving little rat got its claws into our Lou..."

"Do rats have claws?" butted in Alberto, trying to lighten the heavy atmosphere that seemed to settle in the air whenever they met up these days, "I thought they had paws"

"I think you should shut the fuck up!" Stan glowered, "I thought you were both going to help me with this! We need to get Lou back! It's not the same without him!"

"What are we meant to do?" argued Calvin tiredly, "He's already found himself new little playmates, and I don't think he's looking to loose his new little lapdog anytime soon - the guy threw up on his back and he didn't even flinch. Since when would our Tommo let that happen?"

"So you're saying that we have to suck up to the kid if we want to hang out with our best friend?" Stan grumbled sounding and feeling childish, "We were here first. He should just go back to where ever he came from!"

"Just text him. Invite him to your birthday" Alberto suggested, "He won't have forgotten that, and he always comes out for it"

"What if he doesn't reply? He's not been out in weeks, too busy playing happy family's with lover boy and those little twerps he adores so much."

"Maybe you shouldn't open with that" Alberto pointed out helpfully, "And they're not twerps. Niall and Olly are a good craic, and Nick can be a good laugh when he wants. It's just Liam...er...Harry, you hate"

Stan ignored both him and Calvin and concentrated on composing a text to his best mate. Hoping he would be able to build some kind of bridge and get back things back to normal. He never realised how much he had missed Louis - until he was gone.

xxxx

"Hey Lou. I'm so sorry about what happened concerning Harry. I miss you so much bro, all of us do, and we are so sorry about how everything has turned out, and we really want to make it up to you both. Come out with us on Saturday? Harry is more than welcome to join us obviously. Please come, won't be my birthday without you. Stan (Al and Cal) xx"

Harry read the text out loud to Louis who sighed deeply and pocketed his phone, before snuggling back into his boyfriends arms and continuing to dot kisses across his jaw.

Harry closed his eyes, enjoying the sensation of being doted upon by his boyfriend, but knowing that it was partly due to him wanting to avoid talking about, or replying to Stan's text - which was obviously bothering him, enough to get Harry to read the text to him when he saw Stan's name flash up, instead of reading it himself.

"Do you want to go?" Harry murmured, ending his question with a slight hiss, as Louis began to suck on a sensitive spot beneath his ear, "We can go, or you can go on your own? Whatever you want."
"Want to be with you" Louis breathed into his skin, "I'm not that guy anymore. We have nothing in common now. They made their point of view quite clear at Niall's"

"But they're your friends," Harry pointed out, running his fingers up and down Louis' sides, nimbly getting underneath the boys t-shirt to get to his smooth warm skin, "They were just looking out for you, I'm sure they think they were doing the right thing at the time"

Louis sat up a little and glared, "They were horrible to you!" he reminded Harry, "Stan was the worst of them speaking to you like that! I trusted you, he should have too!"

"Do you want to text him back and say no?" Harry asked, slipping his hand into Louis' shorts to get his phone.

But Louis shook his head.

"He ignored me, I can ignore him" he argued somewhat childishly, and went back to lovingly lavishing attention on Harry's neck, "I don't care what he thinks of me!"

But there was a slight quiver in his voice that made Harry think differently, amplified even more when Louis suddenly developed a headache, stuck his face into Harry's soft tummy, and wouldn't move for the rest of the evening, falling into a seemingly troubled sleep, clinging onto Harry tightly, whimpering under his breath, obviously troubled by everything that Harry had offloaded from his shoulders, and onto Louis'.

When they had been kissing on the settee, before dinner, and Louis had gotten a little rough with him, Harry had instantly felt scared, terrified that now he had put a label on himself and Louis, that he had been turned into a possession once more, but after his boyfriend had freaked out over the sound of the oven timer going off, Harry realised quickly that 'protective Louis' was gearing up for a fight with his unknown enemy, and it was all Harry could do to distract him - he didn't want Louis to feel extra stress because of him.

The message from Stan, had obviously tipped him over the edge. Feeling as though it was all his fault, Harry carefully extracted Louis' phone from his pocket and re-read the message from Stan.

He didn't want to interfere, but he couldn't help but feel that it was his fault that Louis' friendship with the Musketeers had taken such a bad turn, and as much fun they both had with Niall, Nick and Olly, sometimes Louis seemed to be lost in thought or would stop himself from telling story because it centred around a fun time he'd had with his old friends.

Harry and his secrets had ruined that. He didn't take long to think it over.

Meet for a drink tomorrow? Just you and Louis? From Harry

The reply was instant.

Why isn't Louis asking me?

Do you want to put this behind you or not?

Of course! Will you be there?

No. I'll just get Louis there. Then I'll leave you both to it.

Why are you being nice? I was a shit to you.
I love Louis. This isn't about me, it's about you and him - and he misses you too.

Thanks. Rock Garden. 6:30pm

Harry quickly deleted the texts, then put the phone back into Louis' pocket, kissing his hair, smiling as Louis nuzzled his face into him once again. This would make Louis happy, he told himself as he dozed off to sleep, Louis had accepted his past, and now Harry had to reunite his beloved boyfriend with his.

Awaking in Harry's arms was the best way for Louis to wake up - he was so beautiful it instantly brought a smile to his face, even more so as he softly kissed his delicious looking pink lips, and felt his lad, sleepily and lazily respond.

"Good morning my gorgeous boyfriend!" Louis whispered brightly, straddling Harry, then laying down so they were chest to chest, nose to nose.

"Morning babe," Harry rasped, stretching himself, and keening from the relief of it, "How's your head?"

Louis looked slightly ashamed, "I'm so sorry about yesterday" he said, stroking Harry's cheek, "It sounds shit because it feels like I'm making it all about me, but it just made me feel so fucking helpless - that you were out there and all that shit was happening to you, and I couldn't do anything about it"

"It's not your fault" Harry crooned, yawning widely, then kissing him gently, "You didn't know me then. And it was sweet when you tried to protect me from the oven timer!" he smirked, earning him a small poke in the tummy.

"What are you going to do today?" Louis asked, looking at the clock and groaning when he saw he should be getting ready for work.

"Not sure," Harry dismissed quickly, ushering him off the settee, thinking of his plans for Louis that evening, "Come on sweet cheeks, you've got work. You go and get dressed, and I'll get your lunch."

"You really made me lunch?" Louis asked feeling his heart strings tug a little bit, "You don't have to do that for me you know, I love that you did, but you don't have to."

"And that's why I do it" Harry grinned at him, tapping Louis on his bottom to get him to move, "Because you don't expect it and I love looking after you."

"I want to stay here and make sure you're safe though" Louis complained, beginning to feel anxious once again.

"I'll be fine" Harry insisted, "You'll see when you get home"

xxxx

At half past five Louis finally left school, homework that needed to be marked in a large file under his arm, whistling as he walked back to his car, to see the heavenly sight of Harry leaning against it.

"What are you doing here?" he beamed at his gorgeous boyfriend, "Not that I'm complaining!" his face fell slightly, "Did we have plans?"
"Well," now Harry looked shifty, "You have plans, I...er...don't get mad ok? I only did it because I felt massively guilty, and I promise I had the best of intentions..."

Louis' eyes narrowed suspiciously. Harry did indeed look incredibly guilty, and sheepish, and also quite adorable like a small child who had gotten caught sneaking sweets out of the kitchen!

"Harry?" he asked semi sternly, "What did you do?"

Harry rubbed his nose, looking down at his big feet, which were scratching at the ground, scuffing his boots.

"Well, you know Stan text you?"

"Yes...."

"I kinda text him back, as me!" he hurried to add, as though it would make everything better, "And said you would meet him for a drink tonight, put all of this behind you and all that. I know you miss him Lou, and he misses you, and it's all my fault, and I'm sorry, but it felt like the best idea at the time! I want you to be happy Louis! And he's your best friend! And I love you! And please can you say something?"

Louis was trying so hard to control his face from showing the irritation he was feeling inside. Of course Harry had felt guilty. Of course he only had good intentions. But now he had to do something about it, and to be honest, he wasn't ready to see Stan. It still felt so raw to him, and painful that he had considered the Musketeers to be such good people, and it had turned out that they weren't.

"Harry, I know what you were trying to do, but...fuck Curly, I don't know," he looked pained, "I don't want to be friends with people who don't treat you right."

"Just meet him tonight and hear him out" Harry urged, "What if he says sorry and really means it. Then you can go back to how you used to be. Please Louis!" he wheedled, "For me?"

"Fine. Only for you" Louis grumbled, getting into his car and buckling his seat belt "Where are you going to be whilst I'm suffering through this? I'm guessing you aren't going to stay for the event itself"

"I'm going to come and say hello so it looks polite" Harry assured him, placing his flat palm on Louis' thigh and giving it a little squeeze, "Then I'll go and get a coffee or something nearby."

Louis nodded, not at all happy with this situation, and wishing he was going home with Harry to a good meal and a hot bath - but this was what Harry wanted, and for Harry he would move oceans to make him happy.

When they got to the bar, Stan was already there, sitting at the bar on his own, seemingly nursing a pint in front of him.

"Be nice" Harry whispered, his curls tickling Louis' cheek, sensing his boys hostility already, "Be friendly. Remember the good times."

Louis gave him a withering look, taking a hesitant step forward when Harry gave him a little nudge in Stan's direction.

Stan looked up as the pair approached, looking a lot shyer and apprehensive than Louis had ever seen him look before.
"Hey" Stan greeted nervously, wiping his hands on the legs of his trousers before offering his hand to Harry, "Thanks for coming Lou, and er...thanks for making him come Harry. Under the circumstances it was pretty decent of you."

Louis made a small sarcastic noise as he watched Harry smile politely and shake the offered hand. Harry nudged him.

"I'm really sorry Harry," Stan emphasised, "I was a total twat for how I treated you. I...er...I really hope that we can put this behind us, and move on."

Harry smiled at him warmly, "All forgotten," he assured the lad, who he still marginally disliked, but was prepared to put up with for Louis' sake, he gave Louis' shoulder a squeeze, "I'll be in that little place across the road," he promised, "Take as long as you need," he indicated to the book he was holding, "I've got plenty to occupy me."

He turned to leave, only stopping momentarily for Louis to grab at him and give him a proper kiss goodbye.

"Be nice and friendly," Harry reminded him win a low whisper, "Remember the good times babe."

Louis grumbled incoherently, but he gave Harry a squeeze, wishing he was going with Harry to the coffee shop, and reluctantly turned back to his former best friend who was waiting anxiously.

"I got you a pint," Stan said when he sat down on the adjacent bar stool, "How are you?"

"Thanks" Louis muttered and took a sip. He would need a good few of these to put him in a good mood, "I'm bloody brilliant by the way"

"Harry looks well," Stan offered, "You both look happy"

"We are" Louis replied shortly, not really bothering to get into conversation.

Stan sighed, setting down his pint.

"Lou, I'm sorry" he insisted, "I swear I was just trying to look out for you. I know he had his reasons now, but Harry was really shifty when he turned up, and I admit I didn't trust him, and I admit I handled it in the wrong way. But I really feel bad, I really miss you mate!"

"Have you any idea how much you upset him?" Louis snarled at him, "How fucking vulnerable you made him feel? I know every fucking thing that he's endured, and I don't know what to do with it! He's living in fucking fear every fucking day, and you with your bullshit put so much extra stress on him, and me!"

"I'm sorry!" Stan insisted desperately, "I was a fucking insensitive twat, and I wish I could take it back and do things differently. Honestly Lou, I really regret it! Please let me make it up to you both."

"How?" Louis asked sarcastically, "How could you possibly make it up to us?"

"Any way you want" Stan promised, "Whatever it takes"

Louis eyed him cautiously, but he knew Stan well enough to know he was being genuine.

"It's not going to happen overnight" he warned, "You are lucky Harry set this up to be honest"

"I know" Stan agreed sadly, "But I really want to try."
"You can start by getting me another drink then" Louis stated shortly, but a little less frosty.

The conversation was difficult to pick up, things were definitely strained between the two of them, but Harry wanted Louis to give this a go, and for that reason alone he would.

But as the minutes ticked by, Louis could feel his inner self warming to the lad he really missed, asking after Alberto and Calvin, and stating his surprise that they had just abandoned him, not acting like the best mates he thought they were.

The bar began to fill up as people's working days ended, people sitting close to them, making them have to raise their voices in order to hear each other properly over other people's chatter.

Toptics of conversation chopped and changed frequently, Louis not wanting to dwell on subjects where he could get easily irritated.

"You're still coming on holiday with us next month right?" Stan asked, taking a gulp of his third pint, referring to the lads holiday himself, Alberto, Calvin and Louis had planned to go on, one they had booked and paid for about three months previously.

"No," Louis shook his head, "Harry can't come, therefore I'm not going."

Stan couldn't help himself. He wanted to try, but he was sick to death of hearing all about Harry! And now he was ruining Louis' holiday, preventing him from spending time with his real friends again?

"For fucks sake Lou! It's only for a fucking week!" he snapped, "Surely he can do without you for one week!"

Louis stared at him open mouthed.

"Are you joking?" he asked incredulously, "There is no way I'm going to go without him. I'm not leaving him on his own! He needs me here! I need to be here with him!"

"He's not a fucking child!" Stan growled, loosing his temper, "Can't you see what he's doing? He wants to keep you all to himself! He hates us and probably spun you a little sob story to keep you interested in him!"

"You," Louis shoved his stool away from the bar, so suddenly and with so much force, he knocked the person next to him off his stool and onto the ground, "Sorry mate" he muttered, offering the lad a hand and helping him up, before turning upon Stan once more.

"You need to get your priorities in order!" he snapped at Stan, "This," and he indicated to them both, "Is never going to work if you cannot accept that Harry is my number one priority!"

And with that he turned on his heel, stalking out of the main door, almost running across the street to where Harry would be waiting for him, needing his cool, soothing touch as much as he always needed a glass of milk after eating something that was too spicy. He was so angry that he had given Stan another chance and he blew it almost instantly.

Back in the bar, Stan thumped his fist down upon the bar top, furious at himself for screwing up so quickly. He repeated the action three times, before a hand shot out of nowhere and grabbed his wrist.
Looking up, Stan recognised the lad as the same one that Louis had knocked off his stool minutes before.

"You're gonna hurt yourself" he murmured, "Boyfriend trouble?" he quirked an eyebrow at Stan who shook his head, irritated at the stranger for interrupting his self depreciating thoughts.

"My mates boyfriend is a dick!" he suddenly snapped, "He's taken my best mate away from me! Apparently he's too fragile and damaged for my mate to leave him behind and come on holiday with us!"

The lad signalled to the bar tender.

"Another pint for me mate" he ordered, "And for you?" He asked Stan politely.

"Same" Stan smiled, feeling instantly calmer, lulled by the strangers gentle voice, "Thanks."

"No worries, you look like you could use another drink."

"I'm Stan by the way," Stan held out his hand, smiling shyly.

The lad pushed a fresh pint in front of him, then smiled warmly, taking Stan's hand to shake.

"Nice to meet you Stan," Zayn Malik nodded, "I'm Rylan."
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Ok, so for this chapter we're going to rewind and see how things worked out for Zayn with his point of view. Hope it makes sense, it may take a couple of chapters to bring the two story lines together.

Ps thank you for all your lovely and funny comments, and just commenting in general, and leaving kudos. I won't lie, they are sometimes the best part of my day!
Hope you like this one too!

If you ever want to ask anything about the story, I'm on Twitter @sharemysunshine :)

"Are you sure you don't want to stay at mine?" Matt Cardle asked, hovering at the foot of the steps to the Malik's house with a decidedly pale looking Zayn, "I can't imagine what you're feeling right now." he added sympathetically, wishing there was something he could do that was useful, and bring this man's husband back.

Zayn shook his head, still very much in shock.

"Well, I'm right next door. If you need anything just come on over." Matt emphasised, "Anything at all."

Zayn nodded numbly, putting a shaky hand on the rail and starting to climb the steps to their...his home.

"Can you take me out on the boat tomorrow?" he asked suddenly, "I have to find him."

Matt knew it would be hopeless. If Harry was still in the water, without his life jacket and being unable to swim - well...he wouldn't be alive. But he agreed instantly. It really was the least he could do under the circumstances.

Zayn nodded his thanks. Then turned abruptly, walking quickly to his house, shutting the door swiftly behind him, leaving Matt behind him, his own heart aching for Zayn and his beloved husband that had been so cruelly snatched away.

The first thing that struck Zayn when he had closed the door behind him, shutting out the noise of the wind and the sea, was how silent and still it was.

Was it possible to see silence?

It felt like it was now. Thick, suffocating silence swirling around him like a smog of smoke, compressing him from all angles.

There was no movement, no sound of Harry quietly shuffling from room to room, asking him quietly
if he was hungry, or taking his coat to hang up. Zayn had no reason to even open his mouth to speak - there was no one to talk to.

Frozen with cold, his mind numb from the nights events, Zayn moved slowly into the living room, his footsteps sounding so loud, echoing around the windowed walls. He stopped suddenly, the rubber soles of his shoes squeaking obnoxiously on the wooden floor, his dark brown eyes fully fixated on the ornament that Harry had been holding only hours beforehand.

Harry. His sweet, loyal, adorable Harry. Frowning slightly, Zayn reached out with trembling fingers, touching the ornament in the exact same way as Harry had, smoothing his fingers over the smooth porcelain.

Something dark was brewing in the depths of his mind, staring down at the object he was holding, lip curling, eyes straining. Rage. Pure, undiluted rage. Harry had been stolen from him. The sea had dragged his slight, terrified body from the boat and swallowed him whole! The sea had stolen his husband from him! How cruel and callous could the world be? To pray on his boy? To target someone in its clutches who couldn't swim! Harry didn't stand a chance against the treacherous tide!

Deep inside his mind, Zayn began to throw the blame around.

It was Matt's fault!

Matt should have known about the weather! Matt's boat shouldn't have lost control of the sail!

The life jacket he had provided had been made too poorly - it had come off for fucks sake! Maybe if it had been properly made then it would have stayed on Harry and kept him buoyant until either himself or Matt had spotted him struggling against the waves!

It was Harry's fault! If he hadn't been so traumatised by the death of his dad and his sister at sea, then maybe he would have learnt how to swim! Zayn knew he would have panicked as soon as he hit the water, probably yelled out for him, and swallowed too much water! If Harry had only kept his head, grabbed hold of the boat, held on until Zayn could get to him!

Anger and disgust flashing with the white heat of a bolt of lightening, Zayn glared angrily outside to the beach and the inky black sea beyond.

It was the sea's fault! It had seen his beautiful, delicate husband and decided to claim him for itself - and Zayn wanted him back! The sea didn't get to just take what it wanted! Harry belonged to Zayn! Harry was his!

His fingers clenched around Harry's ornament, thinking of how much he wanted to storm into the waves and destroy them! But how could he do that? Water couldn't be ripped into shreds! Water couldn't be smashed to pieces with a punch or a kick! Water couldn't be harmed in any way - unlike his husband.

With the feelings running riot in his veins, Zayn snatched up the ornament he was holding, lifting it up and drawing it back to throw at Harry's killer, but as he looked through the glass, for a split second he faltered, what little colour he had remaining in his face, instantly draining. Then he snarled, a growl erupting from the base of his throat, as he came face to face with the culprit of Harry's untimely demise.

Himself.

The only reason Harry had been on the boat at all, was because he had insisted that they went. He knew Harry couldn't swim, he knew that Harry didn't want to go - not really - but he had gone
because Harry was so selfless, always doing whatever he could to stay by Zayn's side, because Harry had loved Zayn so much - until his love for Zayn had actually killed him.

Zayn swung his arm back, and threw the ornament with all his might at his reflection, not able to stand the sight of himself a moment longer.

The glass smashed, the wind howled hauntingly through the gaping hole, Zayn stood motionless, staring at the shattered porcelain on the balcony outside that belonged to someone who was no longer alive to see it broken.

Zayn hadn't been able to stay in the house and sleep. No matter where he went within the walls, Zayn felt Harry everywhere. His scent clung to the fabrics of the curtains, bed linen and the cushions on the armchairs. He could see him in everything around him, reflections in windows, glasses, mirrors, never directly, but as a shadow standing slightly behind him in his peripheral vision. They made him jump every time, spinning around on the spot, hoping every time that a miracle had happened and his princess had returned to him.

But deep down Zayn knew that Harry would never return.

Harry would never cook in their kitchen again. He would never make their bed after it had been slept in. He would never collect fresh clams in the morning, or be at the door when Zayn returned from work. Zayn was alone. A widower. And it was all his own fault.

"I can't stay there" he announced minutes later after knocking on Matt's front door, which the doctor had instantly opened before he had finished banging on it - just like he had been waiting for him.

"You can stay here as long as you need" Matt assured him, saddened, but unsurprised by his sallow, waxy complexion, and gently taking him up to his spare room, where the bed had already been made, fresh towels already sat on a chair in the corner.

Zayn muttered his thanks. Matt gave his shoulder a small squeeze.

"I'll be next door. If you need anything, just shout."

Matt left the room, leaving Zayn to sink down on the edge of the bed, his head in his hands. He wouldn't be able to sleep tonight. Every time he closed his eyes, all he could see was his precious Harry. Zayn had always thought he looked like an angel with his beautiful silky curls, sweet cherub like face, and big green eyes - was that what he had become now? Was Harry looking down on him from above?

Maybe he should sleep. Maybe when he awoke the next day, it would have all been a dream, and he'd wake up to his husband laying beside him in their bed, and they could restart what turned out to be a horrific day and night. But as he closed his eyes, and he felt green ones focus on his shivering form on top of the bedsheets, Zayn knew that it was a miracle that was never going to happen.

For the next three days, Matt and Zayn combed the coastline. Scouring beaches, nearby coves, diving down at the place where they thought the accident had happened. Zayn badly wanted Harry's body back. So they could have a proper funeral. A good husband would make sure their spouse was properly taken care of, even after death - Harry had been so scared of the sea, it must have been
his own personal hell, to not just have it take his life, but be trapped in it, tossed around, eaten by creatures, corroded until what little remained of him was ground into dust, dissolving into the sand on the sea bed. Harry didn't deserve that.

But no body was found, and eventually, after five days of continuous searching, Matt finally convinced Zayn that it might be time to let go.

The funeral was a small affair.

Set atop a grassy space overlooking the Malik's beach house and the ocean. Somewhere where Harry and Zayn had walked, sat and made love when they had discovered Zayn's offer on the place had gone through.

It was a bittersweet memory for Zayn. The night had been warm and humid, and when Zayn closed his eyes he could remember so vividly how he had rolled his new husband onto his back, pushing into him almost as soon as he'd gotten rid of his shorts, and exposed his pretty little hole, that just looked mouthwatering surrounded by the pretty black lace of his crotchless lingerie. Zayn couldn't control himself long enough to even attempt to open Harry up, and he didn't have any lubricant. Besides, patience was not one of Zayn's strong points. He wanted his husband, and he wanted him now!

However, Harry was small, and although he loved a tight entrance as much as the next man, Zayn was not fond of either having his dick strangled or hearing the whimpers of pain from the boy struggling below him - both of which were putting him off the chase for his orgasm! It was from that night that Zayn had insisted that Harry wore a butt plug on a regular basis, to make sure he was semi prepared whenever Zayn was in the mood - when you were in a moment of lust and need, there is no time for something as time consuming as preparation.

It occurred to Zayn, as he stood almost on the same spot, listening to the minister read from the bible, that as much as he could remember the moment from his point of view, he couldn't really remember much about Harry. He remembered feeling powerful, in control, the heat coiling and exploding deep in his gut, each and every one of his muscles relaxing, and the sweet feeling of relief. But that was all. By his own memories account, it was almost as though Harry hadn't been there. He couldn't remember the taste of his skin, how his eyes had looked. Had Harry enjoyed it? Had he actually orgasmed? Zayn didn't have a clue!

He tried his best not to scoff at his own thoughts out loud, shoving them out of his mind. Of course had enjoyed it. He loved sex with Zayn. Harry loved to please his husband, and Zayn had been, so therefore Harry had loved it!

Hadn't he?

There hadn't been many people to invite to Harry's funeral. He didn't know many people. All his family were dead. So it was just a few of his colleagues from the library, and a few of his own friends from work who Harry had spent time with at functions Zayn's firm had held. In short, the turnout was sparse.

Harry hadn't needed anyone but Zayn in his life, which Zayn had made that quite clear to Harry on several occasions.

At first, Harry had answered back, disagreed, had the audacity to state that his husband should be able to trust him to have a few well chosen friends, and not be worried that he would be cheated on.
It wasn't Harry's fault. He was young, impressionable, too innocent to be trusted around others who would no doubt try and corrupt him.

It had taken a while, but after reminding his princess that he had promised in his wedding vows to obey Zayn, and after a few well practiced lessons, Harry had agreed that Zayn was right. Well, of course he was right, and the lessons were needed, after all, he only had Harry's best interests at heart. Harry had known that.

Hadn't he?

He was torn from his thoughts when the minister announced to those gathered that it was the part of the service where there would be tributes.

The first to the front was three ladies who Harry had worked with at the library.

To be honest, Zayn had barely met them, just brief glimpses of them whenever he went to collect Harry. It had been a surprise to him when the library staff had requested to say something at the funeral. They barely knew Harry. What could they possibly have to say?

"Harry didn't work many hours with us a week," the first lady started, wiping a tear from her cheek as she moved closer to the mic, "But he truly was the heart of our little library,"

Zayn's eyes narrowed in astonishment. That was a bit much wasn't it? It was fine to tell little white lies to make things sound better than they were, but that statement was a little dramatic and far fetched!

"Every morning he worked, he would always bring us all a cup of tea," she recounted, smiling wistfully at the memory, "We never asked him to, he just did it, because it was the small personal acts of kindness that meant the most to Harry."

It was almost as if the memory was just too much for her to take, no matter how small a detail. Choking back a sob, she wiped a her eyes, almost crumbling as another lady gently squeezed her arm in a comforting gesture.

"Harry loved the children who visited," she carried on, "And the children loved Harry! No matter what we had asked him to do, put books back to shelf, serve on the counter, as soon as a child came through the doors, Harry would completely forget what he was meant to be doing because he wanted to spend time with them. If Harry was ever missing from his post, we would always find him in the children's section, sitting cross legged on the floor with about five or six little ones surrounding him, reading aloud from his favourite books, and listening to them chatter about what they had been reading that week," her voice was failing her, huge glassy tears slipping down her cheeks, "He always said he wanted to have a family," she wept, and turned to Zayn, "I'm so sorry that it never happened for you both" she told him honestly, "He would have been an incredible father"

Zayn nodded numbly. He had never known this. Harry had wanted a family? Harry had been good with children? How had he never known? Harry had never said anything of the sort to him! Why hadn't he known?

_When did you ever ask him about his day?_ a little voice nagged at him from the back of his mind. _When did you ever ask him what he wanted?_
Unable to continue, the second lady replaced the first, a lot more composed, but still looked as though her heart was breaking.

"Harry was the sweetest boy, I have ever met" she started, a small smile on her lips, "I should say man, because he is...was too old to be considered a boy. But that's what he was to me. There was so much love inside him, so much kindness, such a big beautiful heart, with such a sweet, wide eyed innocence about him. I considered him a son." she indicated to the other women besides her, "We all did. He was our son, our boy. We knew he was going to go on and do amazing things in his life. He told me that he wanted to be a patron for a charity, like his own mother, who sadly passed away. He said he wanted to do something worthwhile, and help bring a little happiness into other people's lives, who weren't as fortunate as he was. I was so proud of him. He never thought of himself, all he did was think about the happiness of others, even if it was only whilst he was making someone something as simple as a cup of tea."

The lady turned towards the ocean, looking far into the horizon, her eyes blinking away unshed tears, "We are so proud of you Harry," she said loudly, but gently, "You will always be my son, and I will always love you. I'm so sorry you never got to have the dream that you so badly deserved."

She continued to stare out at the water for a little longer, then swallowed hard, and turned to Zayn.

"Harry loved you so much," she told him, looking right into his eyes, as intensely as if she was looking right into his soul, "He was so proud of you being his husband," she told him with a watery smile, "he rarely called you by your first name, he always referred to you as 'my husband'. You could tell that he loved being married to you, your future was all he could talk about. 'One day my husband and I are going to adopt, and get a little place in the countryside to live' he told me once, 'we'll have a huge garden for the children to play in, a few chickens, and a vegetable patch so we can really live off the land. It's going to be perfect. My husband, our children and I are going to be so happy!"

Zayn had no idea what expression he should be wearing on his face. He hated the countryside, and had always been a city boy at heart. Apart from their beach house - which was a stone throw away from a city - that, was as close to the wilderness as he would ever be willing to go! Why would Harry tell this woman such a pack of lies! And kids? There was no way Zayn wanted kids! He had stated this so many times! Had Harry been insane? Why had he been planning a future in his head that would never happen?

_{He didn't say your name though did he? a nasty little voice hissed inside his head, Who says he was planning this perfect little life with you? He did try to leave you once, maybe he wanted to leave you again?}_

Zayn screwed his face up, desperate to get the voices to stop, not realising that to the onlookers, it seemed as though he had been hit with a wave of emotion, and was trying to stop the tears from falling. A ripple of sympathetic murmurs from the few gathered reached his ears. Matt put his arm around his friend's shoulders. It was so unfair!

One by one, other mourners took control of the mic. Sharing Harry memories, most of which Zayn was left wondering if he was actually at the right funeral. They were describing a man who he wasn't sure he actually knew, let alone been married to. It disturbed him greatly. He hadn't considered it possible that anyone had been closer to Harry than he had. It was something that he had made sure of. Harry had belonged to him - how dare he spill the secrets in his heart to these peasants!

Whilst the others went off to the wake, being held at his own house, Zayn hung back. A large portrait of Harry was displayed on top of the small monument he had fixated as a memorial. It was a
beautiful picture, taken on the day of their wedding. His smile was so big, so bright, it almost hurt Zayn's eyes to look at it. It occurred to him suddenly, that he hadn't seen Harry smile like that in a while. Harry had been happy with him hadn't he?

The husband comment was deeply bothering him. His own little voice questioning Harry's motives, bothered him even more.

"Were you really going to leave me?" Zayn asked, stepping right up to the portrait and tracing his finger tip down Harry's cheek, and along his jawline, "Were you really planning your future with someone else?"

Harry's picture, of course, said nothing. He just smiled charmingly back at him, making Zayn feel slightly sick.

"Maybe it's a good job you're dead,' Zayn hissed with venom, "Because if you had tried to leave me, I would have fucking killed you before you even reached the door!"

Zayn snuck into his own house a couple of hours later, and very quickly wished he hadn't. The ladies from the library were still there, in fact they were the only ones still there, them and Matt, still sharing Harry stories.

"I just knew his house would be squeaky clean and tidy" one of them was saying, "He never talked about cleaning," she gave a little laugh, "But he must have been cleaning non stop! Every morning when he got to work, he always smelt of chemicals!" she laughed again, "Such a sweet boy," she smiled, "He gave the biggest and best hugs ever, but he always smelt of chlorine!"

Shaking his head, not wanting to be reminded further of how much he didn't know his husband, Zayn ducked right back out of the door he came from. He'd wait until they were gone before he set one step in there that night!

Zayn felt so confused. Questions were springing up all over the place, and he didn't understand where they were coming from, or why he was paying so much attention to his own nagging little voices - he'd barely ever experienced self doubt, but now that was all his subconscious was doing. His legs taking control of him, Zayn found himself being propelled onto the beach and down to the shore, where he took off his shoes, letting the cold water lap at his feet, covering them with sand as he started out into the darkening sky, his head full of thoughts of Harry, wishing he was there to answer all the questions floating around in his head - he couldn't answer any of them without him, so they would forever be unanswered.

By the time Zayn decided it was time to go back home, it was when it had gotten so dark that the little street lights that lined the path in front of their houses had clicked on and glowed brightly against the inky black.

As he'd ventured quite far down the beach on his little head clearing walk, Zayn took the nearest set of steps to the path, still bare foot, uncharacteristically dragging his feet. He would obviously be staying at Matt's as usual, just for tonight though. Tomorrow he would go back to London. His new apartment should be ready by now. Zayn didn't want to step in the doorway of another building that reminded him of Harry.

A sharp pain in his right foot made him yelp in pain, wildly hoping on his bare right foot, until he was fully balanced on it, gripping his left foot which was throbbing with discomfort by something that had gotten lodged into the sole. Swearing under his breath, he struggled to see in the partial
darkness, and hopped into the light of the nearest beam of light to get a better look.

It was a large shard of glass, thin and curved. Hissing from the pain, Zayn yanked it out, watching his red blood seep out of the wound, and looked around to see where it had come from, as he slipped his feet back into his shoes, to investigate, which only took a few seconds of observation. The bulbs from the lamp above where he had been walking had smashed, and obviously the glass had fallen onto the ground, embedding in his foot when he stepped on it. He'd have to call maintenance over that, stupid vandals, it couldn't have broken on its own! It also annoyed him, Zayn was very particular about order and symmetry, and this one lamp being broken, just threw off the whole line of lights. Even if he would be in London, and wouldn't be looking at the huge space of darkness it was the cause of, it would nag at him, just by knowing it was there - and out of all the things he wasn't able to change, or fix, this was one of them that he could.

Back in London, life on the surface for Zayn went back to normal almost instantly. He went to work and acted the same as he always had done. He had never really discussed his husband with his colleagues, so it wasn't unusual for him not to mention Harry now, because he hadn't then. He did receive a lot of sympathy though, his office looked like an extension of a florists the day he returned.

Inside however, he was struggling. It felt like he was having to learn to walk again. Only without Harry's constant presence, did Zayn realise exactly how much he had relied upon his husband for absolutely everything. Cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping, the list just went on and on. Zayn had never had to lift a finger before, and now everything was down to him because there was no alternative.

Two months after the accident, Zayn was a shadow of his former self. For one thing he was thinner through the lack of nutritious meals that Harry provided him with on a daily basis, preferring to go to sleep or to work hungry than to learn or spend time cooking something.

Sleep was also an issue. Whenever he closed his eyes, green ones would spring up out of the darkness, staring at him with judgement, haunting his dreams with their presence, and the thoughts that came with them. He just couldn't get over the words the women had said at Harry's funeral. Had he really been planning to leave Zayn the whole time? But now he would never know. Questions left unanswered, bothered Zayn very highly indeed.

It was just another day at the office. Zayn's mouth was clenched in a thin tight line as he tiredly skim read through the bulk of his emails, when his intercom buzzed.

"Mr Malik?" a female voice interrupted his thoughts, "You have a call."

"I told you to hold my calls." Zayn snapped. Why couldn't anyone just do what he asked them? He was grieving for fucks sake, didn't this woman have any sympathy for people going through a mourning period?

"I know," the voice stuttered a little, "But she says she knew your husband"

Zayn's eyes snapped away from the computer screen, suddenly very much awake. Zayn hadn't received any phone calls about Harry's passing. Everyone who had known him had either sent cards and flowers, because they didn't know him very well, or worked with him. As far as he was aware, everyone who had proper contact with his husband had already been in touch. This was interesting.
"Put her through,"

There was a click as the call was transferred.

"Hello?" Zayn asked into the air, putting the call on loud speaker so he could continue on his computer if need be.

"Hello, Mr Malik? My name is Lou Teasdale."

"Yes?" asked Zayn, searching in his memory for any trace of hearing this name before. He had no recollection so far.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you," Lou continued, "I just heard about Harry, and I wanted to call and tell you how much we'll miss him"

"Thank you" Zayn murmured, no matter how little he knew about this woman, or how she had known his husband, it was a nice message to receive, "How did you know him?"

"From the local sports and leisure centre" Lou answered automatically.

Zayn scoffed, but tried to disguise it, "No, you must be speaking of someone else. My husband has never been to a sports and leisure centre. He had no interest."

He stood up, needing to stretch his legs, he wondered if he could just hang up the phone? This woman obviously had his Harry mixed up with someone else. It was a very common name after all. Maybe they had misremembered his surname or something.

"No. No, we took swimming there Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 8am"

"Look there is obviously some mistake" Zayn was getting irritated, prowling around his desk, "My husband drowned. He...he couldn't swim."

"Well at first he couldn't" Lou said, sounding sad, "But he became a good swimmer, in a relatively short time"

"I'm sure you have the wrong man" Zayn rubbed at his face, why wasn't she listening to him. She obviously had the wrong Harry!

"This is odd" Lou mused aloud, "Mr Malik, your husband studied gymnastics, didn't he?"

Zayn let out a huff, "No, my husband never studied gymnastics" he scoffed. Now would she clear off and go and cause someone else grief?

"That's so strange" Lou mused again, "He told us that's how he got all those terrible bruises"

It felt as though the walls were shrinking in on him. Zayn's eyes opened wider in alarm, spinning around on the spot, as a wave of nausea threatened to send him fainting to the floor.

"Mr Malik, I don't understand it. I'm sorry if I bothered you. This is just so confuse."

Her irritating whine was cut off abruptly, Zayn wrenching the phone out of the wall by it's cord and throwing it at the nearest wall. There was something brewing in his gut, something was clawing at his memory, screaming a word in his ear that he had heard someone say recently about Harry.
It had been the lady from the library.

_He always smelt of chlorine!_

Feeling completely out of control and on the brink of an anxiety fuelled break down, Zayn headed straight for his car. He told no one where he was going, and set off straight away. Heading straight back to their beach house as fast as the speed limit would allow him to go.

The whole house had been cleaned in his absence by the professionals he had sent in, sheeting all the furniture to protect it until Zayn had decided what to do with the place. It was also where he had sent every single personal item Harry owned. He hadn't planned on setting foot in the place again, so really it was the best place for Harry's possessions, including clothes to be stored, somewhere where he wouldn't have to see them.

As soon as he got into the front door, he made a beeline up to their old bedroom, and took down a large box from the wardrobe, which read "Harry's Personal Records". He wasn't sure what he was looking for, but he was getting increasingly certain that Harry had been hiding something from him. There had to be a trace of it somewhere. No one could be that careful! If he really had been taking swimming lessons behind Zayn's back, then what else had he been up to? What else had he been hiding?

There was nothing in the file. Zayn read every word of it, throwing the papers haphazardly all over the room, his anger only increasing as he continued to find anything out of the ordinary. Giving up on the paper work, he began to rummage through the Harry's drawers and cupboards. Was there any jewellery in his box that he didn't recognise, any clothes he hadn't chosen for him? The possibilities were endless, and still Zayn found nothing that he didn't recognise or find suspicious.

Almost tearing his hair out from frustration, Zayn took his rampage all over the house, leaving a mess of debris in his wake. There had to be something here! Where was it? His books! Harry's fucking books! Had he written something inside one of them? Hidden bit of paper between the pages?

Zayn darted to the cupboard under the stairs, switching on the light and falling to his knees in front of the small book case, his eyes shifting from left to right, wondering where to start. But before his outstretched hand plucked out the first book, something stopped him.

Already, something looked a miss. Something was wrong. Some of the books were upside down. Zayn frowned. This wasn't what he had been searching for, but this was unacceptable behaviour. He had set Harry rules. All books had to be in alphabetical order by the author's surname and kept tidy at all times.

This was no tidy! This was not organised!

And neither was that scuff mark on the wall next to the shelving unit! How long had that been here? Zayn had patrolled this little space regularly, wanting Harry to know, that just because he had no interest in using the room himself, didn't mean that Harry could slack off his duties and use it as a little space to create mess! How on Earth had he missed that? What a weird place for a scuff mark though. It seemed to go behind the book case itself.

Was he finally on to something? Was this Harry's hiding place? Zayn gripped the shelving unit with both hands, yanking it forward, only confirming his own suspicions as a good quantity of the books fell off straight away and onto the floor. Both feeling hungry for information, mixed with a good proportion of fury at the thought that his husband had actually managed to keep important details of
his life hidden from him, Zayn shoved them to the side, almost throwing himself into the small gap hidden behind the unit.

There was nothing! Absolutely nothing! Not a single piece of paper, not a scrap of clothing. He had expected to find swimming shorts, a locker key, something! Or had there been something that had been removed? That scuff mark hadn't gotten there on its own! Maybe he had to look further? Maybe there was something still hidden out of sight? Taking his phone out of his pocket, he turned on the torch application, shining it right under the stairs, falling onto his stomach and scrabbling, searching for anything that might lead him to some more clues over the secrets Harry had once held before he died.

At first he thought his efforts had been in vain. But then the light from his phone glinted on something right at the back, right underneath the bottom stair. What was that? A coin? A key? Whatever it was, Zayn's inner anxiety was snarling to find out what it was!

Stretching as far as he could, face flat against the floor, Zayn strained until he felt his fingers brush against something cool, that chinked when he moved it. Then he grabbed it, shuffling backwards, bringing whatever it was with him, then holding it up to the light.

It was a ring. Platinum. Engraved. Lived on Harry's forth finger on his left hand ever since Zayn had eased it on as they said their vows. Harry had never taken it off, not since the one time Zayn had found it next to the sink, which had resulted in Harry accidentally getting his fingers slammed in the door! That ring was a symbol of their devotion and exclusivity to each other - Harry had to wear it!

But he did wear it. The all too familiar little voice whispered into his ear, as his eyes glazed over staring at the ring he held in his hand, He never took it off. You made sure he didn't. How did it get here? He was wearing it on the boat, you made a point of showing it to Matt, to warn him off. Harry had his ring on there. How did it get here?

Was he going into shock? Still clutching Harry's wedding ring in the palm of his hand, Zayn struggled to his feet, slowly making his way to the front door, feeling sick and dizzy, all the weird little things adding up in his mind piece by piece, standing on the top of his steps, first analysing the path in front of him, then looking out to sea, searching for the red light which sat on top of the buoy.

It was almost perfectly in line with the (still) broken lamp outside his house.

Legs no longer feeling that they belonged to him, Zayn slid down the wall, staring out to sea, little air seeming to enter his lungs, making him hot and light headed.

They never found a body.

Harry had leant to swim.

Harry hadn't drowned at sea.

He had swam ashore.

He had collected something from behind that bookcase, scuffing the wall in the process, messing up the order of the books, and fled, leaving his wedding ring behind him, in a place he never thought would be found.

He was alive.

Harry was alive...
So, I have lived and breathed this chapter since I uploaded the last one - at one point falling asleep on my laptop attempting to edit it!
It's pretty hefty, I'm pretty nervous, I hope it's ok xx

Zayn balled his hands into fists, clenching them so hard his blunt nails almost punctured the skin of his palms.

Harry was a devious, disobedient, cheating, piece of shit!

Did he really think that Zayn wouldn't figure it out? Did he really think he would be able to get away with this?

How dare Harry put Zayn through this hell!

Zayn had been doubting their entire relationship! Doubting his ability as a good husband! Doubting his kindness of a person!

It was clear now! The only mistake he had made was trusting the innocent little face that had managed to wrap him and his better judgement around it's sick and twisted little finger!

How long had he been planning this? How many other lies had he told? Had he met someone else and run off with them? Had someone promised Harry the world? Made him think that they could give him more than Zayn?

Zayn was Harry's family! His only family! And nothing was more important to Harry than family!

Especially his mother....

Harry had thought the world of his mother, and been so upset when she had passed away, he hadn't even whined or complained whilst Zayn taught him what happened to little boys who ran away from their home without telling anyone. He had been so broken and disoriented with grief that he had just let it happen - until Zayn had convinced him to tell exactly where he had been, and why he had gone.

A place where Harry had once been on his own, without him knowing.

Had something happened there?

Had he met someone else there whilst he was grieving over his mother?

Had someone comforted him? Taken advantage of him? Made him cheat? Was that why he had been so compliant with Zayn when he returned home? Had he been feeling guilty?

Maybe he should follow Harry's footsteps? Maybe Harry's mother's residential home would hold more clues?

Zayn didn't linger any further, certain he had found every secret the beach house had hidden.
Grabbing his coat, he left immediately.

Clearly he had a lot of ground to cover before he discovered the whole truth - and tracked the little rat down!

The manager of the residential home "Tall Oaks", in Holmes Chapel in Cheshire had been most accommodating, making it her business to see him immediately, inviting him into her cosy office for a chat over a cup of tea.

"Harry spoke so highly of you, the quality of care," Zayn smiled warmly at Mrs Caroline Flack, hiding from view his actual emotions - snarls, growls, demands for information. There was no point in being rude or nasty. He wouldn't get anything out of her that way, "Harry's mother was so happy here."

"Well, it's always nice to hear that," Caroline smiled back, "We enjoyed having her with us."

"Harry's passing was so sudden, so shocking," Zayn recounted, "I tried to talk to as many of his family and friends as I could find. Then I thought maybe there were people close to him...that I never knew. Perhaps they visited his mother here."

Caroline smiled again with encouragement. This poor man looked and sounded so nervous, so heartbroken over the loss of his husband.

"I was hoping you might remember, or hold records?" he eventually asked, to which Caroline shook her head in regret.

"I'm afraid we don't keep records on visitors" she took a sip from her cup, and placed it down on the table, "And you came all this way, just...?"

"Well no," Zayn interrupted, "I thought Harry might want to be laid to rest here,"

This lady didn't need to know that Harry's body had never been found.

"In whatever place his mother was buried"

A frown of understanding dawned on Caroline's face, "So his mother's passed on as well? I have to admit I'm surprised, she was so young."

Zayn's forehead creased with shock, leaning forwards in his chair, clutching onto the armrests.

"Eight months ago, his mother died here" he stated, wondering if the woman was half mad, "In your care!"

Caroline shook her head slowly, "Eight months ago, your husband removed his mother from this institution. She was handicapped, as you know, but otherwise in very good spirits and health. Mr Malik simply showed up, paid the bill, and collected his mother."

The large vein in the side of Zayn's temple throbbed dangerously, blood rushing to his cheeks at this unexpected revelation.

"Did he say where he was taking her?" he demanded, almost standing up he was leaning so far forwards.

Caroline eyed him curiously, "Well, home, of course. To live with you."
The whites of Zayn's eyes became more apparent, as he sat, rigid, a muscle beginning to spasm in his right cheek, affected his left eye, as he stared unblinkingly at Caroline, who, very confused, stared right back.

"And where was she last seen?"

"In a residential home in Cheshire" Zayn stalked around the unfamiliar office, "Holmes Chapel" he elaborated, turning to face the young, brown eyed man sat behind his desk, animatedly taking notes on what Zayn was telling him.

"So you tried there?" Liam Payne asked rubbing at the scruff on his chin with his finger tips.

"Eight months ago she was removed" Zayn told him, striding up to the desk and sitting in the chair opposite, "Taken elsewhere. I have no idea where though. I would have thought up north, but not so far that it would be a long trip, probably by rail"

Liam reviewed the notes in his book.

"I can put three men on it. But it'll cost" he told Zayn uncomfortably.

For Liam, discussing payment was the worst part of his job. The people who came to him, requesting him to track someone down, were usually the victim of a cheating partner, or a missing person, who more often than not, turn out to be dead.

Liam ran a successful agency, one that he had built up over the years and was very proud of. But he still felt guilty every time he made financial gain from someone's misfortune. When a person was of a suspicious, anxious and worried state of mind, they would pay through the nose just to get the information they urgently desired - even if they couldn't afford it. The man in front of him, at a first glance, was obviously no exception.

"Good" was Zayn's surprisingly cool and collected reply, nodding assertively, "I want this taken very seriously. And if she's found, a £10,000 bonus, to the man who does it. In cash." he leant forward on the desk, meeting Liam's soft brown eyes, with his own hard, flashing ones, "And another ten for you. For making sure that the best people were working on it."

"You don't have to...." Liam started to say, feeling uncomfortable at the level of urgency in the mans eyes, "Just the standard rate would be sufficient,"

"A standard rate would promote a standard job," Zayn pressed, leaning so close to Liam, that he could feel his hot breath on his nose, "There is nothing standard about this task, which I will award you greatly. As soon as I get the results I am after. However for now," Zayn reached into his bag and brought out a bundle of brand new bank notes, bound in stacks of £500 in twenties, "Here is the standard rate you require."

"Thank you" Liam stuttered a little, eyeing the vast amount of money now sat on his desk, and wondering exactly what he was dealing with here, holding out his hand to seal the deal, "I'll get my five best men on it straight away"

"I thought you said three," Zayn questioned suspiciously, grasping Liam's hand in a tight handshake.

"Want to make sure it's done to your satisfaction. We'll get you your results Mr Clarke, as soon as
"Good" Zayn fixated shrewd eyes upon Liam's. They both shared a similar shade of iris, but whilst Zayn's were calculating and slightly cold, the other's held the liquid softness of a new born puppy.

Saying nothing, Zayn nodded curtly, then strode towards the door, exited as swiftly as he had entered, with no doubt that he was leaving Liam to immediately start the process of searching the UK for his late husbands missing mother.

The speed, professionalism and quality of Liam Payne's business was proved just a short twenty-three days later, when Zayn received a phone call, from Liam himself, with an address:

Fairview Residential Home, Wishings Road, Doncaster.

Zayn drove straight there, chain smoking out of the car window. Was it really Anne? Had Harry really managed to mastermind this act of deception, not only thinking it up, but pulling it off right under Zayn's over protective, controlling nose?

Anne was sat in the summer house in the front garden, wanting to get some fresh air and not be cooped up in the house for another wet and windy day. Fully equipped with her knitting, she sang softly to herself as she worked on another baby blanket, listening to the pitter patter of rain drops against the windows and roof.

Anne had no idea that she was being watched, or that the man watching her, was sneaking closer and closer.

"For goodness sake", Anne muttered to herself in annoyance as she heard her wool pick go clattering to the ground, setting her knitting in her lap, and holding onto both needles tightly, as she leaned over, feeling over the concrete for the item she'd dropped.

Zayn watched, anger and hatred etched all over his face, as her hand got quite close to landing on his shoe as she reached for the metal stick. Anne was definitely blind. He was stood barely a foot away from her and she didn't have a clue. He was also close enough to tell, that this was indeed Harry's mother. Very much alive - when he had believed for six months she had been dead. Finding it at last, Anne straightened up, a content smile playing on her lips as she continued humming and knitting.

Zayn stood perfectly still. Hardly daring to breathe, Reeling on the inside, furious from the betrayal of his sick, twisted, sad excuse for a husband. How dare he try and play Zayn for a fool like this! How dare he humiliate him! How many times had Anne and Harry laughed about his misfortune? Joked about how stupid and brainless he was not to realise sooner what Harry had done!

His fingers clenched and relaxed at his sides. Anne of course could have been dead, he could kill her right now! That would send the right message to his darling "dead" husband! But now was not the time, there was still more to find out before he did anything drastic.
The exact whereabouts of his husband for a start. But he needed to plan this carefully. He couldn’t just barge in and cause havoc. Anne was very fortunate that he had a bigger picture in mind. How he wished he could see inside her mind, know everything that she did.

Inching away from Anne, as quickly and quietly as possible, thankful for a break in the rain, Zayn turned his attention to the rest of the site, eyes flickering around him, taking in absolutely everything he saw in case he needed it in the future.

The building itself was large and sprawling, and looked like there was a fair bit of land surrounding it. Zayn felt this was a very good thing, it meant there would be a lot of staff, a lot of residents, and even more visitors - he would blend in quite nicely when he visited again.

Deciding to take a look around the inside of the building, Zayn moved confidently to the front door, which thankfully was open. Once inside, Zayn wasn’t sure if he was actually in a residential facility, or a hotel. It looked so expensive.

Pretending to be with a small family consisting of a mother, father and two small children, Zayn slipped into the lift behind them, then left on the floor above theirs.

A small smile tingled on his lips as he eyed the doors he walked past. Each one had a personal letterbox attached on the wall to the left, and on each letterbox, was the name of the resident who lived inside. This was excellent. He skulked each floor, using the stair cases to climb and descend, looking for the one particular name - which he eventually found, on the ground floor.

For a split second, he considered going inside. But he decided against it. He had no need to see inside the room, not yet. Checking his watch, he decided to make his way back to the reception, a little plan forming in his mind as he walked. All he needed was to find the right person to put it into play.

Once out of the residential wing of the ground floor, Zayn wandered around the communal areas. There was a large dining room, library, games room, and finally, an enormous living room, full of cosy chairs and little tables.

If you were anyone apart from Zayn, it would have looked like a wonderful place to spend your days, if you required partial care. Zayn however, didn’t notice these things - unlike Harry had when he chose the establishment.

At the end of the room was a young blonde girl, arranging colourful posters on a notice board. She was singing softly to herself, and was very intent on making sure each new piece of paper she attached to the board was perfectly in line with the rest. Zayn internally admired her attention to detail.

"Excuse me. I wonder if you could help me." he asked, stepping up quietly behind her, a sincere chuckle exiting his lips when she jumped in surprise, spinning around on the spot, one hand clasped to her chest as though she was really shocked. One look at Zayn’s handsome features, and a warm smile developed on her lips, a faint blush tinging her cheeks a rosy pink.

"I can try," she smiled softly, "I may have to go and ask for assistance though, it's only my second day here,"

**Fantastic!** Zayn internally cheered. This couldn't be turning out better.

"Congratulations, I never would have guessed," Zayn grinned, pouring on the flattery, "My name is Simon by the way, Simon Cowell."
It still amazed Zayn how easy it was to lie about his name. As long as you had confidence in what you were saying, people would believe anything.

"Perry Edwards" the young woman responded, politely holding out her hand, which Zayn delicately took by her finger tips, and whilst keeping eye contact, briefly kissed her knuckles before lowering it again, allowing his touch to linger just that couple of seconds longer than necessary.

It was a bold move, and it could have ruined everything, but instead, Perrie smothered a small giggle, then fussed with a few strands of hair that had escaped her ponytail, obviously flattered.

Zayn gave her his most winning smile, "My younger brother used to work for the lady in room fourteen," he whispered in a hushed tone, confiding in her with a lowering of his head towards hers, "He's returning to the area, and I know he'll want to visit Mrs Cox."

"And you'd like to leave a message for him?" Perrie asked, still a little flustered, blushing a deeper shade of pink.

Zayn looked uncomfortable. Or rather, he tried to.

"Well the thing is," he stepped closer, leaning in conspiringly, still keeping eye contact with the blue eyed girl, but trying to make himself sound regretful, remorseful, sad.

"My brother married someone the family didn't approve of really, and we grew apart. I was wrong to let that happen. If he knows I'm here, he won't see me or take my calls. I want to surprise him. What I need is someone..." he paused, mustering as much love and devotion into his dark eyes, his face so close to Perrie's that she was starting to look a little cross eyed, "...just to let me know he's here. Someone I can trust to keep a secret," he fumbled in his pocket and brought out a small pad of paper and a pen, quickly jotting down a note, then handing it to Perrie, "You already know my name, this is my mobile number," he said, smiling so hard his cheeks were being to ache, "It would really mean so much to me."

Perrie took the note, carefully folding it into equal squares and slipping it into her pocket, beaming back at him, obviously flattered that this handsome man was choosing her to help him in such an important task, "I'd be glad to help," she assured him.

Zayn beamed right back, giving her shoulder a small squeeze, then brushing the few strands of hair she'd been playing with off her face, "Thanks."

He turned, and walked casually away. He didn't need to look behind him, he could tell she was watching him leave.

Coming back into the main reception area, he watched smugly, as Anne wandered through the entrance, using her white cane to avoid any obstacles, her left side moving a little more sluggish than her right. He couldn't help but wonder if she would look so calm and peaceful if she knew that he was right there, watching her every move as she made her way to her room.

Deciding it was time for him to leave himself, Zayn paused for a few moments, looking on his phone for a nearby hotel, when he was distracted by someone coming through the front doors.

Zayn honestly could not help himself, almost letting out a whistle of approval. This lad was gorgeous. If it hadn't been for the fine smattering of stubble around his jawline and upper lip, he would probably have quite a baby face, with his adorably soft feathery hair, swept somewhat haphazardly over his forehead - Zayn longed to brush it out of his eyes, which even from this
distance, were the brightest and most vivid shade of blue.

Carrying three large boxes, the lad frowned as he looked around, obviously searching for someone. With nowhere to put the boxes down, he had to jut out his lower lip slightly in order to blow his fringe out of his eyes, quirking his head to the left to shake it in the right direction. It just looked hot!

As did the rest of him. The more Zayn watched the lad, the more attractive he was looking. Obviously smaller than him, he looked the perfect size for Zayn to throw around as he pleased, his upper arms looked strong and defined, lean chest and stomach, nice muscular thighs...and then the lad turned around...fuck! Now that was some serious ass!

Zayn's mouth was pretty much watering at the sight of it, if he wasn't careful and stopped thinking such inappropriate thoughts, he was going to start sporting a semi! Having had no sexual interaction since his last time with Harry, had turned him back into a horny, hormonal teenager - and this lad swaggering in front of him, swinging his hips in the most hypnotising manner was doing nothing to stop his newly imagined fantasy of peeling off those skin tight jeans and bending the lad over the front desk!

Still looking around him, the lad carried his boxes to the nearest table and plonked them down on it, before plucking his phone from his jacket pocket.

"Oli Mate! Whatcha upto?" he enthused into the phone, making Zayn wince with his loud, obnoxious Yorkshire accent. It was instantly obvious that this was not a lad who would be easily dominated. As quickly as he had become interested, Zayn was now sorely put off. That lad didn't half have a mouth on him. Rolling his eyes, he went back to looking for a hotel.

"Wanna keep me company for a couple of errands?" he heard the lad ask, "Or rather help me with a couple of errands. I'm just dropping off some stuff for my mum, but Curly gave me a list of stuff he wants in town - wanna come?"

Zayn could feel himself sneer. He sounded a right prick. Loud, obnoxious, probably arrogant too - he had just the voice and volume for someone who thought he was all that, and a box of frogs! Besides, what kind of name was Curly? Twat!

"Come on Oli!" the lad was pacing around, laughingly pleading into the phone, "You know how he gets when I pick the wrong thing!" he laughed then put on a funny voice, making it go unnaturally deep and drawling, "I'm Harry Styles and if it's not the right organic-animal friendly-pesticide-free-brand, I'm not eating it! Besides, I can't read his writing!"

The only way Zayn could describe it, would be that someone had dropped a balloon full of water on top of his head, chilling him to the bone, and numbing every nerve inside him, the urge to throw up violently was overwhelming, amazed at his own ability to manage to stand up straight.

Harry was a common name, but Styles wasn't. Harry Styles was not a common name. Harry had curly hair. It was just like that fucking prick to call him that as a nickname!

Sickness and shock, warped into soul wrenching disbelief.

As sick as he had felt at what he had suspected, as furious and adamant he had been with his accusations, how ludicrous they had seemed running through his mind, determined he was to turn over every stone until he found what he was looking for...

There was a big part of Zayn that hadn't believed it. Hadn't thought it was possible, convinced he
was dreaming, and all of these things were just a massive coincidence that meant nothing, and would lead to nothing.

When Harry died, he had needed closure. Without a body, without something to put in the ground, Harry's death had felt raw and unfinished, and even though all the little things had seemed to add up to something, Zayn had been more than prepared to believe that it was his grief over reacting than the thought of his princess actually faking his own death in order to leave him.

What he was living now, did not feel like real life. The hidden ring, the broken lamp, the woman from the swimming club calling to tell him about Harry's secret lessons, the other mentioning he smelt of chlorine, the mother who he had been told was dead, was actually alive, and been tracked down so quickly by a private investigator!

This wasn't a real life scenario, this was a plot of a badly written film! Now, a fucking handsome little twat, shows up out of nowhere, and he just happens to hear him say Harry Styles? Nothing could be this coincidental! As much as he had doubted it, worried about his mental health, it was actually true. Zayn had never felt so destroyed on the inside to be right.

Harry was alive.

Harry was using his old surname.

Harry was living, breathing, making friends with common ruffians like that - who Zayn could tell was his exact opposite.

Everything he had first thought about the lad evaporated into thin air. Suddenly the lad did not look attractive in the slightest. Now he looked closely, he actually had a rather rank features, sort of resembling a sewer dwelling rodent, one that deserved to be drowned!

"Come on Oli! I don't want to fuck this up! He never asks me to do shit for him and I really want to impress him!"

The vein was throbbing in Zayn's temple again, feeling lightheaded, and probably looking very green in colour, Zayn sat down as inconspicuously as possible, hiding, but still able to see the lad through the leaves of a large fern. He could feel anger coiling in his gut, his hands were shaking - in fact his whole body seemed to be thrumming with undiluted rage. As much as he was trying to tune the lad's voice out, he knew he had to listen, and fuck, it was torturous!

"But if I get it wrong, he's gonna look all sad," the lad was now whining playfully, "You know what Harry's like, he's gonna pull that sad, pouty little frog face, and that's just gonna make me feel bad, because he'll be looking all sexy, which is gonna make me really horny..." he broke off into hysterical laughter, completely unaware of the lad sitting only a few meters away, face pale, fists clenched, looking murderous.

"Ha! You're feeling uncomfortable! Ok, come meet me, I'm just dropping some stuff off to my mum at work. I'll be about half an hour, meet me outside the home? I'll drive and...oh, mum's here. See you in a bit!"

Shutting his phone with a snap, he approached a woman who had just trotted into reception, picking up the boxes again.

"Hello boo!" the woman greeted, obviously delighted, "What are you doing here?"
"Brought you some cakes," the lad (Boo? For f**ks sake, could you get any lamer?) said proudly, "Helped make them myself!"

The woman looked at her son warily, "Exactly how much help did you give?" she asked, not looking so keen to take the containers, "I still haven't forgotten the time you made sandwiches and gave everyone who ate them food poisoning!"

"You can't conclusively say that it was my sandwiches that did that" Louis grumbled playfully, "Besides, these went fine, the eggs were perfectly green and..."

"Louis William Tomlinson! You had better be joking!" the woman warned sternly, "If you think you are being funny...."

Louis laughed, "Relax mum, I had total supervision" he assured her, "I actually barely did a thing, my main job was 'official taste tester'."

The woman cracked a smile, and took the boxes, "Sensible idea," she said, her face softened a little, "Was it Stan who helped you?"

Louis shook his head, for the first time, subdued and sad, "Still not speaking" he started to fiddle with his fringe, "We're not friends anymore...at least I don't think we are...it's complicated..."

"Aww Boo!" Louis' mum, pulled him into a one armed hug, "I'm sure you two will make up eventually. You're both good lads the pair of you, and you're so close! Sometimes I forget Stan is a Lucas and not a Tomlinson!"

Louis cracked a smile, "Well anyway, hope these sell alright. You'll have to let me know if you like them"

"Of course," his mum assured him, "In fact, it's time for my break, might go and taste test these with Anne!"

"Cool" Louis nodded happily, then gave his mum a firm hug, "I gotta go, got some stuff to do down town. See you soon"

"Love you boo" his mother told him, smiling fondly and kissing him motherly on the cheek, "See you soon. Keep in touch."

Louis gave her a cheek kiss in return, along (from Zayn's point of view), a cocky smile, then spun on his heel, grabbing his phone out of his pocket, and swaggering out of the front door.

Zayn, fighting back the urge to run at the lad and wring his scrawny neck, punch that grinning face until his teeth were dripping with his own blood, drag him down the gravel path by his hair! That was the face of the devil right there! How dare he try and impress his husband! How dare he comment on how sexy he was! How fucking dare he look at his princess in a sexual way! He deserved to have his fucking prick cut off!

But instead, he put all his energy into appearing nonchalant, calm, collected, just like any stranger on the street. He was getting so close, he could almost taste the blood. So he casually walked a good distance behind the cretin, watched him get into his car, got into his, and followed him, all the way into town, repeating two names over and over inside his head.

Louis Tomlinson and Stan Lucas.

He had to see Harry in the flesh. He had to actually see him with his own eyes to actually fully
believe.

One of the lads - Louis, would no doubt lead him to Harry. If not, maybe this Stan would prove useful to look into.

Although he hadn't had much experience in tracking himself, Zayn was proving to be quite good at it. Doncaster had a huge city centre, and it was very easy to blend into the crowd, whilst keeping Louis, and the mate he met up with (a pathetic looking ginger twat), in sight.

The most difficult part was trying to hide his overwhelming emotions when Louis stopped dead still, staring at the paper in his hands, radiating shock.

"Harry wants sex!" he practically squawked, "With me! Harry wants to have sex with me!"

It was lucky it was crowded. It was lucky that there would be too many witnesses. It was lucky that Zayn had nothing but his bare hands to do the deed with. It was lucky that Louis still hadn't led him to Harry.

His cold, dead, snake like eyes, followed as a spaced out Louis was removed from where he was blocking pedestrians to a nearby bench, babbling the entire way, amplified in Zayn's own ears, the urge to lunch and attack pulsating as he passed the bench to sit on the one behind, hearing Louis claim he'd actually given Harry a hand job!

Stay away from my fucking husband! he wanted to yell in his face, the horror and revulsion bubbling up inside him, as he zoned in on the hands that were being waved around, almost in front of his face. Mocking him, gloating, taunting him. Those hands. Those small, tanned, flexible fingers had been wrapped about his husbands dick, stroking it, pumping it, bringing his princess to the peek of sexual ecstasy!

It was all he could think about. Those fingers. Covered in Harry. What position had they been in? Louis was much shorter than Harry, by at least a head. Had Louis been straddling Harry's delicate lily white thighs? Had he lay on his back? Completely spread out and willing, throwing his head back, breathy whines tumbling out between his pretty pink lips, eyes screwed shut as the heat coiled in his gut? Had Harry clasped his huge hands around those sultry hips, digging his nails into skin? Or had they been in the short and fluffy hair, dishevelling it, tugging at the strands, pulling the lad down towards him?

Had it been romantic? Were passionate, loving kisses and touches involved? Had Louis dragged his hand, making the pleasure build up slowly?

Or was it a raw, lustful, animal act of need, with Harry's hands pressed against the wall, trousers around his thighs as Louis reached around from behind, grinding against his pert little bum, yanking him off in a passion fuelled whirlwind?

It was too much! It was too fucking much! Aware that he was visibly trembling all over, in the middle of what he could only describe as his personal hell, the sound of the city had faded into the background, his hearing alert and only listening to that one nasal whine, sounding like a badly tuned radio, full of static, most of the words only skimming over the surface of his dazed state, but then he mentioned something that sickened Zayn to the point that he had to get up and walk away, emotionally unable to just sit there and listen to any more.

What if he wants to top? What if this is his way of establishing control in a new relationship because
his last husband treated him like shit?

Harry establishing control. New relationship. Ex husband treating Harry like shit.

Stumbling away from the words that felt like they were stabbing him, barely seeing the pavement in front of him, nor the people on it. Zayn blindly found an ally behind a row of shops, sinking down onto his knees right next to the rubbish bins, loudly retching, projecting vile smelling, yellow bile, as the words repeatedly played and rewound inside his mind, each time louder than the last.

As the sickness wore off, a new, far more brutal, far more intense wave of fury erupted from within.

Not only had Harry deceived him and betrayed him! Not only was he cheating and fucking around like a cheap whore! Harry was tarnishing his name! Zayn had treated Harry like a fucking beautiful, precious princess! Zayn had done everything he could to make sure he was safe, well looked after, safe from danger, safe from the evil that was out there and could hurt and corrupt him! From the people who could tear him apart! Zayn had been the best, selfless husband in the world!

And what thanks did he get?

Harry fucking slagging him off to complete strangers! Telling lies to complete strangers!

This was slander! This was fucking unacceptable!

Feeling stronger, his head clearer, Zayn wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, stuffing mints into his mouth, returning to the bench, adamant that he was to stick with this lad, no matter how much verbal diarrhoea came out of his mouth, involving his princess - but he had been gone too long.

Louis and the ginger lad, was nowhere in sight.

It was time to track down Stan Lucas.

Social media was a godsend. All you had to do was type in a name and location into google, and immediately a range of matching options came into view. It took Zayn mere minutes to find the correct account on Twitter and Facebook. The profile picture on each immediately incriminating.

Now to establish where to find him. Which wasn't hard, for Zayn's quick mind, and thirst to get to his husband. For a couple of hours, his eyes didn't leave his phones screen, scrolling through photos, tweets, Facebook posts, trying to find either a whisper of Harry's existence that wasn't found.
Although Louis Tomlinson had a profile page on both social media sites - his privacy settings were watertight, not being able to gain access to anything.

This wasn't too much of an issue though, Zayn simply cross referenced anyone who was tagged in a mutual photo, only paying attention to the names tagged, rather than the faces in the photographs—time was of the essence and Zayn did not have any patience as he logged potential haunts, finding the places on google maps. This really was child's play.

Now he had a few names to play with in a pinch. People who were indeed close to, and would lead him to Louis, who would undoubtably lead him to Harry.

Back at his hotel, charging his mobile which had considerably drained, Zayn's new obsession was refreshing Stan's Twitter and Facebook feed, watching, waiting for something he could use. He had abandoned looking at past photos, the ones he had seen already had served their purpose.

But sometimes, important details can be there right in front of your face, details which can be easily missed if you act rash and impatient.

Supposedly familiar faces become obscured, visually non existent, when you're not looking for them. Zayn was only paying attention to the tags - not everyone gets tagged in pictures on Facebook if the people in them don't have an account. Just because their name is not there, does not mean that they're not in the picture itself.

It was when he had returned from a much needed cigarette break that he reached the jackpot.

A brand new Facebook post from Stan.
Lads! Beers and a bit of footie tonight? 6pm?

Zayn smirked. Stan had tagged himself, and a few familiar names at a local park.

"Why thank you Mr Lucas," he beamed down at the smiling lad in a photo he'd just come across, "I would love to be there. I do hope you have some good stories to tell to make it worth my while!" he could feel it in his bones, Zayn was in the process of throwing the net, and pretty soon that net would catch him a little princess, and the devil he was fraternising with!

Hanging out in the park was not as good as blending in on a crowded street. Zayn was far much more conspicuous and could be subject to suspicion if he was to just loiter near the group of lads, who had taken up residence in front of a set of goal posts at one end of the park, and there was only so many times he could pretend he was out for a walk.

Wearing a hoodie pulled high over his head, Zayn skulked past the group of lads, keenly watching as they abandoned their game in favour for slumping against the wired fence a few meters away, and cracking open a can each. This was something Zayn could work with.

Behind the fence, there was a footpath, lined with trees, shrubs - places to loiter, hide, and listen.

The chat for a while was boring, football, work, lads, girls...nothing that Zayn was interested in. But he kept listening. At some point Harry had to come up in conversation. And when he did? Fuck it was worth waiting for!

It became apparent, quite quickly, that Harry's appearance in Louis' life was not welcomed by his other friends, which Zayn gleefully noted. In fact, he seemed to have created quite a divide between Stan and his best mate Louis. Harry had spun a story, Stan had doubted him, told Louis, and Louis had chosen Harry. Therefore, Stan hated Harry! This was useful information. This could work very well for Zayn indeed.

As much as he despised how they were calling his husband names, comparing him to a rat - Zayn was absolutely giddy with delight!

Stan wanted to get Louis back. Was desperate to get his mate Louis back.

And where there was desperation, there was blindness, sweet emotional blindness. How far would Stan be willing to go to get everything back to normal? How trusting of strangers would he be to get what he wanted?

By the sounds of it, a message had been sent to Louis, begging for forgiveness no doubt, Stan taking his mates advice in "sucking up to the kid", attempting to befriend him in order to get their Louis back in their little clique.

More cans were opened, more useless chat was exchanged. No messages were returned, much to Stan's grumblings which were getting louder the more lubricated with alcohol he was getting.

Then finally, there was a exclamation!

"Lou's text me!" Stan shouted gleefully, after a phone had beeped, "He actually text me back!" then a pause, "Oh, it's from Harry"

"What's it say?" a voice belonging to someone Zayn had deciphered as Calvin a while ago.
"Meet for a drink tomorrow? Just you and Louis? From Harry." Stan read out, sarcasm dripping off his tongue. There was a sound of a message swooping off.

"What you say?"

"Why isn't Louis asking me?" Stan replied, sounding majorly pissed off, "Can't he even answer his own texts now?" he clucked his tongue, "I only text the first bit" he explained randomly.

His phone beeped again.

"Do you want to put this behind you or not?" he read aloud, "Someone's getting bolshy!" he commented, "Dick!"

A few minutes passed, Calvin and the other lads still laughing and drinking. Stan stayed silent.

"Ok" he said suddenly, the other lads instantly quiet, "Things are looking up lads! Harry's making Louis meet me tomorrow for a drink at the Rock Garden at six thirty. Apparently, he's going to get Louis there, then leave us to it so we can make up. Listen to this. I love Louis. This isn't about me, it's about you and him - and he misses you too."

Zayn could not describe what he was feeling. Harry loved Louis. His Harry. His husband Harry, was in love with someone else - someone who Zayn hated with every fibre in his body. Someone who had developed a death wish the moment he had engaged in conversation with his princess. Someone who wasn't going to last in the land of the living much longer....if Zayn was to reclaim his husband, he could no longer be in the picture, he had lost that right the moment he heard that Harry had stated his love for him.

No one was to have Harry's love apart from Zayn!

It was then that he sloped off. Keeping to the shadows just in case any of the lads were to spot him. He needed to think things through. He had a plan to put together. He had to prepare himself for seeing Harry in the flesh without blowing his cover.

It was amazing how time could fly when you were busy plotting, and even when Zayn arrived at the Rock Garden, recognising but instantly ignoring Stan sitting at the bar waiting, he still wasn't entirely sure what he was going to do or say. He had to see what would happen.

Hiding at the back, in the darkest corner he could find, Zayn ordered a drink, then propped up a few menus, creating a nice discrete little viewing area.

Inside he was shaking, sick with nerves and apprehension of what he may see. Any moment, his husband was going to walk through that door, with someone else, someone who he claimed to be in love with...already! Harry had moved on from their relationship already!

He didn't move his eyes from the door. Staring so hard he barely blinked. Then suddenly, shocking him violently, even though he knew it was coming, the door was opening, and there they were. Louis Tomlinson. Hand in hand with his husband, Harry Malik.
Now Zayn knew. Exactly how it felt when a moment was described as seeing someone come back from the dead. The room was spinning, his sanity grabbed in a tight hold, pulling, tugging, sucking him down a plughole in a range of emotions Zayn had never felt to decipher what they were.

Already, Harry didn't look how he remembered. Harry looked older, more aware, holding himself confidently, a thick book in one hand, Louis' hand clasped in the other. His hair was longer, and if possible more curly, his skin was slightly tanned. He looked incredible - Zayn couldn't keep his eyes off him.

Zayn had never cried. Not when they declared Harry was dead. Not at his funeral. Not in any of the days where he had searched for his husband. Zayn didn't cry. It wasn't in his make up. But sitting there, he felt the tickle of a lone tear on his cheek, completely out of his comfort zone, in a grotty bar, watching as his "dead" husband whispered in Louis' ear, seemingly giving him encouragement at approaching Stan. Louis didn't seem to want to be there at all. That made two of them.

With a murderous rage igniting, Zayn gripped the sides of the table as Harry nudged Louis gently, urging him forward. From that moment on, Zayn didn't see the exchange between the two lads and his husband. All he could watch was Harry. His living, breathing Harry, the air around him feeling so suffocating and toxic, his lungs and throat felt as though he was breathing in acid. Each smile on his lips, quirk of his eyebrow, hand sweeping through his hair, Zayn watched, ravenous, holding himself back from leaping over the table and throwing himself at his Harry, still unsure if he wanted to smother the boy with kisses, or strangle the life out of him.

It didn't feel real. Even though Harry was right in front of him, Zayn still couldn't believe what he was seeing. It was one thing to build great plans inside your head, but another one completely when your target, who you loved so deeply was right in front of you.

Harry turned to leave, Zayn could feel himself standing, reaching out his hand, the name *Harry* and *no*, forming on his lips. He couldn't let Harry leave! Zayn couldn't breathe without him, couldn't live without him, he had to tell him, reclaim him, promise him the whole world! As long as he got him back!

The thoughts lasted longer than the moment did.

A hand shot out, grabbing Harry so urgently, and yet so gently.
Louis had one hand on Harry's forearm, the other reached into his hair, pulling Harry's face down towards his.

Oxygen!

Zayn needed oxygen! His chest constricted painfully, his heart in excruciating pain, as he watched his princess' lips in slow motion, slightly pucker and come into contact with another man's.

Then he left. Harry just hugged the devil goodbye and strode out of the door.

A quiet, strangled gurgle sounded in the base of his throat, followed by a snarl of pain, rather like a wounded animal. Internally, Zayn was fighting. Animalistic, primal, urges were tensing his muscles, gnawing at his sanity. He had to get through this, he had to complete this stage to get onto the next step. He had to. For him. For Harry. For them!

Minutes passed. Zayn stayed in his corner. Concentrating on his breathing. Now that Harry had left, he was beginning to think more clearly, his common sense returning in cool, soothing waves. All he had to do was breathe, and concentrate. Breathe and concentrate.

The bar was starting to fill up, people were sitting closer to him, between him and the lads at the bar who he was watching. He really was between a rock and a hard place. Did he stay and risk missing something important? Or did he move, and risk being caught should Harry come back into the bar?

On closer inspection, Louis and Stan were starting to bicker. He heard Louis shortly say Harry's name with a very obstinate expression on his face. He chose closer. So close, he ended up sitting right next to Louis.

Arranging his face in his well practiced nonchalant expression, he ordered a drink. He tried not to smile at the brewing argument between the lads.

"You!"

Louis shoved his stool away from the bar, so suddenly and with so much force, he knocked Zayn cleanly off his stool and onto the floor. Winded by the elbow to the stomach, Zayn could only look up in astonishment as Louis immediately turned to him, his face half still etched with anger, half embarrassment as he offered Zayn his hand.

Wordlessly Zayn took it, letting Louis heave him to his feet, and retook his position on his stool once more, as Louis muttered an apology, before turning on Stan as though it had never happened.

"You need to get your priorities in order!" Louis snapped viciously, pointing between the two of them with a sharp, pointed finger, "This is not going to work if you cannot accept that Harry is my number one priority!"

Zayn caught a glimpse of flashing, angry eyes, as Louis stormed out of the bar, evidently going to find Harry. It took everything inside him not to follow. He had other things to do.

Make a new friend. Or rather, acquaint himself with an ally of a common aim in mind - separating Harry and Louis.

Stan was a prickly aura of hostility and irritation, thumping his fist on the counter top. This was good. This was something he could work with.
Just like he had done with Perrie at Fairview, Zayn turned on the charm. Summoning his most convincing, caring qualities to the surface, stopping from hurting himself any further, by gently grabbing his wrist.

"You're gonna hurt yourself" he murmured, "Boyfriend trouble?" he quirked an eyebrow at Stan who shook his head. He looked irritated by the interruption, but Zayn ignored that, choosing to give him a sympathetic smile in hope that it would melt his icy exterior.

"My mates boyfriend is a dick!" he suddenly snapped, "He's taken my best mate away from me! Apparently he's too fragile and damaged for my mate to leave him behind and come on holiday with us!"

Feeling slightly triumphant, Zayn signalled to the bartender, "Another pint for me mate" he ordered, "And for you?"

He turned and asked Stan politely.

"Same" Stan smiled at him, calmer, less flustered, "Thanks."

"No worries, you look like you could use another drink." Zayn replied comfortably, even though his skin was still prickling at the back of his neck, anxious over the thought of Harry and Louis alone together somewhere.

"I'm Stan by the way,"

Like Zayn didn't already know that!

Stan held out his hand, smiling shyly.

Zayn pushed a fresh pint in front of him, then made himself smile warmly, taking Stan's hand to shake. Another face, another fake name. Who should he be this time?

"Nice to meet you Stan, I'm Rylan."

Stan nodded and dropped his hand in favour of taking a sip of his pint.

Once more Zayn felt triumphant. This part of the process was just too easy!
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Long chapter ahead! I couldn't help it, I had to keep going, so I'm sorry it's taken such a long time, I really hope it was worth the wait. Thank you so much for the continued support, and I hope this offering is ok. Lots of love xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Are you sure you're ready baby?" Louis breathed, pressing a soft chaste kiss upon Harry's slightly parted lips, "We don't have to do this now, we can wait until you're ready"

Harry squirmed slightly in Louis' arms, chest tight and heaving, skin pink and flushed, nerves almost getting the better of him. He felt Louis' hesitant fingers inch into his hair above his forehead, carding backwards, his nails slightly scratching against his scalp as they carded through his curls, instantly soothing his worried mind, emitting the softest of moans.

"I really love you Harry," Louis whispered, snaking his other hand around the younger lad's waist, drawing him closer to him, "It's ok if you're nervous, this is a huge thing for you,"

Eyes tightly closed, Harry concentrated as Louis began to stroke the back of his neck, wrapping his arms firmly around his smaller boyfriend's back, burying his face in the gap between his neck and shoulder, inhaling the fresh spring smell of his skin, mouthing a kiss on his collarbone without even realising he was doing it.

"I'm ready," he mumbled, unable to hide the blatant tremor in his voice, "I love you and I trust you. I really want this,"

Two gentle hands gripped Harry's cheeks, coaxing him to retract his face, finding himself gazing into soft loving eyes, "I'm so proud of you baby," Louis whispered to him, going for a lingering kiss, dragging his top lip down over Harry's bottom one, "You're going to feel so good sweetheart, don't worry, everything's going to be fine."

Harry nodded uncertainly, a small coil of panic was on the verge of brewing deep down in his gut, and upon recognising it, he squeezed Louis tighter, humming quietly at the butterfly kisses Louis was dotting over his cheeks, sensing that he needed to relax his boyfriend, making each touch more softer and gentler than the last.

"Ok," Harry exhaled shakily, but met Louis' eyes and nodded assertively, "I'm ready,"

Harry was so on edge, it was making Louis himself feel slightly unsteady, but he mustered his biggest smile for Harry's benefit, removing the hand which was caressing Harry's cheek and jaw, trailing it down his neck, over his defined chest, pattering his fingers across toned stomach muscles to grab Harry's waiting hand in a tight squeeze.

"Right" he agreed, smoothing out the creases in Harry's shirt, "You concentrate on holding my hand, I'll carry the flowers"
Harry tore his gaze away from his emotional pillar of strength that was Louis, and looked up at the vast house of Fairview, feeling every memory he’d held so quietly to himself since his last and only visit.

Without letting go of Harry's hand, Louis opened the door to the backseat of the car.

"Ok lads, we're going in" Louis chirped enthusiastically to the three lads and a dog cramped into the backseat of his car, scooping up the huge bouquet of flowers that Niall was holding dutifully on his lap, and debating how he was going to manage to carry the cake tin as well as hold Harry's hand, "Try not to fuck up my car whilst we're gone!"

'Wait, wait, wait!' Nick scrambled out of his side of the car with a struggling Pig in his arms, and strode around the front of the vehicle to where Harry was still gazing up at the house looking fretful.

"Everything's going to be fine H," he enthused, pulling the boy into a tight hug, almost crushing poor Pig between their bodies who yelped loudly, "Sorry Pig!" he crooned, scratching her head, smiling at how Harry automatically went to fuss over the small dog in slight distress, "We're all here for you, you're going to have a great time!"

"Alright, don't smother him," Louis spoke up, a little frown gracing his face as he gave Harry's hand a little tug to move him closer to him than Nick. There was a still a little part of him that was very wary of Nick's enthusiasm when it came to his boyfriend.

"He is right though," Oli put in shyly, patting Harry's shoulder and pressing his camera into his hands, "Get some good photo's eh, and if you need anything...we'll be..." he grinned, "In the car,"

Louis rolled his eyes as Niall took his turn to give Harry a hug and wish him well. It was kind of sweet really. As soon as the three lads had been told that Harry would be going to see his mother for the first time in almost a year, the three had insisted of accompanying him up until the last possible moment, wanting to give their new friend their full support.

"Are you sure you're ready?" Louis asked anxiously, seeing how pale Harry looked, pretty much clinging onto Niall for dear life as he hugged him.

"Of course he's ready!' Nick enthused, swiping stray dog hairs off Harry's shirt, "You'll feel much better once you're inside,"

"Are the flowers ok?" Harry asked worriedly, turning to Louis who instantly held the blooms out for inspection. They'd chosen them first thing this morning, and had made his car smell heavenly, but that didn't stop Harry from doing a thorough fragrance inspection, "And the cakes?"

"All fine" Oli assured him, handing him the tin when he held his arms out, "Nialler hasn't even stolen one!"

"Which just proves how serious I think this is!" Niall cut in with a laugh, "Go on mate, go give your mummy a big hug!"

Harry managed a small smile, then mouthing 'thank you' to his wonderful friends, he took a big first step forward, then exhaling the breath he'd been holding, kept on walking, Louis half running at his side to keep up.

"Right, mum should be waiting for us on the second floor," Louis muttered as they approached the main doors, "Just look natural and follow me."
"I thought she was on the ground floor?" Harry asked, but was immediately shushed by Louis.

Even though Harry had been happy to share the news about his mum with the three lads he considered to be good friends, leaving out of course the huge chunk about him pretending to his ex husband that himself and his mother were dead, making up the excuse of a family fall out, to cover why they had been separated for so long, Harry was still exceptionally worried that something might go wrong. So the fewer people who knew about this the better.

"All part of the cover up babe" Louis murmured, leading the way to the lift, "Don't worry, mum knows what she's doing."

Jay checked her watch, feeling more than apprehensive about what was going to be happening that morning. The previous day, Louis had called her, with a rather strange request. He wanted to visit Anne in her room, and he wanted to bring a friend, saying it was really important, and he'd explain when they got there, but refused to tell her any more over the phone because, who knew who might be listening! It was all very cryptic, and very unlike Louis, but he was adamant that a) it was going to be a wonderful surprise for Anne, b) there was no way he was saying a word more until he (and the mysterious stranger) arrived, and c) they would have to sneak in and out of Anne's room, so not to attract attention.

"But it's Anne's birthday tomorrow" she remembered just in time, thinking of the spa treatment she had planned as a surprise for Anne in the afternoon, "I'm sure whatever you're planning can wait until another day."

"I know it's her birthday," Louis had groaned back at her, "Mum, it has to be tomorrow, I will explain everything when we get there...just trust me would you?"

In the end, that was all Jay could do, but she wasn't entirely happy with not knowing exactly what was happening, puzzling over who Louis could possibly be bringing to see Anne, and especially on her birthday. Had she even mentioned to Louis it was her birthday?

They arranged that Jay would meet them on the second floor, then take the stairs down the internal fire escape back to the ground floor, which Anne's room was conveniently situated next to. Jay would make sure the coast was clear, whilst Louis and friend snuck in to her room. Needless to say, Anne would have no idea either until they were in her room.

"This had better be a good surprise!" Jay had warned Louis seriously.

"Trust me mum, it's going to make here year" Louis promised cryptically, before saying I love you, and hanging up.

The lift pinged, and the doors opened, Louis walking out first, all sunshine smiles which half went unnoticed by Jay. She was more concerned about the second person, clinging onto her sons hand, face obscured by the most gigantic arrangement of flowers she had ever seen.

"Louis? What is..."

"Shhh!" Louis hissed interrupting her immediately, "Keep your voice down mum!" and handed her a large cake tin.

Jay glared at him pointedly, letting him know she was not impressed with his lack of respect for his
mother, then looked around the empty hallway. Louis had made such a big deal about making this whole visit a secret, even she felt like a secret agent!

Quirking her finger, she led the way to a room which she knew to be empty, went into the centre, and waited for Louis and his friend to follow. They followed her in, Louis instantly locking the door behind them, his friend blatantly hiding behind the large sweet smelling blooms.

"Ok" Louis announced in a low voice, starting to walk into the middle of the room, but stopping when he realised Harry wasn't walking with him, "Babe, it's ok. It's just my mum...everything's going to be fine" he smiled encouragingly, ducking behind the flowers to observe Harry's petrified expression, "Why don't you put these down and show mum your pretty face?"

Jay quirked an eyebrow at both Louis' words and how the flowers, or rather the boy (it was blatantly a boy) holding the flowers shook.

"Don't mind me boys" she chuckled as the whispering continued, "Just pretend I'm not here!"

"Sorry mum, he's a bit nervous" Louis piped up, he let go of the boys hand, clasping his fingers around the bottom of the bouquet and tugged, "I'll take these".

He whipped the flowers away, exposing the boys face for the first time. Jay went to say hello, and introduce herself, but then she saw his face and her mouth that she had started to open, just gaped in obvious surprise. He looked a little different to how she had remembered, but there was no doubt that she had seen him before, talked to him, waited for him to call, and here he was.

Louis frowned, tensing up, looking at first his mum, then back at Harry, who stood as still as a statue, wide eyed, staring at his mum as though he couldn't quite believe his eyes.

"Erm...mum...?" Louis asked, then leapt out of the way as his mum steamrolled across to Harry and pulled him into a tight hug.

"It's you" he heard her whisper, "It is you isn't it?"

Harry nodded numbly. How could he forget the woman who had showed him so much kindness when he had needed it the most? And now it was evident she had been Louis' mum all along - irony had never been so beautiful.

"What?" Louis was at a complete loss as he watched Harry nod over his mum's shoulder, then pull away.

"I never got to say thank you," he murmured brokenly, "For the note...what you said...it meant so much to me,"

"What did?" Louis whined, exasperated and forgetting he was meant to be quiet, "What's going on? Why are you saying thank you?" he demanded to Harry, before turning to his mum, "What did you do? Do you two know each other?"

"What's your name sweetheart?" Jay asked gently, ignoring her son in favour of pushing a curl out of Harry's eyes, "I was so worried about you. Are you ok?"

Harry looked into her warm, motherly eyes, remembering how they had comforted him on the train.

"Harry" he stuttered, "My name's Harry"
Jay beamed at him, and bundled him into another hug.

"Oy!" Louis actually stamped his foot. If he hadn't have been so impatient and confused, he would have found the identical surprised expressions on his mum and boyfriend's face comical.

"I've met your mum" Harry told Louis simply, letting Jay lead him to a chair and sit him down, "On the train here, when...when I left..."

"You were so brave" Jay mused, she couldn't seem to leave Harry's curls alone, "Such a brave boy."

"She knows?" Louis asked in astonishment.

"Not everything," Harry muttered hastily, going a little red, "Like why I'm here now,"

Jay paused in stroking Harry's hair, trying to think of something on the tip of her tongue that she remembered Harry saying on the train, eyes flickering to the flowers, that smelt so beautiful.

"My mum's by herself in a nursing home, she's blind and can't move her left side very well. She had a stroke."

"Oh my" she gasped as it all fell into place in a rush, both her hands flying to cover her mouth, "Anne's your mum isn't she? You're the one who's been sending her flowers!"

The tears that had been threatening to fall from Harry's eyes since they had decided to make today the day to visit his mother spilled over his eyelashes, so overwhelmed in an instant about everything. Louis' love, his friends unwavering and solid support, meeting the woman who had believed in him when he thought nobody would, the thought that his mum was in such close proximity - making it more than he could emotionally handle. It was just too much!

Louis sank to his knees before the first tear fell, predicting the outcome from the first little tremble of Harry's lower lip, crawling over to him and wrapping his arms around Harry's waist, nuzzling into his chest, crooning words of comfort. Arms circled his shoulders, Jay stroking his upper arms, fussing with his hair.

"How did you meet him?" Jay asked her son. She had been watching how Louis was caring for Harry, noticing how his softly spoken words were penetrating through the tears, how Harry clung to her son, the deep affection in Louis' eyes.

"Can I tell her?" Louis asked, gently touching Harry's chin, "You can trust her I promise,"

Harry sucked in a breath of air, nodding emphatically, "Everything," he nodded, thinking hard, "I know I can trust her,"

"Why?" Jay couldn't help but question. Of course she could be trusted. But why was Harry so certain? Why did he look so fiercely confident?"

Harry blushed instantly. Rubbing his nose as if embarrassed.

"Because you raised Louis"

Louis' face was so smug as he looked up at her, Jay couldn't stop herself from laughing and swatting him playfully, lifting the tension that had settled uncomfortably over the room in a mere moment.
Harry now situated on Louis' lap, leant back against his chest, head resting on his shoulder, trying to pull himself together as Louis recounted his story.

From a brief description of his past relationship, why Anne had been moved to Fairview, how Harry had escaped, to how they met. Although the tears subsided, they never fully dried.

Jay, who had tears of her own trickling down her cheeks by the end, kept questioning how it was possible that someone so young, be so impossibly brave and so strong. The details of what had happened to Harry the night she first met him, horrifying her beyond belief.

"Does your mum know about this?" she asked faintly, clasping Harry's hand in hers and squeezing it tightly, "Sweetheart! You could have died! Your mum would never have known!"

"Mum!" exclaimed Louis, as Harry shuddered in his arms, turning and hiding his face in the crook of his neck, "You can't say things like that! He knows"

"I'm so sorry sweetheart" Jay apologised, rubbing his fingers, "this is just such a shock. I didn't even know Anne had a son!"

"And a daughter" Harry mumbled, crumbling once more, letting Louis rock him.

Jay opened her mouth, but Louis silenced her with a glare. That could come later. Louis couldn't make Harry relive that again.

Jay bit her lip, and silently tapped Louis on the knee, trying to be discrete.

Do you think this is a good idea for today? she mouthed at him, jerking his head towards Harry, Is he going to be ok?

"Lou?" Harry asked suddenly, his voice sounding tired and cracking, as though he knew that his boyfriend and Jay were talking about him, "When can I see my mum? I miss her Lou, when can I see her?"

Louis and Jay shared a glance and a nod.

"Right now?" Louis asked gently, wiping his tears away with a finger, "Are you sure you're ready?"

Harry's eyes were red around the rims and his face was blotchy.

"I need my mum Lou, please take me to her"

Louis nodded, giving him a small kiss on the forehead, and giving the lad's thigh a little tap.

"It's going to be fine" he assured him, knowing how nervous he was, "She's going to be so happy."

The three were silent as they made their way to Anne's room. Jay carried the flowers and the cake tin, Louis held Harry's hand, Harry tried to hold himself together.

Jay knocked lightly on the door.

"Anne love, can I come in? I've got a surprise for you!"

"Door's open"
Louis squeezed Harry's hand, the sound of his mum's voice making him draw in a long rattling breath, clasping the other hand to his chest.

"It's going to be fine baby" he whispered, "Just breathe, not long now baby boy. So proud of you"

Jay opened the door, hurrying in, with Louis and Harry following behind.

Anne was sitting in her favourite chair, curled up with a cup of tea, a selection of her favourite musical songs playing in the background, smiling already in greeting.

Harry's hands flew to his mouth, eyes wide and longing, twitching on the spot, not knowing weather to hang back or rush forward.

"Anne love, Louis' come to see you for your birthday...." Jay started, crossing over to her friend and gently extracting the cup of tea from her hand.

"Happy birthday Anne!" Louis piped up, rubbing Harry's back.

"Thank you Lou!" Anne beamed in the direction of his voice, "That's so sweet of you to come and see me,"

"Louis' brought you a special present," Jay said gently, taking Anne's hand and looking up to see if Harry was ready,

"Did he bring me those gorgeous smelling flowers?" Anne smiled sniffing the air, "They smell wonderful Louis,"

"Uh..." Louis stumbled with his words, pretty much pushing Harry forward, "They're...."

"From me..." Harry choked out, almost tripping over his own feet to get to his mum's side, "Happy birthday mum!"

For a second time stopped. Anne's smile froze on her face, fingers twitching as she grasped at the side of her chair, launching herself out of it, arms outstretched.

"Baby?" she asked halfway between bewildered and hysterical, "Harry?"

"Mummy!" Harry gasped out, flinging himself into his mums open arms, holding her so tightly, which was instantly reciprocated, an instant tangle of limbs, hair, and salty tears, "I did it mummy! I left him! I escaped, everything's going to be ok now! I've missed you so much!"

It wasn't just Anne and Harry who were crying now. The scene in front of them was so touching, Louis immediately went to his mum's side, wrapping an arm around her waist, just because he could.

Sometimes Louis took his mum a bit for granted. He might forget to call when he said he would, he might not visit her as much as he could, and even though he loved her so much, sometimes he probably didn't show it enough.

Watching Anne and Harry's reunion, hit home exactly how important it was to show his appreciation for his mum every day, because who knew when one day he might have to manage without her - just like Harry had.

"I love you mum," he whispered, blinking back his own tears, because this was not about him, "You
do know that don't you?"

Jay wiped her eyes on the back of her hand, and turned to her son with a watery smile, kissing him on the cheek.

"I know love, I love you too," she followed Louis' gaze, Anne was sitting down in her chair, Harry was sat at her feet on the floor, gazing up at his mum with the biggest, heart melting smile on his face, nuzzling into Anne's hand as she 'looked' at him, tracing her fingers searchingly over his cheeks, eyelids, nose and lips.

"Come on" she whispered to him, "Let's give them some time on their own."

Louis seemed reluctant to leave Harry, but let his mum walk him out of the room, taking one look, smiling at how young Harry looked as he lay horizontal on the settee, his head in Anne's lap as she played with his hair, the two of them talking and crying in low tones, but both of them looking so, so happy.

Louis knew he would remember this moment forever, along with the warm glow of knowing that he was partly responsible for making it happen.

Needing to get back to work, Jay left Louis in a room adjacent to Anne's so he wouldn't have to wonder far from his beloved boyfriend. There was nothing to do except wait.

Two painfully boring hours later, Jay poked her head in the door and beckoned to him with a smile.

"You've got to come and see this," she whispered, "It's simply beautiful,"

Intrigued, Louis followed, slipping under his mum's arm to see through the crack of the door that she had partially opened.

Louis heard before he saw.

It was Harry's voice, and he was softly singing, still laying with his head on Anne's knee, her hands still playing with his curls.

"It's from 'The Woman in White", " she whispered in his ear, "One of Anne's favourite songs,"

Louis barely heard her. All he could concentrate on was the rich, textured tones coming from his boyfriend's mouth - no idea that he could sing this well, and then he heard the words - if this wasn't a song about himself and Harry, there would never be one - this one was perfect.

*Whenever I see your face the world disappears,*

*all in a single glance so revealing.*

*You smile and I feel as though I've know you for years.*

*How do I know to trust what I'm feeling?*

Louis couldn't help himself, pushing his way into the room, he leaned on the wall in a place where Harry could see him, blowing him a little kiss, feeling his heart melt a little as his baby blew one back.
Anne took over the next verse, singing as softly and gently as if she were to be singing her baby a lullaby. How he wished that Anne was able to actually see the love and joy on Harry's face, as he looked up at her in wonder, almost unable to believe that they were actually together again after all this time.

The life-time before we met has faded away.

How did I live a moment without you?

You don't have to speak at all, I know what you'd say.

And I know every secret about you.

Voices melding together for the chorus, complementing each other, making Jay and Louis feel as though they were witnessing one of many memories that mother and son had shared together in happier times - with hopefully hundreds of more to come.

I believe my heart, What else can I do?

When every part of every thought leads me straight to you.

I believe my heart. There's no other choice,

For now whenever my heart speaks, I can only hear your voice

Harry spent the entire afternoon and early evening sitting as close to his mum as he possibly could. Whilst they had been alone together, he'd told his mum everything, speeding over his words, not wanting to linger on the topic so they could properly put this behind them.

"Are you really sure that you're safe?" Anne asked him seriously, "You really don't think Zayn will come after you?"

"He thinks I'm dead mum" Harry told her, thinking of what he had briefly seen when searching for something to show Louis as proof, "There was a funeral...besides," he blushed adorably, "Louis will keep me safe," and proceeded to tell his mum about Louis' heroic act of saving him from the oven timer!

"I like Louis," Anne commented, thinking about previous interactions she'd had with her friend's son, "Always seemed like a lovely lad. He looks after you doesn't he? He doesn't treat you like Zayn did?"

"He'd...he'd never!" Harry had gasped out, "Mum, Louis is about as far away from Zayn as you can get. He would never hurt me!"

"Do you love him?"

Harry paused. He should have prepared himself for this question.

"I know you think it's soon, and that I'm probably rushing into things," he said as he twisted his fingers in his lap, "But I love him very much...I wish I had met him before...he's good for me mum, and...I think I'm good for him too...we just seem to fit...and it's natural...I don't think I would be me as I am now without his support..."
"So that's a yes then?" Anne laughed at her baby boy's garbled speech, fully understanding why he might have been fearful of her reaction. If it had been a stranger, she would have had to have had words, but this was Louis - someone who when she first met, she remembered wishing that Harry could have found someone like him to begin with. It amused her that she had been right.

"There is something I want to know about Louis," Anne asked seriously as Harry was putting a new CD in the player, "I've never actually seen Louis, is he hot?"

"Mum!"

"He sounds attractive...."

Harry blushed deeply at the thought of taut, toned, tanned skin, deep cornflower blue eyes flecked with green, thick black eyelashes upon perfectly defined cheekbones.

"He's beautiful,"

The romance and sincerity in his tone so welcoming to Anne's ears, as was the CD of songs that she had once sung to Harry and her daughter when they were babies.

She patted her lap, "Come on then baby, I want to know all about him!"

Harry was more than happy to oblige. Talking about Louis, turned into Anne telling Harry about Jay, their friendship and her life at Fairview. It relieved Harry no end to learn how well his mum was, how she was looked after, and had a really good friend to rely on - even though Anne admitted, that it would be easier to be more herself around Jay now that she knew about Harry. The urge and need to talk about her boy with her best friend was often hard to swallow, particularly when she received the flowers from him every week, and she wasn't able to tell her what it was about the simple messages that always made her cry.

Talking turned into comfortable silence, which turned into singing, just like they had sang to each other when they had been at home - only instead of just sitting together and enjoying each others company, Harry would have been painting or making crowns out of flowers, and Anne would have been watching him with eyes that could see.

"I'll come back soon" Harry promised faithfully, wrapping his arms around his mum for a goodbye hug, embarrassed by how much he'd been crying in front of Louis and Jay, "Love you so much"

"Love you too baby" Anne smiled as she kissed his cheeks, finding his dimples with the tips of her fingers, "Keep smiling my dearest one"

Anne reluctantly let Harry go, requesting Louis to her side.

"Thank you for looking after my baby," she whispered, kissing his cheek, "I'm trusting you completely. Don't let me down!"

"I'd rather die" Louis told her honestly, "That let anyone touch a hair on his head!"

"Harry? Can you give me a minute with Louis?" Anne asked, waiting a couple of moments, "Are we alone?" she checked with Louis who nodded, then said aloud that they were.

"Listen to me," Anne took Louis' face in her hands, to make him look at her in the face, even though she couldn't see him herself, "I know Harry thinks he's safe, I know he thinks he's pulled this off.
But you have to be careful!” sounding so fearful and so pained it hurt Louis' insides.

"Zayn Malik is a dangerous man! If he gets just one little inkling that Harry's alive...he's going to be hunting for him...please...please keep him safe!” she begged him, "I can't protect him like I used to"

Louis assured her, repeating them over and over again, until she sounded like she believed him. But he was barely thinking about it.

Malik.

Zayn Malik.

Harry Malik.

Red. All Louis could see was red. His jaw clenched, his fists balled, his eyes narrowed.

So, that was the name of the man who had hurt Harry, humiliated and ridiculed Harry, beaten him until he couldn't move. That was the name of the man who had ripped a mother and son apart, forced them both into hiding. The name of the man who Louis wanted to be left in a....

"Louis?"

Anne had felt Louis stiffen, her slightly heightened sense of hearing, attuned to how the boy's breathing stilled for a fraction of a second.

"Anne, I promise, Harry will be safe."

It was short, it was simple. But it was everything that Anne needed to hear, and she believed every word. She slipped her arms around his waist and pulled him into her tight embrace, feeling almost as close to him as she felt to her own son - a common bond of protection binding them together.

"Go take my baby home," she whispered to him, kissing his cheek, "And make sure you bring him back here soon! Thank you so much for bringing him to me today. Being with him was the best present I never dreamed to wish for!"

They slipped out of Anne's room hand in hand, passing a blonde girl in the hallway dusting picture frames. She gave them a small hesitant smile as they passed, then seemingly having finished her task, followed them out into the reception hall, evidently waiting to speak to Jay since she was hovering close to them the entire time.

"Travel safely boys," Jay told them both, bringing them into a group hug and kissing both their cheeks fondly, "I'll see you both soon,"

Harry and Louis nodded, afraid to say anything else, as the blonde girl was so close, so returned her hug, then hand in hand, left the building, each of them bursting to talk about what had happened that day.

Perrie eyed the two boys curiously. Her phone was burning a hole in her pocket. Was one of them the brother that Simon had been looking for?

"Are you alright Perrie dear?" Jay asked, turning around to the young girl, "I hope you weren't eyeing up my son?" she laughed at Perrie's stunned expression.
"Your son? I thought he was visiting Mrs Cox?"

Although surprised by the question, Jay didn't miss a beat.

"Yes dear. It's Anne's birthday today. She's a very good friend of me and my family, and Louis and his boyfriend made her a cake for the occasion", she smiled, "Such sweet lads. Such a lovely couple."

Perrie nodded. They did make a good looking couple, and one of them did look a lot like Jay. Clearly neither of these boys were the brother Simon had been looking for. She really did want to see him again though...she'd have to really up her game to spot anyone visiting Mrs Cox in the future, maybe if she reunited the pair, Simon would be so pleased with her that he'd ask her out on a date!

Harry and Louis walked hand in hand back to the car. Harry's face was completely blank, no smile, no frown, not even a twitch of an eyebrow to reveal what he was feeling inside.

"Are you alright?" Louis questioned gently, squeezing his hand gently, "Was that everything you hoped it would be?"

Harry's eyes flickered to meet his, dragging his feet along, scuffing his shoes on the gravel, but he said nothing.

"Baby?"

His hand gently squeezed Louis.

"Later" he murmured quietly, "Let's just go home,"

Louis nodded, bringing their clasped hands up to his lips and giving a fluttering kiss on Harry's knuckles.

"What the....?" Harry's eyes widened as their car came into view.

All the doors were wide open, a pair of feet sticking out of the back door.

"You didn't think they were going to leave did you?" Louis chuckled quietly, but Harry with his wide eyes obviously thought they would. He'd never had proper friends before, and it always surprised him when one of them popped round to see him, say hi, or take a slight interest in his life - the fact that they were still here, after all this time was simply unbelievable!

"You're still here?" Harry asked in complete bewilderment, ducking his head through the passenger seat to where Oli was sprawled in the front seat along with Nick, Pig sleeping comfortably in the foot rest.

"Hey! Look who's back!" Nick exclaimed sleepily, removing his feet from the dashboard on the drivers side, and turning to poke Niall, who was asleep across the back seat, amongst a small collection of takeaway containers, "How did it go H? You holding up ok?"

Harry stepped back, letting Oli stretch out his legs and climb clumsily out of the car.

"You didn't go home?" he asked, still amazed, "We've been in there for hours!"

"Seven to be exact," Niall yawned, wrapping his arms around the headrest of the front seat, throwing
Harry a lazy smile, "But we did say we'd be here for you." he threw his arms out, "Ta da!"

Harry was truly touched. He knew his friends cared about him. He just didn't realise they cared about him this much, to stay cramped inside a car, in a carpark, just in case he needed them.

"Uh oh..someone's getting emotional!" Nick teased, pulling the boy into a big hug, "Was it good?" he asked seriously, "All ok?"

Louis watched Harry curiously, he wanted to know that answer to.

"Perfect" Harry said for the first time cracking a smile, nodding into Nick's shoulder, "It was absolutely perfect!"

"Told you it would be fine" Niall grinned, moving into the middle so Oli and Nick could squeeze in either side of him now that Harry and Louis would be claiming their seats in the front, "Was worth sitting here all day just to see that look on your face!"

Louis agreed instantly. Just like an early morning sunrise, Harry's smile was growing. First a little quirk at the side of his mouth, getting wider and wider until his first dimple popped, followed by the second, until his smile was at its brightest and widest, and just like a sunrise, absolutely beautiful.

Louis' seat had been tampered with whilst he'd been gone. It was too high, too far back, and the backrest was not in his preferred position - damn Nick Grimshaw! The whole car smelt like chicken and spices and there was probably a hundred greasy finger prints on the windows - things Louis would have complained about instantly - but one look at Harry, turned almost completely in his seat, chatting happily to his friends as they drove away. How could Louis hold anything against people who showed his baby such dedicated support in his time of need?

After dropping the three lads off at their respected homes, each of them giving Harry a massive hug goodbye, assuring him they would get together sometime in the week to hear all about it, Louis drove himself and Harry home.

"Can I stay at yours tonight?" Harry asked hesitantly as they pulled into the drive. Even though they were officially together now, it was still pretty much normal for them to sleep in their own houses - something which Louis had been eager to change as soon as possible, there was nothing more he loved more than waking up with messy curls in his mouth, nose pressed against soft warm skin, long legs tangled with his own. He wished he could wake up to it every time he fell asleep.

"Of course Haz" Louis replied, his smile widening with pleasure, already imagining holding his lad close to him through the night, his strong arms protecting the lad through his slumber, making sure he could hear his soft little snores before he allowed himself to fall asleep.

However, with the new information about the identity of Harry's ex playing on his mind, Louis knew it was going to be some time before he nodded off that night.

He fleetingly wondered if he should talk to Harry about it, share his feelings of hostility and anger, or would that worry Harry? The last thing he wanted to do was keep dredging up the past, and simply knowing the name of his ex made everything spring more sharply into focus, the lines of speculation and reality no longer blurring together.

It was white contrasting against black. What Louis wanted to do vs. what Louis should do. If he wanted to, all Louis had to do was phone a friend, give him Zayn's name, and within days, said friend would be calling him with all the information Louis required - where he lived, where he
worked, where he hung out, what he last purchased on his credit card.

If anyone could track someone down, it was Liam Payne - one of Louis' oldest friends who would do anything to help anyone. It was such a shame that in Liam's line of work, Louis didn't get to spend as much time with him as he wanted, sometimes they wouldn't even speak for months at a time, but like with the best of friends - just because they didn't talk all the time, didn't mean that they weren't as close as brothers.

Out of all his mates, even when his best friend had been Stan, it would be Liam who Louis would call in a time of crisis, was this one of these times? Would he get straight on the case? Or would Liam listen to Louis' story, calmly sit him down, and carefully explain to him that delving more into Zayn Malik's existence could be damaging to his and Harry's relationship?

If Louis had learnt anything from becoming involved with Harry, it was that ignorance was bliss. Once you knew something at this level, about a topic this close to your heart, you didn't forget about it, you couldn't unlearn it, it would always be there, either at the forefront of your mind, or tucked away in a corner.

Louis had two choices. He could either let this consume him, contaminate his gut, soul and sanity, until all that was left of him was a dark shadow of unrequited vengeance! Or, he could follow Harry's example - try his best to salvage every little glimmer of hope sparkling beyond the darkness of the unknown, grab it with both hands and feed off of it, using all his strength and energy to make every future day in Harry's life, as warm, loving and enriched as he had deserved all along.

Fighting his urges was going to be hard. Louis was a man of action. Louis was a defender. Louis was a fighter. But any wrong move on Louis' part - no matter how pure and good the intentions - could directly put the lad he loved in serious danger. Something he had promised Anne, and himself, he would never allow to happen, let alone be the cause.

Harry didn't need the extra strain. His lad had suffered enough under Zayn Malik's hand, now it was Louis' turn to take on the burden, shoulder the responsibility, treat Harry with the respect he deserved and fill his days with love, laughter and consideration. It was the least he deserved, and something that Louis could be proud to be the cause of.

Holding one arm around Harry's waist, Louis fumbled in his pocket for his keys. "Are you hungry?" he asked, toeing off his shoes in the hall and shrugging off his coat, turning back to Harry who was shutting the door, "Or do you..."

Louis didn't get to finish his sentence, or even have time to take a breath as Harry threw himself upon him with an animalistic whine, shoving him roughly against the wall, crushing his mouth desperately against Louis', gripping his fingers into the smaller lad's hair, almost ripping it out by his roots to get his face in the optimum angle to lick fiercely into his mouth.

Although Louis started off stunned, thrown by the abrupt change of temperament, trapped against the wall with Harry's hips pinning his body against it. All it took, was one throaty moan echoing into his mouth, for Louis to grab at Harry's perky bum, inching onto his tip toes, attempting to pull their crotches together - which would have been possible if Harry wasn't so much taller than him!

"Want you!" Harry growled seductively into Louis' mouth, the huskiness sending shivers of arousal scuttling across the surface of his skin, "Love you so much Lou," he was barely letting their lips part in order to speak, "Need you!"

He dragged his top lip over Louis' bottom one, nipping at it with his teeth, scraping his nails down his back and grabbing his ample backside, thrusting his hips haphazardly, making Louis swear
brokenly as he felt the zip dig uncomfortably in to his rapidly growing semi.

In one swift movement, Louis shoved his hands underneath Harry's thighs, and lifted. It worked, Harry flailed, tearing his lips away from Louis, both of them panting loudly, Harry already whining, attempting to free himself from his boyfriends clutches, his gangly limbs all over the place.

"Lou!" he complained, almost head butting Louis out of eagerness, energised by his own passion, "Please!"

Louis may have been smaller, but he was strong, and Harry was deceptively light.

"You really want me?" he whispered huskily, beginning to walk them both towards the stairs, smirking as Harry wrapped his long legs around his hips, then wincing as he felt teeth sinking into the sensitive spot between his neck and collarbone. There was no doubt about it, he was going to have bruises tomorrow!

Lowering Harry onto his back on his bed, Louis barely had time to crawl over him when Harry's hands shot out, dragging him down on top of him, long legs folding around his waist, locking him into place, hands grasped at his shoulders, managing to get him into another thigh quaking, passion driven kiss which was more tongue and teeth than lip on lip.

"Slow down baby," Louis hissed, Harry's fingers digging into his hips, thrusting up against his crotch, attaching his mouth to the delicate skin of his neck and sucking hard, "Don't you want to talk about this?"

"No more talk," aching longing oozed out of Harry's slightly slurred speech, "Enough talk, want you, want you now"

"Want you too baby, but you're gonna have to slow down,"

"Why?" Harry pouted adorably, lacing his fingers between Louis, the size difference in their hands quite distracting, nosing at Louis' jaw, loving the feel of his scruff against the smoothness of his nose, "Have you any idea how much I love you for what you did for me today, for my life in general? Have you any idea how much I appreciate you? Have you any idea how much I want to show you that?"

"Harry, you don't have to...." started, not wanting Harry to feel obligated into doing anything beyond his comfort zone, and especially not to thank him for something that he had done for free, with no payback in mind.

"I have needs too," Harry reminded Louis, a vision of shyness, biting down on his lower lip, eyes bright with innocence and honesty, darkening with lust with every word he spoke, "I'm just as hot blooded as you are - do you think you're the only one who has to settle for a quick wank before bed?"

Louis blushed furiously, he hadn't known Harry was aware of his bedtime habits...or had any idea that Harry had been doing the same thing!

His embarrassment was cut short when Harry trailed a slow, teasing line of moist, full lipped kisses along his jawline, pausing at the corner of his mouth.

"We're in love aren't we? We trust each other," he slipped his hand between Louis' legs, giving his bulge a little squeeze, "we are definitely attracted to each other, and you are my boyfriend...I want more!"
Sucking in a deep breath, Louis turned his head slightly, eyes closed, finding Harry's mouth once more, grinding his hips down slowly and rhythmically, deliberately nibbling on Harry's bottom lip, teasing the tip of his eager tongue, securing his knees on either side of Harry's thighs before raising his torso off of Harry's chest.

The younger lad's eyes were so dilated they were almost fully black, gazing up into Louis' face so full of love and adoration, making Louis' heart swell.

"Please Lou" clumsy hands fumbled at the ends of trembling arms, grasping at his neck and hair, "I'm ready, I promise I'm ready for this,"

Louis couldn't resist any longer, it was always difficult for him to pull away from Harry at the best of times, telling himself that it was for the lad's own benefit, and was afraid he might be rushing him too quickly. But seeing him lying underneath him, begging him, all disheveled and innocently seductive, feeling his needy fingers patter up and down his sides, leaving a trail of goosebumps under his shirt in their wake.

"Don't move" Louis whispered, bending down to whisper into the shell of his ear, enjoying how Harry shivered slightly as the cool of his breath blew on the spot he'd just kissed, "I'll be right back"

Hopping off the bed, Louis jogged hastily into his bathroom to get lubricant and condoms...ah...fuck...which ones? Would Harry appreciate the ones with the dots on them for extra friction? Did he need to use the longer lasting ones? The way he was painfully throbbing inside his jeans it could be over in minutes! Featherlight? Extra strong? Fuck! Why was this so difficult?

"Louis! What are you doing?" Harry whined brokenly from the bedroom, "Hurry up!"

Louis shut his eyes, grabbed the nearest packet and bottle, and fled back to the bedroom. He had barely been gone a couple of minutes, but Harry was fully prepared for him, stark naked, shamelessly tugging slowly on himself, mouth hanging half open, eyes half shut.

"Fuck..." Louis murmured, shaking his head in disbelief at the sight, "Babe, you...fuck...how gorgeous do you look right now!"

Harry only answered him with a loud whine, speeding up the jerking of his wrist at the huskiness of his boyfriend's voice, knees in the air, opening his legs...

It was such a heavenly sight, Louis almost dropped what he was holding, chucking them onto the bed in order to rip off his shirt and discard his jeans, not even bothering to kick them off his ankles before he was stumbling towards the bed, throwing himself between Harry's open thighs, gripping the offending wrist in his hand and jerking his arm high above his head.

" Couldn't wait baby?" he mindlessly babbled, sinking his fingers into Harry's curls, resuming sucking on his lower lip, "Couldn't wait for me to make you feel good? Had to get a head start did you?"

Harry shook his head, curls slapping Louis in the face. He was so achingly beautiful.

"Gonna take this nice and slowly" Louis told him, slicking up his fingers, "How do you want to do this?"

Harry just opened his legs wider, Louis noted the large pillow already nestled under his bum, smirking to himself at Harry's eagerness (and relieved that he wasn't going to have to fend off Harry's deceptively thick, long member from entering his special place!)
Using the pads of his fingers, leaning forward for more knee weakening kisses, Louis blindly started to circle around Harry's entrance, spreading the lubricant over the fluttering muscle, pressing one tip in when Harry began to squirm.

"Lou, stop teasing me, I can take it!" Harry panted, frustrated beyond belief at how his boyfriend was treating him like something fragile and delicate. As much as he appreciated the older lad's love and care, and adored how gentle and considerate he was, Louis just didn't seem to understand exactly how much Harry needed to feel that affection - pounding passionately, aggressively and relentlessly against his prostate! Louis could be loving and tender any time - now was not that time!

It was obvious Louis was torn, between what he felt was right, and what Harry actually wanted. Harry could feel it in how his one finger poked slightly deeper inside him, possibly to the first knuckle joint...and then stopped...frustrated, Harry grabbed for Louis' wrist, his back arching as he assisted insert his finger further inside him, "More!" he groaned, cracking his eyes open, seeing how pained his boyfriend was looking - just from the thought of even possibly hurting Harry - time for Harry to take his pleasure into his own hands literally!

"Give me that!" he gasped, grabbing the bottle of lubricant and pushing Louis off his thighs, "You're too slow," he continued to babble, kneeling up high and slicking up his own fingers, "Kiss me," he demanded roughly, grabbing Louis' chin with one hand and reaching behind him with the other.

Admittedly, it did burn to go in straight away with two fingers, but if he had waited any longer for Louis to come around to his way of thinking, Harry was convinced he would have exploded right there on the spot. It was fine for the boy to strut around, flaunting his shapely ass, toned stomach and muscular thighs on a daily basis, but when Harry actually wanted to do something he just clammed up? Like he was now? Louis' jaw was so slack, he was barely even kissing Harry anymore!

"Fuck baby, what are you doing? Turn around for me baby, want to see you!" Louis questioned faintly, feeling quite overcome with what exactly he was witnessing, thumbing over the head of his fully grown erection, not even noticing the stickiness of precome on his skin, too engrossed in how Harry was turning around, bending over, exposing everything he had on offer to Louis on a plate, shoving his fingers repeatedly in and out of his tight ring of muscle, all the while moaning in the most obscene fashion - music to his ears, painful to his cock.

"So good...fuck...Harry, you can't just do that!"

Gripping his cock that little bit tighter in the palm of his hand, Louis surged forward, knocking Harry's hand out of the way. Never in his whole sexual history had he ever been so envious of seeing a partner receiving pleasure, and instead of wanting all the attention for himself, so badly wanted to be the one giving it!

With all the partners before, Louis was always on the receiving end when it came to oral - he'd never sucked a cock in his life, tongued at a rim - but sitting here, watching Harry's long fingers tease himself, shoving them between delicate pink skin, crooking, stretching, he craved it!

Eyes wide, salivating with desire, Louis ran his hands up the outsides of Harry's thighs, gave the cheeks of his ass a little squeeze, before parting them, licking his tongue over his lips before turning his attention to licking a flat, thick stripe, starting from the base of his balls, wetly slathering over his hole, urged on by Harry's whimpering of pure pleasure, rutting back against the tongue that was enthusiastically probing deeper and deeper inside him.

Louis' lips and chin tingled with the menthol and mint of the lubricant that had smeared all over the
lower half of his face, he didn't want to stop, if Harry hadn't have wriggled out of his grasp, Louis would have happily eaten him out until he came - but Harry was insistent, he only wanted to come with Louis inside him.

When the moment came, when Harry was on his back, spreading his legs out to accommodate Louis leaning between his hips, one hand with spread fingers holding himself over Harry's beautiful body, the other guiding his rock hard dick into Harry, Louis faltered. He'd been in this position so many times before, guiding himself into a waiting hole, ready to fuck it to shreds, desperate for all the friction he could get to chase his orgasm and blow his load - but this was nothing like anything he'd ever felt before. This wasn't a shameful quick fuck for a release. This was an act of love. The first act of love Louis had ever made, the realisation more satisfying than any orgasm.

"I love you," he breathed, such seriousness in his eyes as he gazed down upon his boy who looked back, their eyes locked with the same emotion, as he began to press his tip inside, inching further and further, the heat and tightness spasming around his member, nervous butterflies beginning to flutter in his stomach, the intensity and intimacy of the moment overpowering everything else. He wanted to squeeze his eyes shut as he gasped, but he refused to break eye contact with his boy - his beautiful, trusting, baby boy, especially when they were making love for the first time.

Harry's eyes rolled, caught between hissing with discomfort at the foreign object intruding inside him, and sighing with relief that Louis had finally stopped fretting over hurting him.

Locked in a cocoon under the duvet, Louis rocked slow and deep inside Harry, cherishing every moan, every whimper that escaped his lips, relishing every time their lips brushed. Sweat trickled down his chest in minuscule droplets, dampened his hair, glistened as a sheen on Harry's flushed face. He could tell Harry was close, thighs shaking, struggling to control himself from bucking his hips - something which Louis understood only too well, trying so hard to focus on Harry's pleasure, doing everything to distract him from finishing too early.

A shift in angle had Harry almost crying, throwing his head back, gripping his nails into Louis' bare bum.

"There!" he gasped out, as he felt the elusive brush against his prostate, "Keep it there...fu...there!"

Louis was aching, his stomach was clenched, sucked in so tight, in fact every muscle was clenched tightly, restricting his movements...if he came now, if Harry orgasmed, this moment would be over - their first time would be over....

Harry could no longer take it, the pleasure/pain ratio was sliding in the wrong direction and he didn't need to look at where his neglected dick lay heavily atop his stomach, with it's swollen head, dripping with its natural lubricant, it ached so much it was fogging his mind and taking his focus off Louis - who had sunk back in to being hesitant, holding himself back...Louis just needed a little nudge in the right direction, a nudge in the form of a deliberately placed finger!

Three things happened simultaneously.

Harry took his index finger, thrusting it inside Louis' sacred spot, making him squark with indignant surprise, jolting his hips forward with an especially hard thrust, making Harry cry out as it slammed into his prostate head on, provoking an instant and long awaited release and spurring thick white ribbons between their hot sweaty bodies, clenching hard around Louis' dick, squeezing so tightly Louis didn't have a hope in holding on any longer. Stars exploding in front of his eyes, heart pounding, pumping deep inside his Harry, feeling his muscles contracting, relaxing, finally collapsing into trembling arms that held him tightly to their chest.
"Don't pull out" he vaguely heard Harry murmur sleepily, nuzzling into the side of his face, "Want to feel you....make it last...longer...love you so much"

Louis was more than willing to comply. His dick was still twitching, still dribbling out what was remaining of the most intense release he'd ever experienced. He wanted to tell Harry how much he loved him, how much he cared, how special this moment was to him. He wanted to ask Harry if he was ok? He wanted to stroke his cheeks, kiss his lips, but all the energy had just been sapped out of him. Spots were still dotting his vision, eyelids so heavy.

"It's ok love, I've got you," he heard Harry whisper as he vaguely recognised he was being moved, rolled onto his back, Harry's pretty angelic face hovering over him, with the sweetest smile on his blushing face.

"I love you Lou,"

Louis didn't even realise he had tears on his cheeks until Harry kissed them away, "It's ok Lou, I'm happy too," Harry breathed, "You don't have to speak at all, I know what you'd say." wrapping the duvet cosily around the two of them, arranging Louis' limp arms around his spent body, which was slightly shaky on the inside, but for the first time in a long time. Harry was feeling completely safe, undeniably satisfied, and one hundred percent loved.

Chapter End Notes

Ps. If you would like to hear the song, the version I heard was by Duncan James and Keely called "I Believe My Heart"
Personally, I think it's beautiful, and when I heard it, I immediately thought of this story and Louis and Harry xxx
"Loueh!" Harry whined, trailing his boyfriend around the island of Niall's kitchen, "Please stop sulking! You've got nothing to be embarrassed about, it was really cute!"

As soon as the words had left his mouth, Harry realised he should have chosen a better turn of phrase. Louis merely grunted as he fussed with plates and glasses.

"I'm not cute!"

Harry's lips quirked upwards in a small smile. Louis could be very cute indeed, he just refused to acknowledge it.

"You kinda are though," Harry smiled warmly, closing the gap between them, wrapping his arms around Louis' waist from behind, pressing a soft kiss to the back of his neck, "You can be very adorable and cute;"

"No, no, no!" Louis told him firmly, wriggling out of Harry's hold and spinning around on the balls of his feet, "Baby bunnies are cute! Ducklings are cute!" he jabbed his index into his chest, trying to glare at his lad, but to Harry's amusement only managing to look like a slightly disgruntled kitten, "I am not cute!" he eyed how Harry was struggling to press his lips into a straight line to contain his laughter, "Don't say it!" he warned with wide eyes.

"You're such a cute little hedgehog!" Harry began to giggle, hiding his mouth behind his hand, his eyes dancing with mischief, fingering the scruff on Louis' jaw, "All tough on the outside, tucked into a little ball with all your sharp little prickles on display, when really you're just hiding the sweetest little face..." he poked at Louis' sides, watching in delight as he burst out laughing, struggling to get away from his tickling fingers, "And the cutest, softest little tummy! Just like a baby hedgehog!" he finished smugly, relaxing his hands, stroking Louis' sides, lovingly looking deep into fond eyes which were trying so hard to look huffy.

A burst of laughter interrupted them. Niall strode into his kitchen with about six large pizza boxes in his arms.

"Grubs up!" he announced, "Oli and Nick are bringing in the beers, grab us some sauces would you?"

"Sure" Louis replied agreeably, hungrily looking at the boxes and feeling a rumble in his tummy, "Did you get Harry's vegetarian feast?"

As hungry as he was, he had to make sure Harry's preferences had been catered for, something that earned him a gentle squeeze of appreciation on his upper arm.

"Yup" Niall popped the P and grinned, "Anything for the boyfriend of my cute little hedgehog friend!" then let out a long peel of laughter and scurried out of the kitchen.

"Now look what you've done!" Louis whined, pouting at Harry, "Go fix it! Tell him that I'm not cute," Louis tried to glare, tapping Harry's hands off his hips as he started to tick off on his fingers, "Nor am I sweet, adorable, fluffy, angelic or...."

Harry rolled his eyes and pulled him into a huge hug, Louis' arms trapped between their chests, his
continued protests muffled by Harry's shirt.

"You were last night...and this morning" Harry whispered teasingly, kissing down the side of his beautiful boyfriend's neck, "Really Lou" he insisted, "I understand. It was really special. It was our first time" he breathed into Louis' ear making him shiver slightly with a hint of instant arousal, "It was intense and incredible...anyone would have shed a little tear over that."

"I was not crying!" Louis protested stubbornly, "It was sweat! You try holding off your orgasm for that long!"

Harry couldn't help himself, he loved teasing Louis - and he kind of loved how soft and emotional his feisty little lad had become after their first passionate night, so boneless and blissed out, that he didn't even complain when Harry took care of him after wards, tucking him into bed, snuggling up to him. Harry knew a real tear when he saw one - he should do, he'd cried enough himself!

Besides, if holding back an orgasm was Louis' excuse, how did he explain the salty little trickles running down his cheeks after Harry had woken him up with a good morning blow job?

"I love you" Harry assured him, cuddling back into his arms again.

"I love you too" Louis couldn't say mad at Harry for long. He was too....cute...

"Even if you do cry after sex" Harry mumbled into his shoulder.

"Harold! It was only twice...I mean...once...I mean...fuck! I do not usually cry after I ejaculate!" Louis wailed, just as Oli picked that moment to come to see what was taking them so long, eager to start the film they'd planned on watching.

Blinking owlishly and blushing furiously, Oil held his hands up in surrender, "I heard nothing" he assured them faintly, (sex talk was never a comfortable subject for Oli), slowly backing out of the room.

Harry gulped, eyes darting quickly over to Louis who was bright red in the face, cringing with embarrassment.

"I'm so sorry!" Harry groaned, shaking his head with huge nervous eyes, backing towards the wall. If he had done this to Zayn... "Lou..."

Louis glared at him. Then, seeing his baby begin to cower, swallowed his humiliation, rolled his eyes and cracked a small smile.

"From now on you can only refer to me as rugged, handsome and manly as fuck!" Louis grumbled at Harry, reaching for his hand and giving it a squeeze of reassurance, "And if anyone asks you about our sex life - I rock your world alright?"

Harry looked relieved. Old habits must die hard - being afraid of your significant other for a start.

"You're a beast!" Harry offered with the hint of a growl, "A feisty, sexy beast!"

"Fuck yeah!" Louis agreed with gusto, jutting out his chin and punching the air, "I'm like a linx, or a jaguar with my sexual prowess"

"Or..." Harry offered with a small smirk, "A very sexy porcupine!"

Louis glowered at him, but still kissed him hard - because he loved Harry more than anything, even
enough to walk to a room of people who were surely going to be laughing at him!

"Are you ok?" Harry asked Louis quietly, hovering over him. He had hoped that their little bit of banter in the kitchen would have defused his worries. Louis had kissed him, cuddled him, said 'I love you', but there was no denying that within two bites of his dinner, Louis had gone back into whatever headspace he'd been in all day.

Louis was already sat down on the settee, sprawled out, arms open, waiting for Harry to crawl into his lap and cuddle up to him. There was no more comfortable way to watch a film, listen to music...or just sit with, his legs entwined with Harry's, holding his slight frame in his arms, the slight tickle of his curls on his chin where Harry would always rest his head in his neck.

"Of course I am" Louis assured the lads anxious eyes, "I'll be even better when you're in my arms though babe."

Harry heard what Louis said, and had no reason to disbelieve him. He just seemed so tense and distracted. There was a slight strain around the corners of his mouth that made Harry nervous, and maybe he was looking too closely, but the older boys eyes never seemed to settle, constantly darting around - more so after they'd slept together for the first time the previous night...even though it might be completely coincidental (and along with the tears), deep down it worried Harry. Had he been really that bad in bed? Maybe he'd been too demanding, maybe he shouldn't have done that thing with his finger? What if he found Harry so unappealing sexually when they actually got down to it, that Louis hadn't had trouble holding off his orgasm as he'd claimed, but had trouble reaching one!

"Babe?" Louis asked questioningly pouting his lips, "Don't you want to cuddle?"

"Of course!" Harry rushed to say, scratching the back of his head, "I...erm...just gonna get some more pizza...still...hungry" he wandered off to help himself to another couple of slices, leaving Louis, once again, deep in thought.

Louis wasn't sure what the technical term for it was, but little by little he felt like he was losing control. As much as he was trying to swallow his need to dig for more information on Zayn Malik, the more he tried not to think about it, the more it seemed to consume him.

Harry's situation already made him anxious. About what was out there, about what danger Harry could stumble into, just by walking around and living his life. It would be impossible for him to be with Harry twenty four hours a day, and even if it was possible, that wasn't the kind of person he wanted to be. That wasn't the kind of relationship he wanted himself and Harry to have. He wanted Harry to feel free, able to flourish under his own steam and ambition - not be propelled along with no options or choice.

By knowing his name. It just made everything more real, made this ex feel more human. What did he look like? What did he sound like? Was he a big man? Was he tall? The questions just kept on coming!

Even as he sat on the settee, digesting his pizza and waiting for Harry to come back and cuddle him - stress symptoms were developing, from the rigidness in his jaw, to the weird tick in his left ankle where it wouldn't sit still. So much nervous energy was trapped inside him that he couldn't decide if he wanted to run for miles or fall asleep out of exhaustion, and at the same time, he still felt as though he was a bomb ticking, ready to explode.

"You alright?" Niall asked him, frowning at how quiet Louis was that evening, "Something on your
"I'm fine!" Louis snapped, making Niall jump at the harsh bite in his voice. Across the room, he saw Harry flinch where he had been talking to Nick and Oli, all three of them sending curious glances in his direction.

"I'm sorry" Louis mumbled, struggling to get a grip on himself and keep the irritable side effects of his stressful mind under wraps, "I'm..."

"Tired?" Niall winked at him, he lowered his voice, "Don't think I haven't seen H limping!" he gave Louis a small bump to the fist with his, "Just eager to go home and get down for round two aren't ya...or knowing you...round six!"

Louis sniggered in an embarrassed nature. His old reputation was still hanging around then. It felt good to laugh though. All he needed to do was keep calm. The old Louis didn't fair very well when it came to things that irritated him - if he was in an unhappy frame of mind, just the slightest little thing could set him off.

"You're quiet tonight," Nick murmured in Harry's ear, "What's wrong H?"

Harry snuck a quick look at Louis out of the corner of his eye, who was staring at the wall and scratching at his shoulder frowning.

"I'm fine." he replied uneasily picking at the crust of his last pizza slice, "Well..."

Nick gave Harry a curt nod and looked around, trying to find an excuse for them to leave the room before picking up a couple of empty glasses, getting Harry to follow him to the kitchen.

"Spill" he told Harry, kindly pulling out a chair at the kitchen table, "You look like you've got something major on your mind. Has something happened with Louis?"

Out of all of his friends, Nick was the one who Harry could confide in best. He was so easy to talk to, even with the most sensitive of subjects - although through experience, there were a few topics that Nick wasn't keen on - but if he wanted to know what was wrong, he would have to get over that.

"I think Louis thinks I'm shit in bed," Harry fretted, his mouth so close to Nick's ear to whisper his fears, his lips brushing the outer shell, "He's been odd all day, I can't help but think it's because of me!"

Nick tried not to wince. Harry, Louis and sex were not topics he really wanted to think about, let alone console Harry about it. However, he was Harry's friend, and sometimes that meant talking about things you might not want to - purely for their benefit. And Harry was looking so uncomfortable, so nervous, so unhappy.

"What makes you say that?" Nick asked quietly, "Does this mean you've...actually...?"

Harry nodded quickly, "Yeah...it was...well for me...it was...fuck...I've never felt so close to anyone...it really was everything I wanted!"

"But you think Louis felt differently?"
Harry shrugged dejectedly, "He's just been so distant and closed off from me..." he lay his head down, hiding it within his folded arms.

"He seems all right to me," Nick soothed, rubbing Harry's back, "Are you sure you're not overreacting? Sometimes it takes a while to get used to a new partner."

*Not that Tommo has ever had that kind of problem before.* Nick thought bitterly, thinking of his own exploit with the lad - but even he could admit that Louis had changed since he'd met Harry, he wasn't half the arrogant slut Nick had been accustomed to thinking of him as. Harty had even managed to get Louis in a relationship for crying out loud! That spoke volumes!

Of course, that didn't mean that Nick really liked Louis - even if this was the first time he had known Harry to feel anything but elation when it came to his boyfriend...he knew Harry, and changed mind or not, Nick was still not convinced that Louis deserved him.

"What do I do?" Harry asked, sounding as helpless as the expression that was etched upon his face.

Nick sighed, took a deep breath and pulled the lad into a huge hug. Harry was hesitant at first, but he hugged back.

"Just be you," he whispered, stroking the back of his hair and patting his back, "Talk to him, or...just do it again and see what happens."

"What if he's just trying to work out how to break it to me that we're not compatible?" Harry worried, gripping at his shirt, "What if he's..."

"Do you really think it's that bad?"

"You were the one who told me how sexual Louis is. What if I'm not enough?"

Nick pulled back, holding Harry out in front of him and smiled encouragingly and fondly.

"If you're not enough for Louis Tomlinson then he will be alone for the rest of his life!" he whispered, "You are the sweetest, kindest, sexiest, man I have ever met with a brain so unique you even managed to tame a chaotic handful like Louis." he paused and pressed a brief kiss against Harry's forehead, "You're one of a kind Harry Styles, and I think you're wonderful. If Louis is stupid enough not to see that, he clearly doesn't deserve you...and believe me," he smoothed the tip of his finger down the side of his cheek, "You wouldn't be on your own for long."

Nick finished his words softly, brown eyes soft as he gazed at Harry, who shifted uncomfortably, taking a step back, unsettled by the new expression on his close friends face.

"Did I pass?" Nick asked, ignoring the sinking feeling in his stomach as he felt the radiation of wariness, "Did I get the supportive best friend ego boosting down?"

Blatantly relieved, Harry's smiled returned, nodding his head repeatedly.

"Haz? What are you doing? Turning into Niall?" came Louis' voice shoving the kitchen door open and standing in the doorway with his hands on his hips, Harry and Nick both watched as the lads eyes flickered down to where Nick's hand was still hovering on Harry's hip.

"Sorry, am I interrupting something?" Louis asked frowning slightly, assessing what was in front of him, "Harry? Are you ok?"
"Erm...Harry was just telling me about how it went with his mum," Nick grinned, covering up for Harry instantly, "Poor lad got a little emotional bless him!"

"Aww babe! Come here!" Louis' frown fell off his face, instantly steaming forward to cuddle his Harry and take Nick's place in front of him, "You're ok right?" he asked, searching his face and smoothing back his hair, "Happy emotional right?"

Harry nodded quietly, feeling so much better already. Louis was looking at him, really looking at him, and there was so much love and affection there that was impossible not to see. Maybe he really had been over reacting after all.

"So, we gonna watch that film or not?" Nick drawled from behind Louis, making the pair break the link between their matching heart eyes.

Was it Louis' imagination, or was Nick glaring at him slightly. He was definitely eyeing how they were holding hands. Louis narrowed his eyes, was he missing something important? Or was his anxiety playing games with him? Ushering Harry back into the living room, Louis wondered if he'd be able to sneak in a quick nap whilst they watched - he must just be really overtired, he could swear he'd walked in on Nick trying to make a move on Harry!

"So, is anyone going to ask what's new in my life?" Niall asked conversationally, setting his empty plate down on the coffee table and relaxing back on the settee, stretching out his legs where they rested on Oli's thighs, and beaming around at the group.

Nick was making drinks, with Louis keeping a close eye on how much alcohol was being added to Harry's. Harry was paying no attention at all, wearing his most loved up expression and gazing into Louis' face as though he was the only person in the room - Oli on the other hand was ignoring both of them with a faint blush to his cheeks - Niall reckoned he'd probably caught them going at it!

"So, Harry, since this involves you, wanna tell everyone?" Niall asked cheerfully, finally getting his attention, "I mean it's your news really."

"What news?" Louis frowned, sitting up and looking between his boyfriend who was looking rather sheepish, and Niall who looked nothing less than his usual gleeful self, "What's going on? Is something happening? What's happening? You have news?" he prodded at Harry, "What news?"

"Wow...over protective much?" Nick whistled playfully handing Harry a frosted glass full of a pretty turquoise liquid and rising an eyebrow as Louis took a big sniff of it as it wafted under his nose before reaching Harry's hand, who was curled up in his boyfriend's lap.

"Don't want a replay of last time" Louis muttered defensively, kissing Harry deliberately on the cheek and accepting a little sip of the cocktail when Harry tilted the glass his way, "What's your news baby?" he crooned, not giving a shit what his mates thought about how soppy he was being with his baby, carding his soft curls through his fingers, "What's the crazy leprechaun on about?"

"Niall's given me a job, he asked me this morning." Harry told him shyly, thinking about how he had been wanting to tell Louis all day, but had been worried about his reaction due to his bad mood. Something else he had worried about for nothing. Now he beamed in Niall's direction, pressing his forehead against Louis', "We're going to be working together!" he lowered his voice, just so Louis could hear, and whispered excitedly, "I got a job Lou!"

"Fuck! That's amazing!" Louis enthused grabbing Harry's cheeks for an excited kiss, or three...or
four...or six, "Doing what?"

"Catering mainly, the odd bit of gardening," Harry smiled happily, "Two things I'm...you know..."

"Fucking amazing at!" Niall filled in, knowing Harry was way too shy to compliment himself, even about the things Harry knew he excelled at, "How could I not have him on my team? Plus, Liam's throwing a company party to celebrate his company's anniversary, obviously he hired me to cater it - and it's gone to be a great opportunity to do some networking, Liam knows everyone, and with this little cutie working his magic, we'll have jobs lined up for years!"

Loud hoots of approval and congratulations whistled in Harry's ears as Nick and Oli fell on top of him for hugs, Louis giving him the biggest one of all.

"I am pretty excited," Harry told Louis, all bright eyed and flushed cheeks, "I'm going to be earning and supporting myself! I can start paying mum back..."

"Pay her back for what?" Louis immediately questioned, thumbing at his boyfriends cheek frowning, "She lent you money? When?"

"My house," Harry reminded him carefully, looking guilty, "It's going to take a while...but...well I want to pay a little back. I know she has a lot of money, but Fairview costs a lot of money, and her savings and benefits will only last so long. I want to show her that I can look after her, just like she looked after me"

Louis nodded seriously. "I'm so proud of you baby," he whispered, squeezing him close, then pretending to pay attention to the film that Nick had just stuck on. He had an idea brewing that he needed to fully concentrate on - something a lot more productive than obsessing over the ways he could murder a certain man who he didn't want to think about!

"I like your friends" Zayn lied to Stan as they went to the bar to get more drinks, "They're a great laugh. I can see why you like them."

It was a blatant lie. Zayn couldn't stand the lads that Stan seemed to worship, not that it would be a massive concern of his in the long run. It wasn't like he was planning on sticking around long enough to have to endure them for much longer.

Stan grinned, but then winced a little, "I wish Louis was here" he sighed, "He's the one you want to hang out with...I mean..." he quickly corrected himself, "Al and Cal are two of the best, but...Lou is something else entirely"

Over the last week or so, Zayn had discovered a lot about Stan since they had met at the bar. He was twenty two, an electrician and he was in the process of moving into a shared house with his two best mates Alberto and Calvin. Two people who he shared the "squad" name of The Musketeers!

Stan was trusting and chatty - especially when he had something to rant about, and after his little tiff with the rodent faced dick who Stan preferred to refer to as Louis - and had only needed a small bit of persuasion to fill Zayn in on what exactly had him so upset. Harry and Louis' relationship. Why? Only a reason so blatantly obvious, Zayn felt like belting him around the head in order to slap the stupidity out of him!

Stan was in love with Louis.
"Mate, when are you going to tell him?"

"Tell who what?" Stan asked taking a gulp of his beer, his expression all non plussed.

Zayn rolled his eyes.

"You, telling Louis what your actual feelings are."

Stan choked, mid sip, coughing into his glass, "What the fuck?" he spluttered, beer dripping from his chin.

Zayn rolled his eyes again. At this rate they were going to be living in the back of his head!

"The only reason you hate this Harry guy is because he has taken Louis away from you. And if you really think I believe it when you say that you're only worried about loosing your mate, you're retarded!"

"I'm not in love with Louis!" Stan argued, but his retaliation was weak at best, and his body language just screamed guilt with the smallest hint of shame, "And if I was, I would have done something about it by now!"

"Look" Zayn was feeling irritable, but he sighed, took Stan's wrist and took him over to a quiet table, "That is absolute bullshit and you know it" he rubbed his face tiredly, "I don't know what planet your so called mates are living on, I've only known you a few days and even I have guessed what's running through your mind."

Zayn leaned forward, elbows on the table, his dark eyes penetrating Stan's.

"You and Louis have been best mates for years right? You went to school together, you spend all your free time together, and one day you wake up, and you realise that your feelings for him have changed. You notice his body a bit more, he makes you notices your body a bit more - suddenly sleepovers aren't as fun as they were because instead of innocently waking up side by side, you're on your side of the bed checking out his body and trying desperately not to get hard over the fact he's just inches away from you in just his pants, and you can't do fuck all about it!"

"Fuck off!" Stan swallowed hard, not realising he had been this obvious. But Rylan didn't stop talking, in fact he smirked a little, and continued with renewed enthusiasm.

"Thing is. From what you told me. Louis figured out what his dick was for before you plucked up the courage to tell him. You've sat back and watched him fuck other lads about left, right and centre, and although it kills you a little bit inside every time you hear about how he's had his cock in someone else, you comforted yourself that after he'd jizzed inside them he'd be done with them - he'd always return to your side, like you were the only man in his life he wanted to keep as a constant fixture. In your mind, it was the closest thing to a relationship Louis was ever going to get to - not physical...but..."

Zayn paused, sizing Stan up.

"It didn't need to be physical for you at that stage did it? Not yet. You thought that would come...soon...you were building yourself up to telling him...and then..."

His next words left a bitter taste in his mouth.

"He met this Harry, and in one swoop everything that you dreamt about had swept away"
Stan went to interrupt, but Zayn held up one finger, instantly silencing him.

"Wait, there's more!" he announced, which would have been mildly comical if it hadn't been dripping with sarcasm, "You watched to find anything wrong with this lad that you could use to put Louis off him - and you found something. Something huge...to you...but not big enough for Louis to warrant breaking up with him...however..." Zyan raised his head slightly, frowning at Stan out of the corner of his eye. The lad was no longer squirming in his seat, but instead sat rigid, horrified. Zayn couldn't help but feed off of it, his next words his way of twisting the knife into Stan's heart.

"You didn't expect Louis to break up with you did you?" he asked, "You assumed that he would believe you, and kick his new toy to the curb like every other lad - especially without your endorsement of approval...which I assume had always been accepted without question in the past...but compared to the new guy...you are suddenly worth nothing. Which hurts you - considerably I would say. Considering that ever since you stated your disapproval, Louis has flat out ignored you, cut you out of his life...all for someone who you consider a liar and a cheat who Louis has only known for five minutes"

Stan nodded. Astounded. It was like Rylan could read his mind.

"You know when I met you in the bar Stan, I thought you were being unreasonable" Zayn mused, debating tapping the lads jaw shut, "And I apologise for that. You can never blame the acts some people pull when they're trapped inside the minds eye of love. The real question is though. How far will you go to get Louis to be yours? How much is he worth to you?"

Stan gulped.

"He's worth everything to me" his eyes were starting to itch, and he rubbed at them frantically, "You have no idea how much I've missed him. I would do anything for things to be how they were before"

A slow smile spread across the shadows of Zayn's face as he tilted it away from the natural light. Triumphant and satisfied.

"Well Stan. It would be my pleasure to assist you"

Stan frowned. He was openly stunned by what Rylan had just summarised and it was nice gesture of him to make such a statement, but it was completely implausible.

"I need you to get me alone with him" Rylan was saying, deep in thought, "Try and persuade him. You need time alone with Louis. Time to reconnect, and possibly to initiate something more. The holiday you were telling me about would be the best bet. Harry not being able to come, would make sure that you were both completely alone."

"Al and Cal are coming too" Stan reminded him, "And they don't know about...you know...my feelings"

Rylan waved his comment off with a shrug, "They don't need to know either. This will just be between you and I"

"Louis' not going to agree to coming on holiday with me” Stan sighed feeling defeated, "Harry can't come, and he wants to stay home and protect him" he sneered, "Like the little shit needs protection..."
"What could he possibly need protection from?" Rylan asked with another roll of his eyes, letting out a skeptical laugh...which was oddly...chilling, "The ex?"

Film and pizza night had quickly turned into pre drinks for a night out. Nick had suggested that they properly celebrate Harry's new job - something which his new employer Niall was very enthusiastic about.

Harry was quietly very chuffed that he had friends who wanted to celebrate, making obvious to Louis with big eyes, little smiles and gentle nudges that he really wanted to go, but didn't want to make a fuss if his boyfriend wasn't up for it.

Louis couldn't say no even if he wanted to. Besides, it might be fun! He hadn't had a night out in ages, and he'd never had a night out with Harry, and from what he remembered, a slightly tipsy Harry was a very cute Harry indeed!

Oil was just happy to go along with what everyone else wanted.

Nick picked the club, a slightly obscure choice in Louis' opinion, and one he'd avoided previously because it looked full of uptight hipsters who only went to be seen and not actually have any fun! But it soon became apparent that Nick had been enthusing to Harry about for a long time that the lad was quite intrigued. One hopeful little frog face later and Louis was rolling his eyes and letting Harry raid Niall's wardrobe to find him a "proper" shirt to wear for the occasion. Once again, in Louis' opinion, his black and red sleeved Van's t-shirt looked great with his tight black jeans - either Harry really liked dressing him up, or it was just an excuse to see him topless. Louis liked to think it was the latter!

When they got to the club, Nick charged ahead gripping onto Harry's shoulder, gabbing loudly in his ear, taking him straight to the cocktail bar, the rest of them trailing behind them, Oli sticking to Louis side like glue. He wasn't much of a clubber, which was really quite endearing.

"What you drinking Lugi?" Niall asked cheerfully, waving the bartender down, "Gonna have a pint with me and Oli? Or you wanna get exotic like them?" he jerked a thumb at Harry and Nick who were pouring over the cocktail menu and seemed to be ordering quite a variety of shots to accompany them.

"Make mine a coke" Louis said shaking his head at the pair, "One of us has gotta be sensible tonight, and this is Harry's night"

"Erm..." Oil piped up from besides them, where he was already drinking from a large glass of coke himself, "I'm designated driver tonight...remember...you can drink if you want Lou...I'll make sure you all get home ok"

"Sorted!" Niall shrugged, clapping Oli on the back, "One pitcher of Mai Tai, one pitcher of Mojito, and erm..." he slapped his hands on the bar top thinking hard, "We'll need something to help us drown out this music...six B-52's!"

The girl on the bar smirked at him, "It's four shots for the price of three" she reminded him, indicating to a sign behind the bar, "Have eight, really make a night of it!"

Niall shrugged, "Bring 'em!" he looked sideways, grinning at Louis who was watching him with an amused expression, "What?' he chortled.
"What happened to a pint?" he asked skeptically, "Someone get a little bar fever?"

"Go hard or go home Tomlinson!" Niall commanded, accepting his tray of drinks from the girl and giving her a handful of notes and change in return, "Come on, go grab that...ah...well done Oli mate! You push those bitches out the way!"

Oil froze half way into his seat, quickly looking around to see if he actually had stolen the table from anyone else, was relived to see Niall laughing at him.

"Aww Oli, you're such a sweet little soul aren't you!" Niall chuckled, bringing his mate into a hug, "You sure you don't want to drink?" he asked, offering Oli a straw to his pitcher, "Tastes good!"

Oil shook his head, but he did tuck himself a little further under Niall's arm, who laughed and ruffled his hair. He was such a shy lad at times, and if he was honest, Niall liked putting the lad at ease.

Louis smiled at the two of them, feeling glad once again that he had these lads in his life. This was such a different night out to what he was used to. There was no bitching, no stupid dares being initiated, no raking his eyes around the dance floor, looking for something hot and pretty to play with for an hour or so.

Speaking of hot and pretty...

Louis turned his attention away whilst sinking another shot. He missed his hot and pretty boyfriend...was he still at the bar? Nope, he was heading straight for him. A large glass on his hand, hair bouncing as he bopped his head to the music, a huge froggy smile on his face as he beamed straight at Louis.

"Lou! This place is amazing!" he exclaimed, instantly straddling Louis on his chair and leaning in to kiss him, "Thank you for letting us come here! I love you!"

"I love you too" Louis replied, feeling his cheeks stretch into an instant smile, love for his Harry radiating out of him in waves. Harry was perched on top of his thighs, his glass in one hand, grinning at him and sucking hard through his straw. His cheeks hollowed as he sucked, reminding Louis of exactly how that had felt around his dick this morning, "You gonna kiss me?" he asked, fingering Harry's hair gently, giving a few strands a few quick little tugs, knowing how much the younger lad enjoyed it.

"Oh my God! Will you get a room?" Nick cackled, disturbing them by tickling Harry's side and making him squirm as he giggled, lips leaving Louis' and turning around to swipe at the older lad. Internally Louis snarled. He was really trying to look on bright side when it came to Nick, really trying to like him for Harry's benefit...but it just felt like whenever Harry and Louis got cuddly and close, he would always steam in doing something stupid to distract Harry's attention - and to Louis' frustration and annoyance, it always worked.

This time he actually had the audacity to put his arms around Harry's shoulders, pressing their cheeks together, whilst Harry was sat in Louis' fucking lap! The astonishment couldn't have been more clear on his face. What the fuck was Nick doing?

"How'd ya like your drink?" Nick asked nosing at Harry's cheek, puckering his lips to get them around Harry's straw, "Taste good?"

Louis gritted his teeth, shooting an exasperated glare in Niall and Oli's direction, who were watching the scene warily.

"Really good" Harry chirped, sticking the straw into Nick's mouth who took a long hard suck, his
eyes not leaving Harry's, "What's next?"

Nick smiled flirtatiously, dropping his voice so it was low and gravelly, "How about a slow comfortable screw against the wall followed by a screaming orgasm?"

Harry's eyes popped open, staring at Nick, his mouth falling open, not understanding that those were the names of cocktails.

Louis understood. But it wasn't Nick's shameless abuse of knowing names of sexual sounding cocktails, it was the way he delivered them, looking at his Harry between his eyelashes, nuzzling his cheek.

Furiously, Louis balled his fists, his teeth clamped so hard together his jaw ached. Oli placed a calming hand on Louis' forearm, which the lad was itching to shake off. His eyes glittering dangerously. If Harry hadn't have been sitting where he was, Louis would have spat in Nick's face!

"What's up Lou?" Nick asked smugly, placing a large hand on Harry's knee and giving it a squeeze, "Don't you want another drink? How about a Rum Sour? Seems like it would suit your mood!"

"Lou? He's only messing about," Harry immediately rushed to say, discretely elbowing Nick in the side, pushing him away, whilst fully concentrating on his boyfriend who was steaming under him, "Don't be mad at me. I'm sorry!"

"I'm fine" Louis bit out, still glaring at Nick who was helping himself to his shots from the table, sticking out his hand and snatching the last one for himself, knocking it back violently, taking Harry's head in his hands and pressing their foreheads together, "I could never be mad at you baby, it's not your fault you have a friend who has a shit sense of humour!"

He wasn't fine though. Louis was getting very irritated indeed. He trusted Harry so much, but what was Nick up to? Was he just mucking around and being innocently yet inappropriately over friendly? Or was he goading him? Actually trying to flirt with his boy? Whatever the circumstances, Louis just wasn't in the right frame of mind for this...

"Another drink Lou?" Niall asked hesitantly, wanting to disperse the uncomfortably tense atmosphere, "How about a normal pint this time?"

Louis nodded, closing his eyes and proceeding to kiss Harry's mouth, getting a little more carried away than he would normally, licking in to his mouth, sucking on his bottom lip, as though they were in the privacy of their own bedroom instead of in the middle of a crowded club - but he wanted to give Nick Grimshaw the full show! Something which to his triumph did not go unnoticed.

Louis skin prickled. He had been right all along, Nick really had been putting the moves on Harry! He was a fucking prick!

Nick seemed to get the message. Choosing to go and dance on his own in the middle of the floor, Louis put all his energy into doting on Harry, sharing drinks with him, cuddling him, listening to the absolute adorable rubbish babbling out of his mouth the more and more drinks he put away. Every now and then Niall or Oli would grab him and sit him on their laps whilst Louis got another round in, or popped to the bathroom.

Coming back from another trip to the bathroom, having a little giggle to himself at how the walls were spinning a little bit, Louis was surprised to see their table completely vacated.

"What the?" he murmured to himself, looking wildly around him, had the others just gone and left him behind?
"He's over there" Oli told him, popping out of nowhere, and giving him an uneasy smile, "Don't freak out ok?"

Louis immediately clammed up, craning his neck, trying to focus his vision to see where Oli was pointing.

Harry, Niall and Nick were on the dance floor. Niall was stood still, trying to avoid being bumped into, holding Harry's hands and looking as though he was trying to talk to him. That was fine. It was Nick however that was turning him into an angry spitball of fire! It was Nick that was hacking through the fine wire holding Louis rational thoughts together!

It looked like they had been dancing together, Nick still had Harry plastered to his front, arms wrapped around him from behind, which Niall was trying to persuade him to remove. Harry was very obviously drunk, stumbling on his feet, oblivious to what was going on right in front of his nose, beaming at Niall, all starry eyed.

"You have got to be fucking with me!" Louis growled, grabbing Oli's shoulders just for something to squeeze, "Who the fuck does he think he is!"

"Lou, calm down...Niall's dealing with it" Oli insisted, trying to pull Louis back by yanking on the waist band of his trousers, "Nick's just a little tipsy and over friendly, you know what he's like! Don't frighten Harry! You look scary when you're mad, and really you've got no need to be!"

"What am I meant to look like?" Louis burst out, glaring at Oli, sounding more irrational with every word, "Can't you see it? That shit is getting more and more blatant as the night goes on! I've had to put up with that fucker flirting with my boyfriend for ages! What doesn't Nick understand? Harry is mine! He belongs to me! Not him!"

"You...you think Harry belongs to you?" for the first time ever, Oli looked a little disgusted (well disgusted for Oli), "Why would you say that? That's a horrible thing to say! Come and sit down with me Lou, you're not thinking clearly. Let Niall sort this out."

Louis flat out ignored him. Anger was clouding him like a smog. All the built up rage and fear he'd been bottling up against Harry's ex husband was boiling inside his head. Louis had been like a pressure cooker ready to explode, and now he had something he could actually vent it on, someone he could actually shout at, someone he could actually hurt with his hands and feel like he was doing something to protect Harry! He wanted to go and rip Nick's revolting hands off his babies body, no one had the right to touch Harry except him! Why didn't anyone understand that? Maybe Zayn had the right frame....

Louis' hands flew to cover his mouth, the urge to throw up the contents of his stomach overpowering him. Had he really thought that? His insides that had been paralysed with rage, were starting to poison him with self loathing. What had happened to him? How could he even begin to think that...

"Er...Lou...?" Oli mumbled at his side, stuttering, trying to turn Louis so he was no longer in sight of the dance floor, "Maybe...we should go...to the bar...uh...actually...I really need the bathroom...come with me?"

Something had happened. Why was Oli being so shifty and trying to get him to move away? Louis snapped his head up. Focusing instantly on his baby who was trying in vein to squirm away.

With a drunken roar of anger, Louis stampeded forward, hands outstretched, lunging for the man who had begun to kiss Harry's neck!
"Get your fucking hands off him!" he spat, veins prominent and throbbing in his temples grabbing Nick by the throat, shoving him through the sea of bodies and slamming him up against the wall, "If you even look at Harry again, I'm gonna rip your fucking head off!"

He could feel hands on him, pulling at his arms, dragging at his shoulders.

"Lou stop, it wasn't like that!" he could hear Niall pleading with him, but he shook his mate off, too furious, watching Nick struggle against the wall, a painful but smug leer on the man's face.

"That's it Tommo!" Nick gasped out vindictively, drunken eyes rolling, wincing at the strong grip Louis had on his throat, "Show Harry your true colours, show him what a nasty violent little bitch you really are!"

There was a loud crack when Louis' fist struck him in the jaw, "That's for you flirting with him!" he snarled, recoiling his fist to strike him again, "that's for kissing him you fucking dog!"

"Louis! Stop! Please!"

Over the thumping music, Louis could hear Harry's whimpering shout as though it was being screamed right in his ear, turning around so sharply he stumbled over his own feet, his eyes meeting Harry's painfully distraught face ever so briefly, just before strange hands roughly closed around his upper arms be picked swiftly off them - security steaming in to chuck his ass right out of the fire exit.

Lying on the pavement, tipsy, dizzy, enraged, Louis roared out in pain, before stumbling to his feet, the only thoughts in his head were getting back to Harry. Where was he? Was he still inside? Was he coming to find him? Was he being comforted by that cretin? He needed to get back inside! Where was everyone? Were they coming to find him?

"Louis?"

Louis had staggered to the main street, legs no longer feeling as though they belonged to him, so completely out of control of himself that he didn't know whether he had been drinking too much, or if he was just so angry that he couldn't think straight. At the shout of his name, he looked wildly around him.

"Harry?" he croaked out, falling to his knees. His hand hurt. His head was killing him from where it had impacted on the pavement.

"Louis? What's happened?" Stan asked, running over to his mate shocked and dismayed. Louis didn't even recognise him.

Leaving Alberto and Calvin to their latest potential conquests, Stan had left early with Rylan to talk over their potential plan, and had been in line for a jacket potato when Stan had zoned in on someone almost crawl into the street, grabbing at the wall in a right state. Then he realised. It was Louis!

Grabbing Rylan by the arm, Stan ran, calling out his mate's name, falling to his knees besides him.

"Harry?" Louis gasped out, grabbing the front of Stan's shirt, "Where's Harry?" then he began to cry, hysterical, loud, sobbing tears, grabbing at his head with a bruised hand.

"I don't know where Harry is Lou, where were you? Shall we go look for him?" Stan asked,
shoving every selfish thought he had inside him away in favour of getting that agonised expression off of Louis' face.

"Shouldn't we get him inside somewhere?" Rylan asked, eyeing Louis with a look Stan didn't have time to work out what it was, "Maybe he and Harry had a fight and..."

"I need Harry!" wept Louis uncontrollably, using Stan to clamber to his feet, "He was hitting on Harry! He was kissing him! I hit him! In front of Harry!"

Louis started to babble, words slipping into each other in the haste to get them out of his mouth. He didn't seem to know where he was or even who he was talking to.

"Ok. Let's get him to mine" Stan said quickly, wrapping his arm around Louis' back and half lifting him up, "Help me carry him Ry, you're stronger than I am"

Rylan recoiled, possibly because Louis had just coughed up something down his front, the substance dripping down his chin, but grabbed an arm and slung it over his shoulder.

"Are you going to call Harry?" Rylan asked as they wrestled Louis into the back of the nearest taxi, Stan getting in besides him to hold him upright.

"Don't know his number," Stan replied distractedly, "Look, on second thoughts, you take him back to mine, I'll look around here. See if I can find Harry and whoever he was with, I'll call you when I find someone." he paused as he clambered out of the car, "Look after him," he told Rylan urgently, "He's going to be really sick with the car ride. A cup of tea always calms him down, and he likes just the smallest dash of milk in..."

"Meter's running mate," Rylan reminded him, bucking his seatbelt, "I'll take care of Louis. Don't worry."

Louis whimpered where he lay slumped against the door of the car, his cheek squashed against the window pane. Still pitifully whining for Harry.

As the car sped off, leaving Stan behind, the biggest, most demonic smile stretched across Zayn's cheeks.

"Could you stop on the corner of Union Street?" he leaned forward to ask the driver, before turning back to Louis, who probably had no idea he was even there, "We're going to take a slight detour!"
Harry stared, open mouthed as he watched the clubs security drag his kicking and shouting boyfriend off Nick, and sling him pretty much head first out of the nearest fire exit.

A numbing sensation was creeping through his veins. He could barely believe what he had just seen. Louis had punched Nick. Louis had shoved Nick against the wall, and punched him! In the face! Twice!

Gentle hands took hold of his waist, guiding his clumsy form to the nearest chair, sitting him down.

"Harry? Are you ok?" Oli asked nervously, brushing a few stray curls from his face, eyes full of compassion and worry, "Do you want some water?"

"Where is he?" Harry mumbled, trying to stand, "Where's Louis?"

"Erm...Niall's gone to look for him." Oli said, lightly pressing his palms against Harry's thighs to keep him sitting down, "Don't worry H, I'm sure he's fine..."

"He hit him."

The words sounded alien coming out of Harry's mouth. He hated it. He couldn't believe that his sweet, loving Louis had punched anyone, let alone grabbed their friend by the throat and slammed him against the wall to deliver them.

Oli nodded, his eyes darting to the left every now and again.

Harry swallowed hard, running the tip of his tongue over his dry lips.

"Where's Nick?"

"Right here darling," Nick's voice replied close to his left ear, an arm circling his shoulders, which was immediately slapped away.

"Stop it!" Oli snapped, a glare that Harry has never seen on the boy's face slamming into focus in front of him, "You've done enough damage tonight! Keep your sodding hands to yourself!"

Harry's head was spinning, how he wished he hasn't had so much to drink. Maybe if he hadn't then he wouldn't be feeling this sick or out of control. Or were those feelings purely down to knowing that deep down, Louis did indeed have a violent side, one that he wasn't afraid to use. Maybe he felt sick because for the first time, there was a little bit of himself that was actually afraid of his boyfriend...the one person who he trusted beyond all others to keep him safe and protected from
"I was only showing H some friendly affection." Nick drawled. Harry finally dared to look his way. He had been scared to before, not wanting to see how much damage Louis had done, not wanting to see the evidence of what Louis was capable of.

There was nothing much to see. Nick's large hand was holding what appeared to be a napkin full of ice to his jaw, and was still managing to smile lazily at him when Harry met his gaze. He even gave him a little wink.

"You were goading Louis and you know it!" Oil snapped, all hyped up, red in the face, obviously torn between being gentle and considerate of Harry's feelings, and putting Nick in his place, "Niall's gone to find Lou outside" he carefully explained to Harry, choosing to rub his hands as a gesture of comfort, "Do you feel ok?"

"I want to go home." Harry mumbled, not feeling ok at all.

Nick automatically went to help Harry up, but once again Oli thrust himself between the two, almost growling out his distain.

"Do you want to get punched again?" Oil threatened coldly, having to stand on tip toes to get as close to Nick's ear as possible, "You were way out of line tonight. Harry is my mate too, and I refuse to let you use him as some little pawn in your stupid game!" he refused to let Nick interrupt him, "You are not my concern right now. Harry wants to go home, we need to find Niall and Louis and..."

"No!" Harry suddenly yelped, his voice squeaking a little as it was raised by two octaves, "I don't want to see Lou right now...I...can't...he punched Nick." he finished miserably, blinking rapidly, hoping the action would get rid of the smokey apparitions of his past, lurking in his minds eye, remembering each and every strike he'd felt to his own face.

His discomfort radiated from him, making Oli grimace out of sympathy.

"I'd say you could come back to mine, but I really think that if you leave this where it is, it's just going to be more difficult for you later." he wrapped an arm around Harry's shoulders, hugging him close, resting his forehead on the younger lads cheek as he adapted his most soothing of tones, "Lou's probably devastated and really upset with himself. Let's at least give him the opportunity to apologise yeah?"

Oli gave Harry's shoulder a small squeeze, pleased when Harry slowly nodded, even if the anxiousness was still in his eyes, and one of his hands was gripping at Oli's hip, he was still willing to put his fears aside, and give Louis a chance to do the right thing.

"Excuse me!" Nick snapped, glaring at Oli, still clutching the sodden napkin to his jaw, "What if I don't accept his apology? Louis assaulted me! I think Harry should stay away from him until he's calmed down, what if he hurts Harry next?"

Clenching his teeth, his muscles stiffening, Oli found himself having to bat Nick away from trying to get his arms around Harry, who was being tugged between the two of them like a rag doll - and beginning to look a little green, willing to let Oli steer him to the nearest exit, Nick stalking behind them, disgruntled and cross.

The street was pretty crowded outside, full of jolly, drunk people, staggering around, clutching at
their friends for support, laughing loudly as they dug into their takeaway chips and burgers, and snogged obnoxiously against shop doors.

Oli scanned the street up and down, searching for those familiar heads of brown and blonde hair. There was no trace of them anywhere. Pulling his phone out of his pocket, he went to call Niall, only to see him jog up towards him, followed closely behind by Stan.

"There you are!" Niall exclaimed, a little out of breath, "Was just coming back to get you" he turned straight away to Harry, bypassing over Nick as though he wasn't there, "Are you ok?" he asked, instantly smoothing back his hair, wishing he could smooth the harsh crease between his eyebrows, "Louis' completely wasted and upset with himself, but he's fine. Stan's put him in a taxi to his house with his mate Rylan. Now we've found you, we can head over there too."

Harry looked desperately at Oli, begging him with wide, anxious eyes.

"Maybe Louis would appreciate some space," Oli suggested quickly, eyes flitting between Niall and Stan, "He'll probably just fall asleep wherever he lands and won't even know if we're there. Why don't we just let him sleep off, I'll take H back to mine, and we can bring breakfast over tomorrow morning?"

"Well..." Niall seemed thrown, he had been certain that Harry would have been rushing them all to the taxi rank before he'd even finished his sentence, "I don't think Lou's going to get much sleep without you mate."

"Good!" Nick growled, "He should sleep with one eye open anyway after attacking me like that!"

Niall's eyes instantly resembled a storm gathering, even Stan looked at him with obvious dislike - especially when he saw how Nick had snaked his arms around Harry's waist from behind, face almost hidden in his ear as he whispered to the lad - without the shadow of a doubt that he was manipulating Harry's fragile mind. But why? They were all friends, Nick was meant to be friends with Louis, why would have do something so stupid as to hit on his boyfriend right in front of him?

"You need to go home and think about what you're doing!" Niall told him shortly, "This can be easily sorted out if you just stop, and go home. This isn't fair on Harry, and right now he's the only person here who's hurting."

Nick rolled his eyes, but he did have the grace to look guilty, especially when he really looked at Harry and realised how upset he actually was.

"Sorry H," he murmured into his ear, "I'm so sorry, I didn't want to upset you!"

"Is Lou really ok?" Harry asked worriedly, questioning Stan for the first time. He'd been standing there so quietly it was easy to forget he'd been there at all.

Stan nodded slowly.

"Ry's with him," he said with a nod, "Maybe Oli is right with his plan, maybe you two could do with a little space. Come over about ten-ish yeah?"

Harry nodded mutely.

The group separated. Stan went to get another taxi home, Harry and Oli went to the carpark where they had left Oli's car, Niall stayed on the pavement with Nick.
"Are you going to tell me what that was all about?" Niall asked bluntly, crossing his arms across his chest, "I thought you and Harry were just friends. Why did you go to so much effort to flirt with him? In front of his high strung boyfriend?"

Nick clucked his tongue with annoyance, glaring angrily around, gritting his teeth, "It's not my fault somebody can't control their jealous outbursts and dramatics!"

"You should have known Louis was going to be over the top about it," Niall groaned, "Harry is his first proper boyfriend! Have you any idea how insecure he probably is? What was Louis famous for before H came along eh?" his eyes widened as he questioned Nick.

"Splitting up couples" Nick muttered after a pause, still refusing to look at Niall, but sticking his hands into the pockets of his leather jacket.

"Exactly!" Niall threw his hands up in the air, almost slapping a passer by in the face, quickly moving to the side and leaning against the wall where he was out of the way, "Louis knows all the tricks, he knows all the moves. This is his first proper relationship, and as much as he comes across as arrogant and cocky a lot of the time, his deepest insecurities lie within his relationship. He is not going to stand by and watch whilst someone else makes a play for his lad." Niall bit his lip, "And you knew that didn't you? You were banking on him becoming jealous and possessive and violent weren't you? You were banking on Harry seeing everything he feared from his ex husband showing in Louis weren't you?"

Nick clamped his mouth tightly shut with a curt nod.

"What did you think you would gain?" Niall asked incredulously, "That Harry would be so terrified of Louis that he would run into your arms because you're the victim? Do you love Harry?"

"No!" Nick snapped, kicking some gravel with the toes of his shoes, "Harry is my mate. That's all!"

"Then why...?"

"I wanted to piss Louis off alright!" Nick suddenly burst out with a snarl, "I have to sit and watch him being all fluffy and fuzzy with Harry all the fucking time! It makes me physically ill to look at! When they're together, Louis actually has goo goo eyes! Fucking loved up goo goo eyes! It's nauseating!"

"That's because they're in love!" Niall exclaimed, "They make each other happy! Of course Lou's gonna be..."

"I don't want him to be fucking happy!" Nick roared, fists clenched, his body jerking with sharp jagged actions as he paced around the small part of the pavement, radiating pent up anger, "He made a fucking fool out of me! He doesn't deserve to fall in love! He doesn't deserve a picture perfect happy ending after being such a fucking shit his entire life! Trampling over innocent, kind, loving people who actually had feelings for...."

As Niall's eyes widened at his words, Nick stuttered to a halt, realising a little too late that he had just revealed a lot more than he had intended.

"I mean, in general...I meant..." he tried to save himself, but Niall was already nodding as he understood.

All this time, Nick still had a bruised ego, was still hurting, was undeniably jealous, and still a little bit in love with Louis. All Niall could feel was sympathy, clearly Nick hadn't thought that Louis would have fallen so deeply for Harry, that the novelty would wear off, and he'd be back to his
single, jack-the-lad ways. But Louis hadn't. He'd found the lad for him. He'd settled down, and he hadn't chosen Nick.

"Come on mate" Niall announced finally, slipping an arm around Nick's waist, and beginning to walk them both towards the taxi rank, "Let's get some food, go back to mine, and have a chat."

"I don't want to talk." Nick stubbornly insisted, but he was letting Niall lead him away, so it was obviously just a front.

"Fair enough" Niall shrugged, willing to play along with Nick's pretence, "You want chips? Or see if we can get some chicken somewhere? I think Nando's might still be open..."

Zayn watched with dark shrewd eyes as Louis curled up into a ball on the back seat of the taxi, pressing himself into the door, his cheek smushed against the window, his breath steaming up the pane of glass, and glowered.

Louis was muttering incoherently under his breath, sounding a little hysterical in places, and each little whimper of his husbands name, sent electrified pricks of fire into Zayn's nerves. When they reached the spot Zayn had requested the driver to stop, Zayn quickly paid the driver, got out of the car and walked around behind it, throwing the door open so violently that Louis toppled out, face planting the tarmac with a surprisingly satisfying crack.

Faking a laugh to satisfy the driver, Zayn hauled the lad to his feet and waved the taxi on it's way, trying to make it look as though this kind of thing happened all the time on a night out!

As soon as the car disappeared around the corner, Zayn dropped Louis as quickly as he had picked him up. His face was grazed from where he'd scraped it, minuscule pinpricks of blood seeping out of his skin and speckling.

Louis groaned as his backside hit the floor, smearing the red on his face as he lifted his hand to touch his painful cheek, wincing when the pads of his fingers irritated his raw and sensitive patches.

"Where am I?" he mumbled, his voice giving away his internal fear with a slight tremor, eyes darting dizzily around, jumping visibly as they landed on Zayn, who was stood stiffly in front of him.

"Who the fuck are you?"

Louis's hands scrabbled around on the tarmac, trying in vain to get up and run away at the same time, but only succeeded in kicking his feet erratically and falling back down again on his bum, disoriented and alarmed.

Zayn rolled his eyes. This was just tragic. This pathetic excuse for a male was just a tragic looking state, from his dirty, sweaty mess of hair that was stuck out in all directions, crinkled clothes and scratched face. What on earth did Harry see in this common ruffian, grubbing around on the ground. It would be kinder to just finish him off now.

Alas. This was not on the cards, yet...

Zayn squatted in front of Louis, forcing his lips to stretch into a reasonably friendly smile, feeling so disgusted with having to put on this act, even the muscles in his cheeks were spasming, fighting to scowl and sneer as much as his hands wanted to inflict terror and pain.

"It's alright Louis. I'm Stan's friend Rylan. You were in pretty bad shape, and he asked me to look
after you whilst he went in search of Harry."

"Harry!" Louis gasped out, craning his neck, trying to see behind the man, "Where is he?"

"Not here" Zayn answered flatly, "Get up. You don't want to linger in the road..." he wondered if Louis would be able to detect the gleam in his eyes, "You could get run over."

Louis scrabbled a little more, but managed to get to the pavement in one piece, whipping his head around, still expecting Harry to suddenly pop out of nowhere.

_Delusional prick_, Zayn thought to himself.

"Where's Harry?" Louis demanded. He was sobering up. His eyes pulling focus, his limbs more co-ordinated, voice less slurred, "Take me to him! Where the fuck are we anyway?"

"You don't know your own city very well do you?"

Louis scraped his hands down his face, "Excuse me for not trusting you! I don't know shit about you! You could be anyone!"

_Indeed_. Zayn thought to himself, _I wonder what you would say if you did know who I was!_

"I promised Stan I would look after you," Zayn said instead, trying not to roll his eyes, "Just come with me"

"This is exactly how horror films start.' Louis growled shortly.

Without replying, Zayn grabbed his elbow, forcing him to walk up a path that led away from the road and into a public park. As late as it was, Zayn needed them to be somewhere where people could see them. It was safer that way.

Maybe Louis was still slightly out of it, he didn't even complain, or maybe he thought he was being taken to Harry.

Sitting them both down on a bench, Zayn plucked a previously rolled joint from his coat pocket, lit it and passed it to Louis who, thinking it was a normal cigarette, took it gratefully.

"Thanks mate. Don't mention this to Stan? He thinks I've quit."

"Why quit something so good?"

Louis nodded and inhaled deeply.

_What an idiot! Anything could be inside that filter paper! Zayn made a note of that for next time. Or maybe he could do something else? He had other drugs stashed away, he could always get new ones when it was Harry's turn._

Louis coughed as he exhaled. Zayn had good contacts, ones that provided him with the most potent weed, and other things...

"Fuck that's strong!" he gulped, his mouth drying and his vision loosing focus, recognising the taste, smell and sensation instantly, making his head a little extra crowded, even if the recognition was only fleeting. _Where was Harry? What was he doing? Was he missing him? Was he planning on how to leave him?_

Louis whimpered painfully, seeking comfort in sucking on the filter tip, taking hit after hit.
"Keep it," Rylan shrugged, when he was offered it back, "You're the one who needs to calm down."

"I'm fine" Louis lied, he felt really dizzy now, but the shit inside it was beginning to do as it was intended, his limbs starting to feel heavy and his brain ticking a little slower. It was exactly what he needed. Numbness, to hide how internally he was panicking over what Harry could be thinking about him right now.

"So, what happened?" for a stranger Rylan seemed very sympathetic.

Louis didn't reply. He couldn't bring himself to speak he was so worried. The words were on the tip of his tongue but there was no motivation to get them out. This lad was nothing to him. He didn't want to spill his feelings. There was only one person he wanted to talk to.

"Louis?"

"Harry" he whispered. He didn't feel calm anymore, he felt scared, scared that he was wasting precious time that he could be using trying to persuade his boyfriend not to leave him,"I need to see Harry!"

The sympathy vanished so quickly, Louis wondered if he had just imagined it. Right in front of his eyes he could almost see devil horns protruding from his skull!

"Harry doesn't want to see you!" Rylan spat at him without warning, his eyes flashing, "Why would he? You're a disgusting, violent little rat! Why would anyone want to be with you!"

The shock of his words left Louis dumfounded as he slumped down on the bench, utterly defeated.

Why would Harry want to be with him now? He had done everything that Harry hated. Done everything that Harry feared. His life was over. Harry would never forgive him. A small part of Louis didn't blame him at all.

"He's my everything!" he mumbled, wrapping his arms clumsily around him, trying to hold himself together, he could feel his insides straining at his skin, trying to fall apart, trying to escape him.

"Well, you're nothing to him. You never were."

Louis didn't understand. If he had been in a different frame of mind he would have challenged why he would say such things. Rylan didn't know Harry. He'd never even met Harry! How could Rylan possibly know what Louis meant to him? He knew jack shit!

"You should drink something." Rylan commented. He must have noticed how dry the weed had made Louis' mouth - his tongue was starting to feel like a piece of carpet - hence bottle of water, that was shoved into his hand, "Drink this water."

Louis couldn't undo the cap. His hands felt all huge and clumsy, with a weird sensation that they were no longer made of flesh and bones, but a fine powder - he just couldn't grip.

Rylan did it for him. Louis expected it to be handed back, but he wasn't given an option. One of Rylan's hands held the water bottle, the other clasped his fingers around his chin, both pulling his
slackened jaw open, and tilting the bottle into his mouth - almost forcing his head back to get the neck passed his lips, pressing his tongue down.

Feeling completely out of control, Louis had no choice but to just swallow, gulping again and again against his will, quicker and quicker each time, just to try and keep up with the sheer volume, which was just too much to take.

Louis was sputtering, trying to cough, liquid running down his chin and neck. All he could focus on was the brown eyes staring so intently and soullessly into his own. His lungs were bursting from needing to breathe, his gag reflex was threatening to project at any moment. Was he dying? Was Rylan trying to kill him? What was happening? This didn't feel like a mate helping someone moisten their mouth, this felt like torture!

He was feeling so woozy now. Tired, so tired, he could barely hold his eyes open let alone muster an ounce of strength to push the bottle, or Rylan away.

Abruptly, it was pulled away, bruising his bottom lip as it left his lips, leaving Louis fish mouthing and trying to catch his breath, chest heaving as he sucked in short shallow breaths.

"Stan told me you used to fuck about." Rylan commented, as though nothing had happened, poking him roughly on the cheek to make him pay attention, "A different guy every night of the weekend, sometimes a few in one evening. What changed?"

What?

"Harry" it wasn't even an answer to the question. Louis just needed Harry. He was feeling so sick, so confused, so lost and helpless. He needed Harry to come and rescue him away from this puzzle of a lad, take him home and take care of him.

"He got chocolate tasting spunk or something? Nobody is that much of a game changer."

"Harry is a world changer" Louis mumbled, sliding onto the ground. The bench was uncomfortable and he couldn't lie down. He just wanted to lie down. Lie down and sleep...with Harry. Where was Harry?

There was a sting to his face as Rylan slapped him, his face so close to Louis' he felt a little bit scared. For the first time he realised that he really had no control of his limbs, even when he tried to lift his hand, he couldn't, it just lay limply by his side, staring at it, willing it to move. Why was he was stuck? Even his head which was resting on the edge of the bench couldn't be help up at his own will. Warning bells were clanging in his ears, red flags were waving in front of his eyes - the only part of him that he was still able to move at will!

"Listen to me," he heard Rylan hiss at him sharply. He felt his face being grabbed at, fingers and thumb digging into his cheeks as he was forced to turn his head, "Harry is a lying, manipulative, trashy slut! From what Stan's told me, you need to get out of that before it's too late!"

"Fuck you!" Louis coughed, eyes rolling. He needed to get up. He needed to punch this lad and get out of there! But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't move! Surely the weed couldn't have been that strong, surely he couldn't have had that much to drink. What was wrong with him?!

"What's wrong with me?" he slurred out, disoriented and frightened, "Can't...move..."

"I took the liberty of providing you with a small amount of muscle relaxant" Rylan smirked in front of him, his lips curling with disdain. Louis could vaguely make out him holding the empty water bottle into his line of vision and tapping on it, "Can't trust someone as violent as you to listen to what
Louis' mind was screaming! He'd been drugged! He'd actually been drugged! Why? What was this kid doing? His eyes were starting to close, once again Rylan slapped him. Hard!

"Why?"

"You need to stay away from Harry!"

"You...know...shit...about...Harry"

Another slap to the face.

"Neither do you! He came into your life. He separated you from your mates. He's gave you a sob story about some fictional husband who abused him. He's going to suck the life and money out of you, fuck off and tell the same story to someone else!"

"Not...lying...he..."

It was awful. Louis wanted to shout. He wanted to fight. He wanted to defend his lad. But he couldn't, fuck trying to move, he could barely even speak, he could barely think! The air around him felt solid, compressing every millimetre of his body making him completely immobile.

"He...cries...in...his...sleep. He...gets scared...when I...touch him. Ex...raped him..."

"He said his husband raped him?" Rylan mocked him, slapping him again to keep him awake, or maybe it was just for fun, "If you're married it's not rape. Sex is expected in a marriage. If he had been married his husband would have been aware of his rights, if he wanted a fuck, Harry as his duty should provide it!"

"No! It...was...rape..if he...was here..."

Rylan's face was changing shape in front of his eyes, his imagination seeing the demon lurking beneath the surface, the demonic expression chilling him to the bone, the things he was saying disturbing him to new levels of hysteria.

"The ex? Here? What would you do eh Lou? What naughty little punishment would you inflict on a figment of someone's warped imagination?"

It took all the energy he had left inside him, to first focus on the angry brown eyes, then find the words.

"He's not lying" his eyes rolled once more, his energy sapped, "I'd kill him"

He saw Rylan go to punch him. The fist raised, the snarl vibrated in his ears, he felt the force against his jaw that made stars pop in front of his eyes. He couldn't even defend himself, let alone strike back.

*Please find me Harry!* Louis' last thoughts along with beautiful green eyes as he gave into the pain, and succumbed to the blackness closing in around him.

"Yeah," Rylan smiled demonically as Louis' eyes finally fluttered shut, "You'd really make a good job of trying to do that!"
The phone in Zayn's pocket started to vibrate. Stan. No doubt he'd gotten home and realised that neither Louis nor Rylan were there. But it was ok. Rylan had a story already mapped out.

For good measure, and his own personal enjoyment, he gave Louis' stomach a swift kick. He didn't even flinch. That just implored him to do it again, and for good measure, another blow to the face, before stepping back to admire his handiwork - it was possibly some of his best work to date.

However, now it was time to act.

"Stan?" he answered the phone, full of false panic and desperation, "Where are you? I've lost Louis!"

"Maybe you should get your own phone?" Oli suggested, watching Harry glare at his, which had been situated in his hand from the moment they had arrived at Oli's place, "He might not think to text me looking for you."

"He might though," Harry didn't look up from the blank screen, waiting for the text or the call that wouldn't come, "Why hasn't he called you? Why hasn't he tried to contact me? Do you think he's..."

"He's probably asleep" Oli reasoned, "We could always go round to Stan's now? You know he's there. Even if he's asleep you could see him, ease your mind."

Harry bit his lip, trying to hold back the tears. He was desperate to see Louis. Sure, at the club he'd been shocked, which hadn't gone well with the vast amounts of cocktails he'd insisted on consuming. If he had been sober, he would have been able to think clearer. When it came to Louis, Harry had nothing to fear. Louis would never hurt him, and after Oli had patiently explained what had been the full cause of his outburst, Harry felt so guilty and so shameful that he had let it happen. He had let Nick overstep the line, he didn't blame Louis in the slightest....at least not as much as he blamed himself.

"Can you call Stan?" he asked hesitantly, holding out Oli's phone looking remarkably like a child, "Just to see if he got in alright. I don't want to bother him by waking him up by going over. I'm just gonna want to hold him, and he might be angry with me and not want to be held...and..." he sniffed, overwhelmed with the emotion of his feared rejection.

"Louis would never push you away" Oli told him seriously, "Louis loves you more than anything. If anything he's more likely to just cling onto you like some kind of monkey and refuse to let go!"

Harry mustered the smallest of fond smiles, "Lou does like to cuddle," he whispered blushing, "But he doesn't like to make a big deal of it, it's just something between us." he thought for a few more seconds, before sitting right up close to Oli, "Call Stan now please" he asked eagerly, "I want to go over. I miss Lou and I want to tell him I love him and give him the biggest cuddle...and tell him I'm sorry...about Nick..."

Oli smiled, feeling very relieved, and put his arm around Harry whilst he made the call. He'd call a taxi after he'd got through to Stan. Harry would be reunited with his man in less than half an hour.

"What?" barked Stan, answering the phone with a snap, "Now is not a good time Oli! Something's happened!"

"What?" Oli asked slowly, his heart sinking, "What's happened?"
"Louis!" Harry whispered, crawling on his lap, the blood draining from his face, trying to snatch the phone out of Oli's hand, "What's going on?" he wailed desperately when Oli's facial expression gave nothing away.

"Is that Harry?" Stan demanded into Oli's ear, hearing his terrified cries, "Get him to St.Mary's! Al and Cal will meet you there. They found him and called the ambulance."

"What happ..."

"Just get him there!" Stan barked before hanging up, "If Louis wakes up, he's going to want Harry there!"

Oli covered his mouth with a shaky hand. His phone grabbed from the floor by Harry's impatient hand where he'd allowed it to drop.

How was he going to break this to Harry, who's eyes were already tear filled and he didn't even know what was going on.

If Louis woke up? What had possibly happened? Had the taxi crashed?

"Harry, you're gonna have to stay calm ok," Oli insisted, taking the phone back, "I just need to call a taxi and..."

"What's happened?" Harry demanded, tugging at his hair, not at all calm in the slightest, "What's happened to him?"

"I don't know" Oli was struggling to stay calm himself. But he needed every ounce of strength and control to be the pillar of common sense and reassurance that Harry would so desperately need, "But we need to get to the hospital..."

The colour drained from Harry's face. His eyes the biggest, glassiest shade of green, so big and bright against his now snowy skin, grabbing hold of Oli's hand, dragging him blindly towards the door, imagining the worst possible scenario.

Getting Harry to wait for the taxi was excruciating. If he had known exactly where the hospital was, Oli was convinced that he would have run all the way there, and still got there quicker.

"I should have gone after him!" he cried in the backseat when they were finally on their way there, "He got thrown out of the club and I didn't go after him! I should have gone! I should have gone to Stan's straight away!"

Blood shot, agony filled orbs settled on Oli's face.

"What if he dies?" Harry stumbled over his words, bouncing up and down in his seat, "He won't know how much I love him!"

Louis' not going to die.

Oil, so desperately wanted to reassure the distraught boy. But he couldn't. He had no idea what they were going to find when they reached the hospital. But Stan had sounded besides himself with worry. There had been an ambulance involved. Stan had used the word if, not when Louis woke up. He couldn't give Harry false hope. Instead, he cuddled Harry close to him, stroking his hair, letting him cry into his shoulder, praying to anyone who might be listening, that after whatever had happened, that Louis would be fine.
So, I've been having a little think about a question that is brought up every now and again, and when discussing the subject with my friend, she suggested I ask you directly.

Would this story be more enjoyable for you if I changed the character of Zayn into an original character?
I realise some of you are uncomfortable with Zayn in this role, and as you know, I hate upsetting people.

Let me know what you think, after all this is as much your story as it is mine xx
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for responding to my question regarding Zayn! Because it was a 100% vote to keep it as it is, I'm going to do that. I admit it would have been a bit of a hefty slog to change it, but I'd have happily done it if you had chosen otherwise. Thank you so much for the kudos and comments you left me - all which I really appreciate. You're all so kind to me. Xxx

When Harry and Oli finally arrived at St. Mary's, Harry realised immediately that the "Musketeers" was more than just a jokey name for three mates - it was a title for the very deep, tight, emotional bond of brotherhood each of them held tightly inside them. The prospect of one of their own being hurt badly affected each of them, and for the first time since Harry had met them, there wasn't a hint of animosity or friction.

For the first time, Alberto, Calvin, Harry and Stan were all thinking the same thoughts, they were all there for the same reason, they all wanted the same thing - for Louis to be fine.

"He's here!" Stan murmured to them, jumping to his feet from where the three had been sitting so closely together, they were almost sharing the same chair, "Harry's here!" throwing his arms around Harry's back and hugging him tightly, "We're so glad you're here!"

When Stan drew away, there was a wetness on Harry's cheek.

"Where is he?" Harry asked desperately, fresh tears falling as he took in the anxious expressions of the Musketeers, guessing what it must mean, "What happened to him?"

"The doctors are with him" Stan told him finding it difficult to speak, Harry noticed Calvin reach for his hand and squeeze it, encouraging the boy to sit on his lap, "We're not allowed in." a hint of anger and frustration crept into his tone, which he was "No one will tell us a fucking thing!"

"We should tell someone that Harry's here" Calvin announced suddenly, clearing his throat, sounding like he hadn't spoken in hours it was so rough, "He's the closest to next of kin we have, being the live-in boyfriend..."

"But we don't..." Harry stuttered, wide eyed, shivering from worry.

"Shhh," Oli cut in soothingly, folding his arms around Harry from behind and rubbing his bare forearms, "It will be easier to get updates on Louis if they think you do live together, and it's not exactly a lie is it? You pretty much live together already."

Harry nodded numbly.

"Cal? Take Harry to reception would you? Let them know he's here? See if you can find out anything?" Stan asked weakly. He looked as though he wanted to talk to Oli without Harry's presence for some unknown reason.

Cal nodded, patting a motionless Alberto on the knee, stretching as he got up, his spine making a small popping noise, grimacing at the discomfort his tension had incurred, then placed a large hand
on the small of Harry's back, urging the grief stricken lad down the hall.

"What happened?" Oli asked as soon as the pair were out of earshot, "Tell me everything. Wait." he interrupted himself, "Has anyone contacted his mum?"

"Don't have her number" Stan's face was awash with shame, "I don't know how to get hold of her, I don't even know her new address since she moved last year."

"Would they let you have Lou's phone to get the number?" Oli suggested, "If you explain that you need it to...."

"Lou didn't have his phone on him," Stan's tone was strained and painful, "His phone, his wallet, whoever did this left nothing on him."

Ollie's eyes bugged, "He was mugged? Is that what happened? He was mugged?"

"He had nothing on him," Alberto voiced. He hadn't moved since Harry and Ollie had arrived. Just sat, his large frame hunched as small as possible, staring at the floor, pale and with the air of someone who had been traumatised, "They left nothing on him."

Alberto didn't look up, just sat, staring at the floor, eyes filling up with tears which he didn't even attempt to blink away. Immediately Stan sat in the seat Calvin had vacated.

"It was bad Ollie," he gulped, his minds eye obviously remembering what he'd seen, "Fucking horrific...Al found him first...we can't tell Harry about this. He'll freak, and we need him to be strong for Lou..."

"Explain!" Ollie insisted firmly, "What are we hiding from Harry? He's Louis' boyfriend! He deserves to know what's going on!"

"When Al says they left nothing on him," Stan barely whispered, "He meant literally. The fucker didn't just rob him! They took his fucking clothes!"

Ollie's jaw dropped. Speechless. His skin felt oddly clammy as he broke into a cold sweat. Stan couldn't be implying what he thought he was, was he?

"Do you think he was...."

"Don't know." Stan uttered shortly, "Why else would you strip someone, mess them up and leave them there?"

"How did you even find him?" Ollie managed to ask, sitting down before his legs gave way. Poor Louis. How could anyone hurt Louis?

"Well, I put Louis in a cab with Rylan," Stan started to explain, "Told him to take Lou back to mine. He was all over the place, and I just wanted to make sure he was safe. After I talked to you guys, I went home, but they weren't there. So I called Ry. He said that Lou had puked in the taxi, so the driver kicked off, pulled over somewhere and demanded Rylan pay for the cleaning bill. Rylan was arguing that he should drive them home first and then pay, but the fucker didn't want Lou back in the car. Rylan said that whilst they were arguing, Louis ran off. Didn't even see him go. He was beside himself! So, I went out to look, called Al and Cal, and they went to search near where the driver had thrown them out. He was in the park..."

"What if we hadn't seen him?" Alberto stuttered, shaking his head with disbelief, still staring at the floor, "What if we hadn't spotted him? He was practically hidden under a tree...face down, arse
...he wasn't moving...he stunk of fucking weed...we couldn't wake him...took ages to find his pulse...and then we were trying to keep him warm until the ambulance got there...it was only when he was inside that it was light enough to see..." the tremor in his voice was making it quiver all over the place, "There was so much blood! So much bruising! He just looked so...fucking small!"

Alberto sucked in a huge breath, squeezing Stan's arm tightly, "You forget how fucking small he actually is, because he carries himself with so much confidence and his huge personality, but when he's quiet, and hurt - he's really tiny! I never realised how vulnerable our Lou is..."

The three lads fell into silence, all their thoughts with Louis, somewhere in the building, being examined by strangers, who would hopefully be fine.

"Hey," Calvin's voice was weak and quiet, but each of the lads were so caught up in their own thoughts, they each jumped when they heard it.

"Where's Harry?" demanded Stan, immediately nothing the lads absence, "What's happening? Do we know anything?"

Calvin looked pale and tired as he sat down on the floor, crossing his legs at the ankles.

"They've moved Louis into a room for the night." he reported, bringing huge sighs of relief from all sides, "Harry's just waiting for them to get him settled, and then he's allowed in...poor lad was pretty much scratching at the door when I left him!"

Ollie watched as Calvin and Stan shared a private glance, "Harry really does love Louis mate." Calvin sounded like he was trying to reassure his mate, " We should really get up there, I tried to get him to come back with me to get you, but once he'd discovered where Louis was, there was no way he was going to leave. He was pretty much grabbing onto the nurse's ankles!

"Do you know what the verdict is?" Ollie asked nervously, not sure if he really wanted to know the ins and outs, fearful that it was as bad as he was imagining.

Calvin shook his head, his face tight and pained as he recounted what the doctors had told him.

"We're waiting on lab results. Blood samples, drug tests..." he involuntary shivered, "He has bruising to the face and his torso, but they've ruled out internal bleeding, so that will heal gradually," he stopped, gnawing at his lower lip, "Physically they think he's going to be fine, unless the blood tests throw up a curve ball, we just won't know where he's going to be mentally until he properly wakes up. He's still pretty out of it. I'm positive there isn't just alcohol and weed in his system...we just need him to properly wake up and tell us who did this to him. If he even knows!"

At his last words Alberto and Stan clenched their fists, jaws tight, identical stormy expressions on their faces. Whoever was responsible, Ollie didn't want to be them when they found out!

Calvin led the way to Louis' room. The hallway outside was empty. Harry must already be inside.

"You go," Calvin urged Stan, giving his shoulder a soft squeeze, "We'll wait outside."

Stan nodded, bracing himself for whatever he might find inside, and carefully turned the handle. The other lads watched with sad eyes as Stan pushed open the door, stuck his head around the frame, then paused, his expression softening, carefully stepping back into the hallway and closing the door once more.
Four sets of confused eyes bored into his face as he took his seat next to Alberto. Although there was a relieved smile on his face, it wasn't hard to notice that it didn't reach his eyes.

"Looks like Harry has everything under control."

As soon as the nurse had let Harry know he could see Louis, Harry had almost tripped over himself getting to his boyfriend's side, not even letting the door properly open before he was squeezing himself through the gap.

The room was small, with just one bed inside, three chairs and a small bedside table. There was a stand just behind the wheeled bed with two drip bags hanging there, each connected by tubes to the only content in the room that Harry could see - Louis.

He looked so small as he slept, dressed in a hospital gown that was far too big for him, and tucked under a thin blanket, his arms resting by his sides, tubes connecting to the drip feed into his right wrist.

Harry had woken up disoriented in a lot of strange hospital rooms in the past, and knew exactly what he would have wanted when he woke up - sore, traumatised and frightened - so he pulled a chair right up to the bedside, plopping himself down in it, and hesitantly taking up a small hand in his own, giving it the most gentle of squeezes, trying so hard to look past the nasty discolouration and swelling to his beautiful perfect face, which was peaceful and still, and still so beautiful.

It was strange being this side of the bed, being the visitor instead of the visited. Had he wanted to be in that position again? No. Would he trade places with Louis to prevent him from experiencing it? Yes.

"It's ok my love, I'm here," he said quietly, trying to smile through his tears. No one wanted to wake up to a shocked and unhappy face. As worried, upset and horrified as he felt, he didn't want to convey any of it to his boy. Louis needed love, reassurance and care - not a hyped up, terrified boyfriend!

Very carefully, he leaned down, nuzzling at Louis' hand with his nose and mouth.

"I love you so much Lou,"

"Harry?"

Harry's head jerked upwards, his own sore, red rimmed eyes, coming into direct contact with Louis' sleepy slits. The hand held in his own twitched, gripping onto his little finger and squeezed tightly.

"Hey baby!" he breathed, shooting out of his seat as Louis pathetically raised his arms a fraction off the bed, trying to hold them out to his boyfriend, "How are you feeling?"

"Hurts"

Louis' face screwed up, mouth twisting, nose wrinkling, trying to sit up and touch his face at the same time.

"What?" he muttered when he felt the resistance of the drip attached to his wrist, a note of panic setting in, "Where am I? What's going on?"
Very gently, Harry pressed lightly on Louis' shoulders, keeping him from moving too much.

"Everything's alright Lou" Harry assured him, stroking his hair, keeping his tone upbeat, plastering the smile back on his face, even though it was killing him to see his boy in so much discomfort and confusion, "You've just had a bad night and...well..." he stuttered to a stop, how was he supposed to explain to Louis where he was, or why he was here?

"Harry?"

Louis' eyes were gradually opening wider, struggling to focus on his surroundings, gripping Harry's hand hard.

"What do you remember Lou?" Harry asked quietly, soothingly, "Something happened to you. You're in hospital. Someone hurt you. But everything is going to be fine." he brought Louis' hand to his lips and gently kissed his knuckles, "You're going to be fine."

Harry waited patiently for Louis to come to, watching carefully as he slowly trailed his eyes around the room, down at his own frame hidden under the bedsheets, until they came to land on Harry's anxious face.

Louis' head felt like it was full of cotton wool and not brains, for the amount of sense he was able to make of everything. Every inch of him hurt. His head felt three times it's usual size and his mouth and throat felt like sandpaper - and then there was his memory!

Louis could remember Harry. Sitting cuddled up with Harry on the settee at Niall's watching a film, kissing Harry, talking to Harry, being teased by Harry in the kitchen. Had something happened at Niall's? He couldn't even remember leaving. He shifted in the bed uncomfortably. Why did his stomach hurt so badly? Had he eaten something bad? Was this the result of Harry and Niall's cooking? If so there wasn't much hope for their catering company!

"Lou?" Harry asked anxiously as Louis seemed to clock off into a world of his own, eyes glazed over, "Lou what's wrong?"

Louis' lower lip trembled, reaching out for Harry. He was too far away. Why was he sitting on a chair when he should be in bed with him. Cuddling him, kissing him, nursing him with his unique brand of anaesthetic.

"I don't understand!" Louis struggled to tell him, he felt so drowsy, "I can't remember coming here! What's happened to me? Why am I hurting? How badly am I hurt? My face feels massive, my tummy hurts and I can't think properly! Why? Am I dying?"

He was so exhausted and distressed that the tears came thick and fast, choking hiccups of sobs wracking his small frame, feeling like acid as they shed over his eyelids. Within seconds, Harry had discarded any reservations about what was appropriate and what wasn't, and had climbed on top of the bed, pulling Louis into his arms. When he had been in Louis' position, all he had wanted was to be held and comforted by someone who loved him. He hadn't had that luxury himself, but Louis would get everything that he needed, and right now he needed to be held.

"You're going to be fine Lou, you're not going to die." Harry whispered - trying to keep the little voice in his head quiet that taunted him of how little he knew about Louis' current condition - laying on top of the blanket, stretching his long legs down the sign of the length of Louis' form, curling himself carefully into a position where he was cradling Louis' head against his chest, without disturbing him too much to cause anymore discomfort or concern. "I know you're scared because you don't remember what happened to you, but we can work that out later." he pressed a gentle kiss
to a particularly angry looking red and purple patch of skin on Louis' cheek, "You're a little bruised, and that's going to make you sore. We haven't had all your test results back yet, but you don't need to concern yourself with that. That's my job."

There weren't many parts of Louis' face that was injury free. His nose was a little scratched, but the tip of it seemed safe to drop a kiss onto.

"All you need to do is concentrate on me looking after you. Well..." he conceded, "The Musketeers and Ollie too. They're all here for you Lou. We're all here for you and we love you so much."

"The Musketeers are here?" Louis asked faintly, he was trying to match his breathing with the pace of Harry's, coaxed on by the gentle thump, thump of his heart beating under his finger tips, "Did you call them? You don't like them."

"We'll talk about it tomorrow love," Harry whispered, kissing his hair, seeing how Louis' eyelids were drooping and the Louis' hands were loosening where they had been clutching at his arm, "Right now you need to sleep."

"Kiss...?"

Louis tilted his head backwards, lips loosely puckered together, a tiny whine sounding from the back of his throat as he forehead furrowed, and he gazed up at Harry with heavy lidded and pleading eyes that the younger boy just couldn't say no to. Harry tried to be careful though, where his bottom lip had been bruised and slit, it had puffed up so that it was almost double in size. Their lips barely brushed together, but it was just enough for Louis relax contentedly, the glimmer of a smile shining through the swelling.

"Don't leave me here," Louis yawned quietly, burrowing closer into Harry.

Although he was the primary protector in their relationship, everyone had their off days, and right now Louis needed to be protected for once. If he was certain about anything, he knew he would be ok as long as Harry was by his side, "Don't leave me?"

Harry agreed. He was in no doubt that at some point he would be told to leave, but if he could just get Louis into a relaxed sleep first, both of them would feel better.

"Sing to me?" Louis mouthed quietly into his shirt. His senses were coming back to him. He could smell Harry's aftershave through the fabric, and the clean scent of his favourite fabric softener caught in the cotton fibres. He may have no idea where he was, or why he was here, but just because of Harry he felt like he was home. Closing his aching eyes, he stopped concentrating on Harry's gravelly low tones, lulling him gently and persuasively into a deep, relaxed sleep, where shimmering golden gossamer ribbons swirled around him, lifting him to slumber on a white fluffy cloud, safe in the knowledge that while he was unconscious and vulnerable, Harry would still be there, protecting his physical form from any further harm.

Louis believed his heart, Louis' heart believed in Harry.

Laying together on the bed, Harry singing softly as he stroked Louis' hair, neither boy noticed the small click of the door opening, Stan going to enter, then choosing to change his mind, retreating as quickly as he had appeared. It had only taken a few seconds, but the reality he had refused to see before, had hit him like a sledgehammer. But finally, during the most drastic of situations, Stan had got it. Stan had seen with fresh eyes what he had spent so much time and effort denying.

Louis was laying in Harry's arms, stroking Harry's forearm with the tip of his finger, eyes closed as
Harry held him close and sang softly to him. It was so precious a moment, emotional and moving, as he realised that Harry and Louis really had been a perfect fit all along. As much as Stan really wanted to go in, and be with Louis, he needed to do what was best for him, and right now that was leaving him in peace with Harry.

"Looks like Harry has everything under control." he told the rest of the lads, who seemed confused about why he wasn't going in, "Let's leave them together for a little while. If anything happens we're in the right place." he shared a little look with Calvin, "I'm so glad you told me what Lou said," he said gratefully, "Imagine what it would have been like if Harry hadn't been here."

"I thought you didn't like Harry," Ollie commented suddenly, thinking hard, "You've never believed in their relationship!" he turned to Calvin feeling he was missing something, "What did Lou say to you? When? None of you have talked to him for ages!" he glared at them accusingly, "Why are you so Pro Harry all of a sudden?"

"When Louis was being loaded into the ambulance, he opened his eyes," Calvin recounted, holding Alberto's hand in case he was affected once more by the memory of how he'd found Louis, "It was only for a second or two. But he looked right at me." he swallowed, the memory clearly affecting him, "His pupils were so dilated, he looked almost like a demon had possessed him, and it was clearly a struggle for him to say anything at all. But he did. He said help me Harry! Then he just blacked out. As soon as I could, I called Stan. Told him to get Harry here as soon as possible." Calvin pressed his lips together tightly, trying to control himself once more, "It could have been his last wish." he summed up quietly, "How could we deny our brother his last wish?"

"I know it took a long time for me to see it," Stan admitted, directing his words to Ollie, "I made some bad judgements, because of reasons that aren't important any more, and ones I don't want to share. But from this day forward, I will never think or speak another bad word about Louis wanting to be with Harry. It's his life, he made a choice, and...well I think he made a good one." he looked at Alberto and Calvin for support, "Right lads? All for one?"

Alberto and Calvin looked at each other. Usually they only did this before doing stupid things, like synchronised shot drinking or something, but at this time, the well known saying couldn't be more appropriate.

"One for all." they nodded, automatically reacting in a low five. All thinking the same thought - All for Louis.

The next hour was a flurry of activity outside in the hallway, whilst Harry and Louis slept peacefully inside.

Niall had received Stan's urgent voicemail and came running up to them with only one shoe on and his shirt buttoned up the wrong way. Once he was calmed down, it was he who had pointed out that they could phone Fairview where Jay worked, and get a message to her that way.

Ollie wondered why he hadn't considered this straight away - he and Niall both knew this information because of Harry and his mum, but the Musketeers had no idea about this connection, and therefore, had no idea where Jay even worked. No wonder it had slipped his mind.

With Niall offering to make the call, Stan realised he should really check in on Rylan. He'd sent him a quick text to let him know that Louis had been found, and quite honestly, he'd been expecting him to show up at the hospital - but there had been absolutely no sign of him. Not even a text in reply. He hoped the lad didn't feel too bad about what had happened, he couldn't have known Louis
would do a runner - as much as he wanted someone to blame, he couldn't put it all on Rylan, and he had sounded so guilty and upset when they first talked.

He was in the middle of writing Rylan a text, stopping to read a reply to the message he'd sent to his good, yet absent, friend Liam Payne, when a nurse trotted down the corridor and into the room to check on Louis.

Barely a minute later, a sleep rumpled and disgruntled Harry was being firmly (but kindly), ejected from said room, being told seriously that he was not allowed to sleep in Louis' room, and he would have to wait outside or go home.

Harry understood, and had expected it all along, but he didn't like being separated from his boyfriend. Especially since Louis had gripped at him so tightly, even in his sleep when he had attempted to move under the watching and disapproving eyes of the nurse.

"How is he?" Alberto asked as soon as Harry had sat down beside him, "Is he ok?"

Harry certainly did look a lot less upset than he had done he'd shown up earlier with Ollie, and nodded.

"He doesn't seem to remember anything so far." he confided, "But he might be different after he's had some proper sleep. You never told me what happened?" he added looking around at anxiously pale faces, "He asked and I had no idea what to tell him. Just that someone had hurt him. can you fill me in?"

In the short space of time it took for Alberto, Calvin, Ollie and Stan to share an agonising look, with Niall watching with the same curiosity as Harry, there was the sound of a yelp from inside Louis' room, followed by a series of garbled swear words and a loud clank.

Jumping to their feet, Alberto and Calvin both lunged for the door, only to have it creaked open in front of them, Louis' upset face appearing in the gap.

In the harsh light of the hospital corridor, Louis looked dreadful. One side of his face was almost completely normal coloured and Louis like, the other half was grotesque.

Purple, red and black splotches covered his cheek (which had swelled to the size of a hamster hoarding nuts) and temple where little scratches had cut into the skin, then quickly healed, dry blood making them stand out prominently, as well as little tiny slivers of raw skin where it was scraped and delicate.

Eyes squinting in the brightness, Louis stumbled out of the doorway, dragging his drip stand along behind him.

Alberto and Stan leapt to their feet, but before they had time to properly react, Louis had located Harry, shuffling over to him on his bare feet and plonking himself unceremoniously sideways in the lads lap.

"You left," he accused sleepily, yawning and resting his aching head down on Harry's shoulder, closing his eyes, "Can't sleep without you."

"Babe you need to be in bed!" Harry fretted, trying to rearrange his boyfriends gown so that he was no longer flashing his undercarriage at Ollie, slipping his arm under his knees in a bid to scoop him up, "You're going to get cold, and you need to rest. I'm not allowed to sleep in your room, but I'll be right out here the whole time, and be back in as soon as they say I can tomorrow. I promise."
"No." Louis sulked, pressing his bum down onto Harry's legs to try to prevent him from standing, "If Mohammed can't come to the mountain, the mountain will go to Mohammed." he dug a weak finger into Harry's chest, "You're Mohammed." he murmured as if it wasn't obvious enough, "Wanna sleep here."

"Louis?" Alberto had gotten up, crouching on the floor at Harry's feet. His voice was shaking slightly, and he began to rub his mates small icy feet, trying to keep them warm, "Please let us take you back to bed. You're clearly exhausted. If any of us were in your position you would be saying exactly the same thing."

"He's right Lou," Stan agreed kneeling next to Alberto, looking at Louis imploringly, "We'll all be here waiting to come and see you. Let Harry tuck you in yeah? Let us take care of you."

Louis' eyes flickered between Alberto and Stan at his feet, up at Harry who had the most serious and worried expression on his face, then set his gaze further afield where Calvin, Niall and Ollie were all sat on the edges of their seats. They were all serious. They all looked...drained of energy, void of character.

"Why are you all looking at me like that?" he asked cautiously, feeling incredibly self conscious and frightened because it was obvious that everyone knew something that he didn't, "Why are you looking at me as though I'm going to drop dead at any moment? What's wrong with me?"

Louis' voice had grown louder and more shrill with each word that had come out of his mouth. He ignored Harry trying to quieten him. He ignored how each of his mates all jumped to surround and comfort him. If he paid attention to any of it, he would only feel worse, only feel more worried about his wellbeing.

Alberto, Calvin and Stan were lads! Actual lads! Who messed about, drank to excess, played stupid and practical jokes, watched football and treated everything like a massive joke. So why did they look like they had been crying? Why was Al fussing over his feet? Why was Calvin struggling to put two words together? Why was Stan looking so broken and desperate?

Something horrendous must have happened to him for his mates to act like this - and he couldn't remember a fucking thing! How serious was this really? Were they too scared to tell him? If he was going to die, he wanted to be in Harry's lap surrounded by his closest friends who obviously cared a lot more about him than he'd given them credit for - not stuck by himself, scared and alone in a fucking hospital bed!

"Tell me what happened?" he begged, looking at each of his mates in turn, his stomach twisting in knots at the looks of utter heartbreak etched on each individual expression, "I need to know! You're all fucking scaring me!"

Louis was really feeling cold. His gown was thin, and a draft was getting in all the gaps.

"Please let me tuck you back into bed?" Harry whispered to him, feeling how cold Louis was, and not wearing enough clothes himself to wrap him up sufficiently, "If you get caught out here, the staff will make us leave properly."

"Listen to Harry." Calvin agreed instantly, "You've got to co-operate Tommo. I'll tell you everything I know once you're in bed. You're shivering for fucks sake, do you want to get sick?"

Louis shook his head, he was willing to go back to bed, but when Harry went to pick him up and carry him, he refused point blank.
"You're my baby." he reminded Harry, hating seeing the younger lads face fall from his well meant rejection, "I carry you to bed, not the other way around!"

Between Calvin and Stan, with Alberto behind holding onto his drip stand, Louis shuffled back into his room and climbed slowly into bed. He let Harry fuss with his pillows, tucking the blankets warmly around him.

"Talk!" he demanded, glaring at the Musketeers, "I want to know everything."

It was hard to hear, it was even harder to tell.

Harry told him first about their night out. What happened at the club, his fight with Nick and how he'd gotten kicked out.

Stan took over the story, explaining what he had witnessed first hand, then explaining about his phone call to Rylan and how he'd called in the troops to find him.

The next bit was the most difficult. For neither Harry nor Louis knew what state the lad had been in when found.

Alberto told this part. Stuttering over his words, tearing up, getting angry at himself for possibly sound worse than it was - but in reality there wasn't a shred of exaggeration in his tale - just the horrible truth - which they still didn't know the whole of, whatever had happened to him to end up with him naked, alone and beaten was still a mystery.

Harry took it worse than Louis did. He had tried so hard to not react. Tried so hard to be brave and strong for his lad who was no doubt in a state of shock - but even Harry couldn't keep to himself the level of dismay he felt. It was clear to everyone that if Louis hadn't have been found so quickly, he wouldn't have survived the night. He wouldn't be here now, Harry would have been all alone - and it would have all been Harry's fault! He should have followed him, should have taken him home, should have looked after him like a proper loving boyfriend would have done.

Instead, he'd let Louis down, when he needed Harry the most.

"Stop!" Louis cut Alberto off suddenly, seeing how distressed Harry was getting, "I don't remember any of this shit, and to be honest I don't want to. It's done. I'm fine. Let's move on." he stroked Harry's cheek with an outstretched finger, "Hear me baby?" he asked sweetly, "I'm fine. Stop worrying about me, ok?"

"But you could have..."

"I'm not going anywhere." Louis told him, feeling an inner need to be strong. He'd heard the story, Alberto had showed him his face by taking a picture of it, and it absolutely terrified him to think that all this had happened and yet he had no recollection of any of it. But it was Harry's upset face that made him think more positively. All that mattered was that he was alive, and therefore Harry would still be safe. He'd still be able to take care of him, and love him and be with him. That was the important bit to concentrate on. It was much easier to be strong for someone else than yourself.

"But you...you got hurt!" Harry pressed, guilt masking his pretty face, "It's all my..."

"Stop it," warned Louis, shooting a look at the Musketeers in case they added a little tid bit of information to upset Harry even more, "It's cosmetic. Bruises heal right?" he thought for a second, "I know I look like a right skank, but you still want in my pants right?" he asked attempting at humour.
The musketeers made noises of appreciative laughter - even if they were a little strained and forced. Harry looked shocked for a fraction of a second, then blushed deeply. Louis lay back against his pillows satisfied.

"So when can I leave?" he asked tiredly, "Want my bed." he gazed at Harry, "Want to cuddle with my baby in my bed."

Harry offered him a small smile. He was still worried, he probably would for a long time, with lots of fussing and large doses of affection which Louis was already looking forward to. But Louis refused to make the lad feel bad. This wasn't his fault. It was a nasty accident. It could have happened to anyone - of course, if it had happened to Harry, Louis would not be this calm at all. He'd be chomping at the bit to go out and murder the son of a bitch!

"You have to wait for your blood tests to come back, it shouldn't be too...."

"Harry?"

Harry's head turned so quickly he might have gotten whiplash.

"Mum?"

Anne stood in the doorway, still in her night clothes, with a coat hastily put on over the top. At her side, a young familiar girl held on to her arm in support.

Louis cocked his head to the side. Was he dreaming this? What was Anne doing here? The musketeers looked as non plussed as he felt.

"You can see her too right?" he whispered to Stan, who nodded, but still looked a bit lost, "That's Harry's mum he explained"

Calvin eye rolled. "No shit Sherlock!" he hissed, "Harry did just call her mum!"

Louis glared at him.

"You're friend called me" Anne told Harry as they came out of a tight embrace, "Well, called Jay...she's not there tonight, and asked to speak to me...luckily Perrie here," she indicated to the blonde girl at her side, "knew to get me. I came straight away sweetheart. How is Louis? Is he here? Is it alright?"

Louis cleared his throat.

"I'm here Anne!" he told her quite cheerfully, "Just waiting to leave! You didn't have to come all this way."

"Your mum looked after my son, it's my duty to look after you!" Anne insisted, letting Harry lead her to a vacant chair next to Louis, "I was so worried"

"I promise, I'm fine." Louis insisted right back, feeling guilty that he was actually relieved the woman was blind so she couldn't see how bad he looked, and choosing to ignore the snorts of disapproval from his mates, "Don't worry mum about it. It was just an accident."

"Harry? Baby?" Anne clearly did not believe Louis an inch, although she couldn't see him, he was in a hospital bed, and someone had obviously told her what had happened. Niall? Ollie? He had no
idea who had called her.

"Yes mum?" Harry was at her side at an instant, holding her hands.

"Can you please go and give Jay another call? I've left her a message, but could you leave her another one telling her that I'm here now and Louis'..." she glared in Louis' general direction, "Not as bad as I feared?"

"Sure"

"Perrie dear? Can you give Harry my mobile?"

Perrie stepped forward, her eyes darting around all the faces, pulling a phone out of her pocket and handing it to Harry, who took it with a soft 'thanks'. Before he left the room, he carefully gave Louis a gentle kiss on his lips, then kissed his mum on the cheek.

"Now." Anne began smartly, Perrie?

Perrie - the blonde girl Louis vaguely recognised from Fairview, "Be a love and help Louis' friends get everyone a drink and something to eat from the vending machines would you? Louis will be quite all right with me for a little while."

It was evident she was trying to clear the room, although had no idea how many people were inside it.

The musketeers eyed Louis, but he nodded for them to leave. He was actually feeling quite drained and poorly if he was honest with himself.

"Are we alone?" Anne asked when she heard the door shut.

"Yeah." Louis breathed, exhaling loudly, although he no longer felt groggy, the dull pain that he'd been finding uncomfortable was increasing by the second.

"I spoke to the nurse dear." Anne told him, sitting on the edge of her seat, and groping for his hand on the bed, "She's a good friend of Jay's - I've met her on several occasions. I need you to be honest with me," she said seriously, "I need you to tell me where you got the drugs from."

"Drugs?" Louis asked confused, "What drugs? I don't do drugs! I don't even know what happened to me tonight..." he trailed off, trying so hard to recall something, anything, but all he got was a blank empty space. He couldn't remember anything!

Anne looked pained, "Sweetheart," she said softly, "You had three drugs in your system. One was cannabis, and the other two are very well known as..." she paused, "Date rape enforcers...sweetheart? Have they told you how you were found tonight?"

Louis swallowed painfully. There was a lump in his throat that wouldn't go away. It had crossed his mind. The fact he couldn't remember anything, combined with how he was found took him to darker, more sinister levels of thought that he just wasn't mentally strong enough to delve into.

"Please don't say it!" he begged, tears forming in his eyes, streaming down his cheeks, "That couldn't have happened! I'd know wouldn't I? I'd feel something! I wouldn't have forgotten that!"

"Sweetheart, I'm not saying that it definately happened. It might not have done at all. But the window to..." Anne faltered, trying her best to put her thoughts across in the kindest, most sensitive way, "...collect...evidence...is very small."
It was hard to hear Louis trying to hard to stifle his sobs, acutely aware that his friends and boyfriend, were only just on the other side of a thin door.

"We don't have to tell anyone about this sweetheart. None of your friends or Harry have to know unless you choose to tell them." Anne insisted, hoping that Louis would choose to accept the examination, "This doesn't mean that something happened to you love, but it will put your mind at rest won't it."

"What if something did?" Louis stuttered, feeling very small and very scared of the unknown, hating how out of control he felt.

"Then we face that if it comes up." Anne told him carefully, "When would you like me to talk to the nurse?"

"Now?" Louis sniffed, wrapping his arms around his sore tummy and cuddling down, "Can we get it over with?" he just wanted to go to sleep, wake up, and find himself back on the settee with Harry at Niall's. What if something was wrong with him? What if he'd contracted something?

He felt Anne find his hair with her fingers, gently stroking the sweat dampened strands.

"You're so brave," she told him honestly, so angry inside that someone would go out of their way to harm such a precious man, "Such a brave boy. You're handling this so well sweetheart. Harry is right to idolise you the way he does. He'll make sure you get through this. We all will."

Louis didn't notice Anne shuffle towards the door, letting herself out to where Harry, the Musketeers, Niall and Ollie were still anxiously waiting with Perrie. Instead he dissolved into a fit of uncontrollable tears. Scared of the unknown, terrrified of the potential outcome.
In his hotel room, Zayn stalked the carpeted floor with the same prowess and frustration as a caged panther, eyes dark and brooding, his lip curled into a formidable snarl.

What was he to do now? Why couldn't he have just waited? He should have taken Louis back to Stan's like the good man he'd pretended to be and taken it slowly. Instead, he'd been rash, disorganised and ridiculous. It wouldn't be long now, his cover would be blown, he knew Louis had been found via a text from Stan, how long would it be before Louis was awake and pointing a rightfully accusing finger in his direction?

In short he had ruined everything by not being patient and waiting! Frustration at his own actions was the cause of the table lamp being hurled into the wall, the same with the coffee table - but he was at a complete loss at what to do! He hadn't been able to help himself! Just looking at the whining brat with his punchable face made him see red, which was fine, as long as it was plastered on the brats face! Taking his clothes might have been a bit over the top, a bit dramatic - but what if the lad had accidently died after he'd left him? He could have choked on his own vomit, he might have administered him too much powder causing him to suffer an overdose. At least if he removed all his items of clothing, that might take them a little longer to track him down, or link him to the useless lifeless body!

Zayn glared at the stolen keys, wallet and phone on his bed, and darted into action. He needed to turn the phone off! Where was his head at? If anyone put a trace on the device, or had one of those clever "find my phone" applications, it would be pretty much game over!

But wait. What little secrets could be hidden in Louis Tomlinson's phone? Maybe it wouldn't hurt to have a quick peek?

Missed Calls:

- Arthos - 12
- Aramis - 9
- Porthos - 14

The three Musketeers - how juvenile!

Messages:

Aramis: Lou? Where the fuck have you run off to? Answer your phone you prick! We're trying to find you! Stay exactly where you are and call one of us! We'll come and get you!

Must have been Stan.

Porthos: Louis? Stan just called us. Are you alright mate? If you tell us where you are we'll come and pick you up. Please Lou, answer your phone!

One of the others- Zayn had no interest into which one.

Captain Nialler: Hope you got home alright Lou. Just to let you know that Harry's gone home with Ollie - don't worry about Nick, I'm with him now. This will all blow over mate - it was a shit move, but he feels really bad about it. Feel better soon xx
Knicker-less: We need to talk. Call me. Xx

Knicker-less: Louis. We need to talk about this! Call me. I'm sorry Xx

Knicker-less: Louis please! Don't ignore me! I know I fucked up and it's all my fault, but it wasn't what you thought it was! I'm not trying to steal Harry from you! I'm so sorry!

Knicker-less: Fine! Be like that! You're such an arrogant shit you won't even reply to an apology! It's all your fucking fault! If you hadn't have led me on, and got me believing we were going to turn into something, I wouldn't have gotten so hung up on you and wouldn't be jealous now! Don't you understand what it's doing to me?!

Interesting. Conflict. Knicker-less...Nicholas? Nick? The same guy that Louis had seen kissing Harry? If so, this was someone who Zayn needed to settle a score with himself, considering that it was someone who had their filthy hands over his princess and didn't realise that he wasn't theirs to touch! For starters he was apologising to the wrong man! Harry did not belong to Louis! As long as he was alive, Harry was still Zayn's property, and he had the pictures to prove it!

Over the years they had been married Zayn had kept up a steady stream of pictures and videos saved on his phone. Sure there was the obligatory couples shots, but the ones he revisited time and time again were not family friendly. They were good for appearances when a colleague asked to see a picture of his husband, but they were not good to get off to.

Those were in a different league all together.

Harry tied tightly to their bed, wrists tied so tightly with rope that cut into his skin, bruising the tender skin of his wrists in the most erotic fashion, wearing nothing except for the pristine crotchless lace lingery.

Zayn could feel himself harden at the mere thought of it, grabbing his phone and going straight to his special Harry album, using one hand to flick through the pictures whilst unbuttoning and yanking his tight trousers down with the other, gripping his excruciatingly hard cock and letting out an animalistic moan.

Harry looking wrecked, eyes watering, Zayn's come smeared over his lips and cheek, panting from having his face fucked.

Harry's rim, obscenely stretched around the girth of Zayn's cock as he thrust balls deep into him.

Harry on his hands and knees completely naked, Harry with his legs spread showing off everything.

These were the images that Zayn needed in his head and in front of his eyes. Soon, they wouldn't be just images. Soon, Harry would be performing a live show just for him.

The thought of how pretty Harry would look, how grateful he would be after being saved from the rat that was holding him captive, brought Zayn to an untimely quick orgasm - he'd have to work on his stamina in order to give his absolute best to his husband when they were finally reunited.

It was as he was coming down that Zayn wondered idly if Louis had any pictures of Harry on his phone. Those would have to be deleted immediately. No one should be looking at his princess in that way - X rated Harry was for his eyes only!

Fully prepared to feel fury, Zayn popped himself back into his boxers and wiping his grubby hand
on the bedspread - he didn't have to worry about spilleges when he was with his husband - who had always cleaned up after him when he made a mess!

Bringing up Louis' photo roll, Zayn yawned as he flicked through the pictures, but he couldn't hide his surprise. What kind of wank bank was this?

Harry playing with a puppy.

Harry lying on the grass grinning and peeping over the top of his sunglasses.

Harry in a big baggy jumper, making sweater paws, his full lips formed into a teasing pout.

Harry clearly asleep, his curly head resting on Louis' bare chest with the cretin of a boy pressing a loving kiss to Harry's forehead.

Harry sitting on Louis' lap whose arms where wrapped around him, both of them grinning at the camera.

Harry stood in he middle of a group of lads, all of them making peace signs at the camera and a thing about wearing ugly, matching bowling shoes.

Harry and Louis wearing 3D glasses at the cinema.

Harry feeding the ducks at the park.

Harry and the lads in a massive pile of tangled limbs, their faces frozen in hysterical laughter.

It was disgusting. Fucking disgusting. Harry was there, having fun, smiling, laughing, looking so revoltingly happy when he was well aware that somewhere in the world, Zayn was crying his heart out thinking that Harry was dead!

He looked at every photo, he scrolled through every album, nothing sexual whatsoever, not even one picture of Harry without his top off!

Zayn had expected to feel fury from finding pornagraphic photos of his husband - finding loved up, fluffy pictures made him feel nothing less than murderous!

Louis' own text messages made Zayn growl with hostility.

Work's fine mate, but wanna get back to my baby - we're going to eat pizza and watch films till we fall asleep.

Cool, we'll meet you there. Harry thinks he's gonna look like a dork in the glasses - I reckon he'll look cute as fuck!

Can you believe that Harry has never been? I'm thinking wild lads day out...to the zoo!! You in?

Zayn's eyes narrowed with distaste. He could swear his teeth were beginning to hurt with the sickly sweetness! It was definitely time to shut this phone off, he could already feel the vein in his temple beginning to throb.

Just as he was holding his finger on the off button, a message pinging stopped him in his tracks.

Knicker-less: Nothing? Not even a text back telling me to fuck off? I mean that little to you? You owe me Tomlinson! You fucking owe me! I swear I will fucking kick the shit out of you when I next see you! If you are such the man you make out to be you'll meet me now! I'm at our spot in the
Well hello! This was something that Zayn could possibly work with. But where was their spot? Which park? Was it the one that he'd left Louis in? If so...

Quickly Zayn tapped on the location - technology was glorious really - with just one click of a button you could see exactly where the person had sent the message from. His brain sang the song of the choir, his heart soared, his smile twisted into something sinister and evil as he pocketed Louis' phone, keys, wallet, and a couple of small bags of white powder - the reminence of what he had slipped into Louis' water.

There was a huge possibility that he was back in the game!

When people were emotional, wasted and to his upmost delight, already stoned, Zayn found them almost painfully easy to manipulate. He met Nick in the park, finding him drunk, under the influence of an unhealthy amount of weed he was already smoking, and under the pretence of needing to borrow his lighter, lulled the unassuming man into conversation who was whining pitifully about being stood up by "the love of his life!".

It barely lasted fifteen minutes before he was pretending to comfort the man with a comforting hug, slipping the contents of his own pocket into the large deep pockets of Nick's leather jacket. Louis' keys, Louis' phone, Louis' boxer briefs and two incriminating packets of powder. It was painfully easy, delightfully devious and this poor guy was just the perfect target! Zayn was almost sorry he wouldn't be around to actually witness them being found - he hoped it was around Harry!

On the way back to his hotel, Zayn received another text message from Stan.

_Just to let you know, Louis' going to be ok, he's badly bruised but he's going to be fine. No recollection of what happened yet. Doesn't even know how he got there or who did this to him! Any chance you could take me to get him some clothes from his house? I'll explain why later, meet me outside of St. Mary's hospital? Xx_

No recollection? See inside Louis' house? This was too good an opportunity to pass up. A nasty little smile spread across Zayn's face. He was back in the game...and it was on!
"So good to be home!" Louis sighed as he collapsed onto his settee and made grabby hands for Harry to join him, "I'm so tired I could sleep for a week!"

Harry hung up his coat as quickly as he could and hurried to his boyfriends side. It had barely been an hour since Louis been allowed to leave St.Mary's hospital, and the whole way home Louis hadn't been able to stop talking about how much he just wanted to forget the whole thing and just call it a 'really bad night'.

"Are you feeling ok?" he asked worriedly, yet again trying to see past the bruising on Louis' pale face, "Should I help you up to bed if you want to sleep?"

Louis groaned a little, emphasising more dramatically with his arms that what he really wanted was his boy in them.

"I'm fine babe. Really!" he promised, "Stop fussing over me! It was bad enough with the musketeers watching over me like hawks, and the doctors insisting on poking at me every five seconds... just get over here and let me cuddle you. I'm worried about you."

"Lou! Someone attacked you!" Harry exclaimed crouching down next to the settee and taking Louis' hands in his, "We're all worried about you!"

Louis closed his eyes and pursed his lips together. As far as he was concerned, this topic was over. As long as he couldn't remember any of it (and he hoped it would stay that way), then he could happily pretend it never happened. Harry however, refused to see his way of thinking.

"Lou please?" Harry begged him, dropping his hands and pressing his palms flat against Louis' cheeks, applying enough pressure to provide comfort without hurting him, "I was really terrified that something was going change between us. Something neither of us could control. Please let me take care of you!"

"Harry... " Louis locked sad eyes with Harry's, deepening with sadness as he properly saw how scared his baby was, and feeling guilty to the core that he was the cause of it. Nuzzling into one of Harry's hands, he drew one of his own upwards, pressing his palm against the back of his boys, trapping it to his cheek and squeezing it.

"Nothing will ever change between us. I promise. Nothing will ever change me and you."

"You could have died."

Forest green eyes swam with un-shed tears.

"But I didn't." Louis carefully reminded him, "I'm never going to leave you. Ever."

"But what if you don't have a choice?" Harry demanded, sliding next to Louis and cuddling as close as he could get, "What if someone takes that choice away from you?"

Louis screwed his eyes up, pressing kiss after kiss upon frazzled curls, determined not to cry himself.
"We can't think like that babe." he answered quietly, "I'm just grateful I'm here with you now."

Harry didn't voice his reply, but he did wrap his arms around his boyfriend tighter. The thought of loosing his most precious person was more than he could bear to think about. But from now on he was sure it was all he would be thinking about.

Thankfully Louis was signed off from work following his ordeal - mainly so he wouldn't have to step in front of his many students looking as though he'd come off worse from a bar brawl!

Niall, being the great and compassionate friend that he was let Harry know that he wasn't expecting the boy to start work until Louis was fit to go back - which pleased Harry no end. Louis didn't need any special care and attention to help him through the day, but Harry loved the opportunity to fuss over him at every possible moment.

It took a couple of days for Louis to realise, but letting Harry show him care and affection and accept it in the way it was intended was soothing for both himself and for Harry. It was impossible to get the younger lad to believe that none of the events leading up to Louis' brutal attack were his fault, and by cooking Louis' favourite meals, massaging his bruised skin, kissing him almost senseless for hours throughout the day and night, and not letting the older lad lift anything more than a finger, Harry was helping himself ease his own pain - which could only be done if Louis let him.

The first note appeared on Louis' doormat four days after they had returned home by Alberto, who had become a daily visitor.

Out of all of them - bar Harry - it had been him who had been affected the most by what had happened and would pop over every day just to make sure that Louis really was alright. If Louis took anything positive from this experience, it would be that finally, his old friends had really come around to accepting his boyfriend, being a real game changer when he came into the kitchen after having a shower to find Alberto and Stan sitting with Harry around the kitchen table whilst showing him photos of their last proper holiday.

"When are you off lads?" Louis asked, sitting down in a chair right next to Harry's and grinning at the delighted little squeak the lad made when he was pulled unceremoniously into his lap.

"Five days." Stan answered, wondering if he should ask Louis if he wanted to come, "Can't wait. Could do with a bit of sun!"

"Here mate, this was stuck to your front door." Alberto said suddenly as he reached for the plain white envelope sitting on the table in front of him, and handing it to Louis, before turning back to Harry and complimenting him on his homemade croissant.

Louis frowned at the envelope which had obviously been hand delivered, but shrugged and tore the seal. Inside was a folded piece of paper.

This is not over

"Is this a joke?" Louis asked, frowning at the typed words, "I don't get it."

Alberto glanced up as Louis batted him on the side of the head with the piece of paper.

"What is it?" he asked, reaching for it at the same time as Harry began to watch Louis, unsettled by the tone of his voice.
"Where did this come from?" Louis asked Alberto. "Is this really a joke, or did you really find it stuck to my door?"

Alberto ran his eyes over the words numerous times before slowly nodding his head seriously.

"I swear Lou. Stan was with me when I found it."

"What's wrong Lou?"

Harry went to peek at the paper himself, but Louis snatched it up, preventing the lad from seeing.

"Nothing babe, just someone being a twat."

Harry recoiled and looked hurt at being left out about what the contents of the paper was, but thankfully he didn't press the issue.

Louis stuffed the strange note into his pocket, and just like what had happened to him, chose to ignore it had ever happened.

The second note was found by Louis himself the very next day, left under a windscreen wipe on the front of his car. It was in the same plain white envelope and printed on the same paper.

_I'm watching you_

Louis read the note stood in his driveway right next to his car. Instantly he felt the small hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. This was getting creepy. Was this related to what had happened to him?

Getting into his car rather hurriedly and locking the doors, Louis' eyes darted nervously around as he pulled out of the drive, scanning the empty streets as he drove towards the local store to pick up bread and milk.

By the time he got home, the paper was carefully hidden in his pocket and he had decided not to mention it to Harry - there was no cause to worry him any more than necessary.

To Louis' dismay, it was Harry who found the third note.

After a very satisfying morning of lazy, passionate love-making, Louis was taking a hot shower, playing over the finer points in his mind when, over the thundering sound of water in his ears he heard Harry shout his name.

Dripping water everywhere and only having time to wrap a towel around his waist, Louis ran downstairs to find Harry standing rigid in the hallway holding a large cardboard box and a familiar white piece of paper.

His heart sank, poor Harry looked terrified. Wordlessly he handed Louis the box and the note before sinking down onto the floor, watching for Louis' reaction.

_Watch your back!_

Louis tried to look neutral over the note, but then he looked in the box, a gasp of disbelief escaping from his mouth, his insides beginning to churn at the level of disgust he was feeling.
It was a doll, a Ken doll by the look of it, and was completely stripped of all its clothing. Red paint was spattered over its body, a small razer blade stuck between its shoulder blades.

"Baby? Where did you find this?" Louis asked finally, closing the box and discarding it on the nearest surface so he could sit on the ground besides his boyfriend and cuddle him.

"The doorbell rang," Harry answered quietly. "It was just sitting there on the doorstep. Lou? Is that meant to be you? Why would someone send you that?"

His voice was verging on hysterical and couldn't be soothed, even when Louis cuddled, kissed and tried to convince him that it was probably just a bad joke.

"There is a razor blade in the dolls back," Harry replied through gritted teeth. "The note said 'watch your back'! That is not funny! You got attacked the other night, now this!"

Louis agreed, but he didn't have anything else to say. He didn't understand why he was getting these notes at all, even worse, they were being delivered to his actual house. Whoever this was knew where he lived.

"Lou? What did the other note say?" Harry asked him sternly. "It was another threat wasn't it?"

Louis considered. It hadn't been a threat, more like a statement of an anonymous nature. Reluctantly he told Harry, even more reluctantly he admitted there had been another one, and told him about I'm watching you.

Harry's face went completely white, his bottom lip threatened to quiver.

"I don't like this," he kept repeating over and over. "Why did you ignore this? We need to go to the police! I'm certain the person who attacked you is behind it. I can't have you taken away from me!"

"I'm not going anywhere," Louis promised kissing his soft cheek and running his hand through his hair. "No one is going to hurt me baby, it's probably just the lads having a laugh - they'll admit it in a few days."

Harry clamped his lips together in obvious exasperation.

"If you had properly seen how worried and upset your mates were when you were in hospital, you would not say that!" he snapped. "They were so scared for you. No one would play this type of joke on you! It's disgusting, sick and twisted!"

"Then who could it be?" Louis asked, his tone suddenly small and worried. "This has to be a joke H. They know where I live. They know what car I drive."

Harry thought hard for a moment.

"You need to stay somewhere else until we get this sorted out. Can you stay with Stan? Or Niall?"

"Stan's going on holiday tomorrow," Louis remembered. "I don't think he would mind us staying there for a little while."

Harry's head snapped up.

"Do you still have your tickets? Can you still go with them?"

"I do, but I'm not going!" Louis told him incredulously. "There is no way I'm going to leave you behind with these stupid notes flying around."
Harry tried to glare at him, but worry made him grab hold of his beloved and pull him closer to him. He couldn't understand why anyone would want to hurt his man, but it didn't help that Harry was trying to keep him safe, and he was just refusing to let him.  

The lads were going away for a week, that was a week where Louis would be completely safe and surrounded by friends 24/7.  

"I'll ask Stan if we can stay at his," Louis murmured to him, kissing Harry's cheek. "I want to be with you. I have a mate. He's... I haven't told you this, but he's a private investigator. I'll give him a call and see what he can suggest. He's good at this kind of thing."  

"Call him now," Harry asked calmly, feeling frazzled on the inside. "please? Then call Stan. Ask him if you can still go with them."  

"Harry!" Louis groaned, shaking his head. "When are you going to accept that I'm not going?"  

"I'm scared!" Harry burst out, getting to his feet, snatching the doll out of it's box and thrusting it into Louis' face. "Someone wants to do this to you! If you are out of the country, you'll be safe!"  

"What about you?" Louis asked hotly. "where will you be? Do you think I'm going to be happy knowing that you're in the same area as this... loony?"  

"Ah!" Harry exclaimed triumphantly. "so you do think he's insane! You do think there is something to worry about! They're not after me. I can stay with mum. I'll be fine!"  

"I'll call Liam - he's the PI," Louis said finally. He needed to do something before the vein in the side of Harry's temple exploded.  

"I hate to say it mate, but Harry does have a point," Liam told Louis after he had heard the whole story. "I will drop everything to come and help you out, but you should get away for a bit. I have no problem with keeping an eye on your boy too,"  

"You're an investigator, not a bodyguard," Louis snapped. "I don't want to leave him behind."  

"And we don't want you dead," Liam shot back, "you need to see the bigger picture here. You should be reporting it to the police."  

"I can't," Louis hissed. "I don't want the police involved. It's too risky for Harry."  

Liam's ears pricked up with alarm.  

"Louis. What are you hiding about your boyfriend? Has he done something illegal? Are you hiding him from the law?"  

Louis groaned at his own thoughtlessness. He was meant to be keeping Harry's identity a secret, not spilling it in the face of the first emergency!  

"I'll explain later," he said to pacify his friend. "How soon can you come?"  

"For you?" Liam paused. "I'm already on my way mate. I had a bit of luck with a job a few months ago, bloke paid me enough money to let me slack for quite a while. Only doing small jobs at the moment."

Louis nodded, relieved at the thought of his knowledgeable and sensible friend being with him.
"Look, Lou," Liam tried one last time to reason. "If I promise to take care of Harry, stick to him like glue, will you please go with Stan and the lads?"

"I'll see you soon Li!" Louis chirped, ending their conversation by ending the call. Why were people on his case like this? Then his eyes fell on the doll and he shivered violently. If Harry could come with him, he'd be on that plane faster than you could count to three!

"He's on his way." Louis promised Harry, who was skulking from door to window, making sure everything was locked tight.

"Have you called Sta...FUCK!" Harry yelled out in alarm, interrupting himself mid sentence.

Outside the kitchen window was another doll dangling at eye level - or rather hanging from a noose.

Harry and Louis' shocked eyes read the note stapled to the dolls t-shirt.

*I regret leaving you alive! Soon I will have no regrets!*

Louis gulped painfully, taking the cheap replacement phone out of his pocket and tapping in a number he knew better than his own. He talked short and sharply into the handset, squeezing Harry's hand and leading him away from the window, wishing the younger lad would calm down. Gasping in shallow, unsatisfactory breaths, gripping with white knuckles at Louis' waist - Harry was absolutely terrified.

If only he had looked further than the window pane and the doll, and through the dense hedge in the back garden to see his ex husband's eyes sneering back at him.

Harry might have had some clue of what was actually awaiting him, and would realise that Louis was on the critical list, no matter where in the world he was!

Chapter End Notes

Ps. Recently began posting a new work called "Moonlight Upon Your Skin". It's still a Larry fic, but as a new challenge for me it has alpha/beta/omega dynamics. Feel free to give it a read if you have a few spare minutes.

Lots of love xxx
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

Hiya, I am so sorry if you have been waiting a long time for this chapter, and I really hope it meets any anticipation. I found it quite tricky to write this at times, but believe it or not, it was the last few people who commented who really gave my writers block a good kick. I really hope this doesn't disappoint. Thank you for sticking with me. I appreciate the comments and kudos more than you can imagine! You've all been really kind to me.
I hope everyone has a very lovely and happy Christmas and New Years. Lots of love and best wishes, see you soon xxx

"Fuck... " Stan shook his head in disbelief as he stared at the doll hanging through the window. He turned to Louis who understandably looked distinctly pale and shaken. "Mate, we've got to get you out of here and call the police! Now!"

"No police!" Louis growled scraping his fingers down his face. "Harry... "

"Harry wants you to listen to him and leave!"

Louis and Stan whipped around to see Harry standing at the kitchen door. In one hand was a suitcase, and in the other was Louis' passport and coat.

"No!" Louis shook his head angrily and stormed over to his boyfriend. "I am not going anywhere without you! Stop trying to get rid of me! Liam will be here any minute, and he'll think of something!"

Stan rolled his eyes. "Liam's not God! He stalks people for a living... "

"Listen to me," Harry grabbed hold of Louis' chin with his fingers and forced him to look him in the eye. His tone was so soft that every quiver of every syllable was clearly heard. "Do you have any idea how lucky I was find you? I have been through some of the worst experiences, I have had to fight for my actual life!"

Louis' pounding heart began to ache as Harry's voice began to crack under the strain of his emotions, then pressed their foreheads together. A salty tear from Harry's eye splashed down onto Louis' cheek.

"Babe... " Louis tried to whisper but was cut off almost immediately.

"I would go through that all again to keep you safe," Harry whispered to him and gripped the back of Louis' hair so tightly. "I've just found you Lou and I love you so fucking much! Have you any idea how scared I am? When you were attacked... it was the worst time of my entire life, and now you want me to just sit here and wait for the same person to come and try and finish you off?"

"But... "

Harry interrupted Louis again. This time with the flutter of his lips against his own.
"I love you Lou, please let me keep you safe. If you won't go for yourself, please go for me?"

"But what about when the holiday ends? It's only for a week! I'll still have to come back!"

Harry bit his lip. He hadn't thought that far ahead.

"I'll think of something," he promised faithfully. First he needed to get Louis on that plane. Details like that could be decided later.

"Lou... please?" Harry begged and squeezed his boyfriend's upper arms. "Go with Stan."

Louis huffed loudly. He was completely opposed to this idea. As much as some faceless moron had him terrified, the idea of leaving his boy behind was too ghastly to think about.

"I'll be fine," Harry was whispering in his ear. "I can stay with mum, or Niall, maybe even Nick. You're friend is going to help us right?"

Harry's eyes were so imploring. They bored right into his soul, begged and pleaded for Louis to do what he knew was the right thing.

"Ok. I'll go," he agreed with a mutter. "But on one condition. You need to get a phone, and you need to fucking call me! Every hour of every day! If you don't call, I'm on the next flight home!"

Harry nodded hard. He would do anything! He just needed Louis to leave!

Louis nodded too, numb within his own skin and called Liam straight away, filling him in on his plans and asking him to pick up a mobile for Harry on his way.

"This is Liam," Louis told Harry calmly - he sounded more convinced than he felt inside - as he showed him a group picture of all his friends together. "Don't answer the door to anyone except him!"

"Mate?" Stan gently shook Louis' shoulder. "We should go. We've got to get to their airport, and I've got to get my stuff..." he trailed off as Louis ignored him and simply launched himself into Harry's arms and scrabbled to get as much of his gangly frame pressed against him as possible.

"I love you," he whispered, worried that his words sounded too hollow, too final.

"I love you too," Harry replied, equally upset at this situation and wishing with all his had inside that things didn't have to be this way. "I'll sort all of this out Lou. Don't worry," he smiled up at Stan. "You'll be in the best possible company,"

"Come on mate," Stan tried to coax Louis once more. "Time to say goo..."

"Don't fucking say it!" Louis snarled and kissed Harry rather roughly. "This is no time for that word!" he pulled back and tried not to snigger at how starstruck his boyfriend was after such a passionate kiss. Louis would be back in a week and then he had Harry would hole up somewhere and kiss like that for hours every single day!

When Stan finally managed to remove Louis from Harry's arms, get him to the car and drive him away - Louis' sad little face pressed against the window pane - Harry sank onto the floor by the front door and positively howled. It was so unfair! Why did bad things always have to happen when he considered himself safe and happy?
An hour later there was a brief knock at the door, followed by the jangle of keys in the lock.

Harry who hadn't moved from his spot by the door, yelped and scuffled backwards in alarm as a figure he didn't know let himself into the house and almost tripped over the shivering boy.

"Harry? It's ok, I'm Liam," the shadow announced, spotting him immediately and only taking a second to securely lock the door behind him before dropping to his knees and gripping Harry's shoulder in support. "Louis told you about me yeah? You're feeling alright yeah?"

Harry nodded to both questions silently and allowed Liam to haul him to his feet and lead him into the living room.

Liam didn't even stop to take his coat off before he had checked all the doors and windows. From the settee, hugging a cushion that smelt like Louis, Harry watched him.

He didn't exactly look like a Private Investigator - although in all honesty Harry had never met one before.

"Wow!" Liam breathed, spotting the hanging doll and whistling, "That's a bit of a head fuck. Louis said there was another one?"

Harry didn't want to move from the safety of the settee, but indicated to the box in the corner.

Liam glanced inside, made a face of disgust, then one of sympathy.

"Louis' going to be fine yeah?" he assured Harry, his well practised eyes taking in every inch of the young lad's body language and posture. He couldn't help it, discrete observation came naturally to him - after all, it was his job. His gut reaction? This boy was hiding something.

"I got you a phone," Liam told him to fill the silence. "Louis said you weren't great with technology so it's the simplest model I could find at such short notice."

He pulled a box from his bag and handed it to Harry. "It's all set up. You just need to charge it," Harry nodded. He was shy around Liam's assertive and intimidating persona - even if he was there to help.

"Any chance of a cuppa?" Liam asked, then trotted off towards the kitchen as Harry moved to get up. "I'll get it," Liam sang out. "Sort the phone out. Lou will want you to call him as soon as possible."

"I... er... I need to get out... see a friend..." Harry stuttered once his new phone was charging happily in the corner. This was just getting too much for him - it had only just sunk in that Louis had gone.

Liam eyed him briefly, but didn't argue. "I was thinking," he said after a pause. "Do you mind if we re-locate to your place? I'm going to need to set up a bit of kit here, but afterwards I'll..."

"No problem!" Harry chuckled his keys at Liam turned then raced for the door. The atmosphere was too stifling, it was almost as though he couldn't breathe! He wanted Louis back at home, and right now he needed to talk to someone who knew him!

Nick looked a right state when he finally opened his front door to Harry.

"H?" he asked through a cloud of smoke that escaped through the open door. "What are you doing
"Wanted to see you," Harry replied honestly, stepping over the threshold and shutting the door behind them.

The house if possible looked worse than Nick did. Rubbish was strewn all over the floor, food was lying uneaten and spoiling on table tops. Nick himself didn't look like he had changed his clothes or washed for days.

Harry instantly felt bad. He'd been so consumed with caring for Louis that he hadn't thought anything of Nick or why it had been so long since they last saw each other. Something serious must have happened for his mate to look... and smell this bad!

"Shouldn't be here," Nick muttered under his breath and ran his fingers through his tangled hair. "Louis' isn't going to be happy about this..."

"Lou's got other things on his mind," Harry muttered darkly watching as Nick flopped down into a chair and lit up something which looked suspiciously like a joint. "Nick... what's wrong mate?" he asked softly crouching down at his friends feet. "You seem... off..."

That was the politest way of putting it - and Harry was always polite.

"Tough week," Nick breathed through an exhale. He looked deep into Harry's eyes. "You shouldn't be here."


Nick didn't exactly glower at Harry or sneer, but he didn't look happy or impressed. In fact, it almost looked as though he found it painful to be around Harry.

"I just want to be alone," Nick stated numbly. His vision was slipping in and out of focus and beginning to hallucinate - it was only Harry in the room, but he was beginning to visualise Louis - and how desperately he wanted to see Louis! He missed him so much, and wanted him so badly. The more he stared without blinking, the clearer Louis' face was in front of him. A lazy smile appeared on his face. Louis was so pretty - but he looked worried... why was he worried?

"I think you've had enough of this," 'Louis' told him gently. The half finished joint disappeared from between his fingers. "I'll go and make you a coffee, and we can talk."

"Don't wanna talk," Nick slurred, "Wanna suck ya,"

Louis loved getting sucked off. Nick loved making Louis happy. It would be a win win situation!

Harry's eyebrows shot up into his hairline. This was why he did not touch drugs! They did ridiculous things to your mind! Carefully extracting Nick's lighter from his clenched fist, Harry stuffed it into his pocket and went straight into the kitchen - which if possible was more of a disgusting mess than the living room. What had Nick been doing the last few days? What on earth had happened for him to fall into this state?

It didn't take much persuasion to get Nick to drink his coffee. Considering that Nick had kept saying that he shouldn't be there, he was suddenly very happy that Harry had stuck around - to a rather odd level. He kept telling Harry he was pretty and how much he missed him with a strange sickly sweet smile on his face which Harry had never seen before.
But as he sobered up, his smile faded into an expression of severe disappointment. Refusing to reveal what had happened to himself, Nick just sat still, and Harry just talked. He told Nick everything that had happened with Louis. The assault, the dolls, the threats, where he was now, and finished by how scared Harry was that something was going to happen to his boyfriend.

"Your boyfriend," Nick muttered, his lip curled. "Harry's boyfriend."

Nick honestly looked close to tears. Harry could understand - what he had just reported was enough to tap into anyone's fears - it was terrifying!

"He's going to be fine," Harry tried to convince himself and his mate. "He's with the lads now, and we'll sort this out."

"Should be here," Nick muttered, more to himself than to Harry. "You need to leave!"

His last words came out of Nick's mouth as though they were being shot at Harry they sounded so vicious! Harry gaped in shock! Nick was suddenly so angry!

"Nick? What is wrong?" Harry pleaded with his friend, grabbing for his hand and holding it tightly. This anger was nothing to do with Harry, this was some deep rooted induced pain.

All of a sudden, Nick just burst into tears and snatched his hand away, batting his hands in the boy's direction.

"Get out of my fucking house Styles! You have no place here! Get out!"

Harry had been subjected to an angry man before, suddenly got a flashback to one of Zayn's fists being launched into his face. As much as he wanted to help Nick - this scared him far too much. Tears pricking at his eyelids, Harry turned and stormed towards the door, yelping with fright when a hand closed around his wrist and he felt himself being dragged backwards. Arms were flung around his frame and crushed him against Nick's hard body, holding him tight as he the man sobbed into his neck.

"I need time," Nick whispered to him through his tears. "Come back tomorrow. I'll tell you everything. I'm so sorry Harry! I'm so fucking sorry!"

Harry nodded. Not trusting himself to speak. His heart was beating like a jackhammer inside his chest and his nerves felt severed and ripped. This was just too much! There was so much strain on his shoulders. Too many secrets. Too many things going wrong that he just couldn't control.

"I'll be back tomorrow," Harry promised faithfully. "Get some sleep Nick ok? I'll see you tomorrow."

Nick nodded, allowed Harry to escape his tight embrace and walked him to the front door. Outside it was pouring with rain. Harry was in the middle of wishing he had worn a coat, when one was dangled out of nowhere in front of his nose.

"Bring it back tomorrow," Nick uttered, his voice scratched and raw. "Don't want you getting sick. Lou needs you healthy."

Harry smiled gratefully and shrugged the large leather jacket over his shoulders. This should keep him dry, he was pretty much swimming in it!

"Oops, you've left some stuff in your pockets," he stated after he had jammed his hands into both of them to keep them dry and pulled out a phone. "You might need this mate!"
Nick took the phone. But stared at it as though he didn't recognise it. Harry rolled his eyes at his friends obvious drug induced forgetfulness, and proceeded to pass him the rest of his coat pockets contents.

"This isn't mine," Nick told him sounding confused.

Harry ignored his claim and dropped the remaining items onto the hallway table - a rather strange collection of oddments, including a pair a underwear, a bunch of keys and two small clear bags full of... sugar? Chalk?

Fuck. These were actual drugs weren't they? Why hadn't Harry realised this before? No wonder Nick was in such a state!

He was about to ask Nick, but the question didn't fully form inside his mind, his attention suddenly distracted by something lying on the table right in front of him, staring him in the face.

Those were Louis' keys... there was no mistaking that keyring... those were Louis' keys... and he had found them in Nick's coat...

His mouth suddenly very dry, Harry gulped and glanced at the phone that Nick was still turning around in his hands. The sudden realisation gave Harry a horrible sick feeling in his stomach...

That was Louis' phone... and it had been in Nick's coat pocket... with his keys... which had been stolen from him on the night of his attack... the night Louis had been drugged, beaten and stripped of everything he'd had on him... including his underwear... a pair of which was lying on the table in front of him... with two packets of suspicious white powder...

The blood drained from Harry's face...
Niall chewed a bite of toast thoughtfully as he stared at the letter in his hand.

He'd been in the middle of some pretty terrible jokes in his time, but this far surpassed any that he had been the cause of. It was just so elaborate and artfully done. Not only was the letter written to a professional standard, but the plane ticket actually looked realistic. If he hadn't have known better, Niall would have actually believed from this letter that he had been accepted to star in the next American series of Hell's Kitchen.

This would have been his actual dream. A chance to work with chef Gordan Ramsey was an opportunity Niall would happily over his right bollock for.

There was just one minor detail which completely ruined the joke...

Niall had never applied for Hell's Kitchen. How could he be accepted to a contest he had never entered?

But he had told someone that he did...

Three days ago he had actually contributed in a full on discussion with Alberto and Calvin in Louis' kitchen. They had been teasing him about his profession, saying it wasn't going to take him places unless Niall tried to make a proper name for himself.

Niall who had felt more than a little indignant, plucked out the most outrageous lie out of his head, and then spent about half an hour explaining the audition process he had been through, and that he was expecting a letter in the post any day now.

Niall had assumed he had been convincing - for the two lads had drank in every word - but here was a fake letter with a counterfeit plane ticket. Obviously Niall wasn't the actor he had considered himself to be! With a chuckle he stuck the ticket into his pocket along with the letter, and moved on to his emails. Alberto and Calvin may think that catering was just a glorified hobby, and would go to strange lengths to prove that point, but Niall had actual work to be getting on with! Besides, those two would be away for at least a week, that gave Niall ample time to come up with a retaliation!

Niall had just gulped down a mouthful of tea when a loud knock sounded on his front door.

"All right, I'm coming!" he grumbled aloud to whoever was the cause of this din. One hesitant knock had turned into a onslaught of hammering. One more hit and the visitor might find him
entering his home in a very unconventional way!

With an uncharacteristic glare on his face, Niall swung the door open, then jumped hastily out of the way. Harry hadn't realised the door had opened and had nearly punched his friend square on the nose.

"Harry? What the fuck has happened?" Niall gasped as he caught hold of his mate's trembling arms and dragged him inside. Pale in the face, Harry panted for breath as though he had just run a long distance in a short amount of time. His bright eyes darted from side to side, lips forming words that he couldn't seem to speak aloud.

Niall had seen Louis comfort Harry quite a few times over the course of their friendship. Understandably Harry could be quite skittish and jumpy on occasions, and anything from an unexpected slam of a car door during a lapse of silence, or the mistaken sight of a familiar face in a crowd of people could tap into Harry's inner turmoil and send him on a downwards spiral.

Fortunately Harry now had Louis. Niall had always admired how the older lad could calm the terrified boyfriend with such minimal ease and such tenderness. Without one word, Louis would slip his arm around Harry's waist, and either steer him towards a quiet area in the street, or sit him down in the nearest chair, where the older lad would crouch down at Harry's feet to be as non-threatening as possible and gently rub his hands up and down the younger lad's calves. Louis would always let Harry be the one to speak first, to be in control of his own recovery. Louis was just there to support and guide. Just like a compass or a lighthouse on the dark night, guiding its ship home.

Once Harry had compliantly sat in the nearest chair with Niall knelt at his feet he managed to stutter out all he had witnessed when he was at Nick's. The contents of the coat pocket, the gibberish that had come out of his mouth, the complete and utter mess he had turned into.

"Louis' stuff was right there in his pocket," Harry trembled as he hugged himself for comfort. "I saw it, I held it! Why would it be there if he had nothing to do with what happened to Lou?"

Niall stared up at Harry in shock. If it had come from anyone else he would have called them a filthy liar and chucked them out of his house!

But this wasn't just anyone. This was Harry. Sweet, loving Harry who might be able to act to hide his horrific past relationship, but didn't have the darkness it would have taken to look this terrified.

"Did you confront him?" Niall asked as he prised Harry's trembling hands from his face. "What did he say?"

"I just ran," Harry stuttered with wide eyes. "I... couldn't... I just came here."

"We need to go talk to him," Niall decided impulsively. "If he's in that bad a state we can easily take him down if he..."

"No!" Harry gasped and shook his head hard. "I can't! If he did that to Lou, what could he do to us! I don't want it to be Nick! It can't be! He wouldn't do that!"

"Harry," Niall clasped one of Harry's hands to his own chest. "believe me, I don't want it to be him either. But we can't let this lie. If it is him we need to know! You get that right? You and Louis don't deserve to be living in fear. We have to go there, there is no other option!"

Harry nodded and slowly got to his feet.

"Let's get this over with," he mumbled under his breath. "It can't have been him... he's my friend..."
Niall glanced at him sadly. He really didn't want it to have been Nick either, but the evidence really was stacked against him.

Alas, when the pair arrived at Nick's house it was completely deserted. The front door was open. The contents of Nick's pocket was no longer where Harry had left it. Even though they combed the entire house and garden, Nick was nowhere to be found. Although neither of them wanted to believe their assumptions, both of them painfully lost the small sliver of hope they held when they came across a pile of variously tortured dolls under Nick's bed. Exact replicas of the ones sent as a message to Louis.

"I think," Niall said finally taking his phone out of his pocket. "We'd better call Louis. He needs to be warned."

Harry shook his head as he checked his watch.

"He'll have taken off by now. He can't have his phone on in the plane. Come on, we'll talk to Liam."

When Harry had left Liam alone in Louis' house the couple of hours beforehand, Liam had gotten straight down to the job in hand. It had been pretty easy to rig up the professional standard surveillance equipment in key points around the perimeter of the house. Each camera was the size of a pin head, unless you knew they were there, no one would be able to find them by accident.

Locating to Harry's house was the most logical idea. If this person was fixated on Louis then it would be his house that would need to be deserted. The fact that Harry lived next door was a very fortunate coincidence. Liam could stay undercover and be as close the entire time and be able to take care of Harry himself, he mentally kicked himself for letting the lad wander off by himself, but was certain he would be back. Poor lad. He had been so scared for Louis. He must care for him very much.

Once everything seemed theoretically correct in position Liam sat down in Harry's living room with his multitude of laptops. All he had do was ensure that all the cameras were pointing in the right places and that the feed was working. The first few pictures were fine. The one above the porch needed adjusting but that was easily fixable.

But it was whilst he was flicking through the feeds that the first puzzle came to light.

One of the feeds was not one of his. For starters all of his cameras were outside. This was focused inside the kitchen. Harry's kitchen.

Curiosity struck immediately. Were there others? Why hadn't Louis mentioned that he'd set up his own kit? Or Harry? This didn't seem like a very Louis thing to do. He wasn't exactly technically minded. With minimal searching (possibly minimal only because Liam knew what he was looking for) Liam located separate feeds for the bedroom, bathroom, hall and the living room he was sat in. He could actually see the back of his head. The thing that niggled him was that this was so unlike Louis. He couldn't get away from that fact. Louis would have boasted about his cleverness for being able to set this up. Liam just had to go and take a quick look for himself - he was actually quite impressed, these feeds even had audio!

It was when he located the first camera that the little hairs began to rise on the back of his neck.
Something was dodgy here. For starters although he kind of knew where to look for the lense, it was almost impossible to find - and when he did, they were even more expensive than his. This didn't feel right at all.

Figuring that Louis would still be at the airport awaiting his flight, Liam quickly dialled him as he wandered upstairs, intent on asking him about the cameras. Louis was either out of signal or it was turned off. Whichever the reason all Liam got was voicemail.

"Hey Lou, just checking in," he said with a light and airy tone. "Got all my kit set up and have relocated to Harry's house. Got a few questions to ask you, so if you could get back to me..."

The words died in Liam's throat as he stared aghast at a photograph on the wall. The puzzle of this entire situation with Louis had been the most encrypted cypher he had ever encountered, what was the motive? But all of a sudden things started clicking into place. Liam may not be able to see the entire picture, but enough to know that he didn't like it one bit. In fact it downright horrified him.

He didn't understand. But he knew the woman hugging Harry in that photograph. He'd put his best employees on a country wide search to look for that woman, and he'd been paid a fuck load of money to do so.

"Lou you need to call me as soon as you get this message!" he commanded into the phone. "I think I know who it is. The big job I had was for tracking down the mother of this guys late husband. She's in a picture with Harry. Harry's got an ex hasn't he? The stuff you won't tell me is about him isn't it? You need to tell me all you know. I'll give you his name. It's Rylan Clarke! He's...

The blow to the head came out of nowhere. Liam slumped unconscious to the floor, phone falling from his hand to lie beside him which was quickly whipped up in the other.

With a manic smile upon his face Zayn chose the option to re-record Liam's message. Louis wouldn't get the one intended for him, but he would get a message.

"You'll never stop me. I'll be waiting for you!" he growled into the phone before turning it off completely. Liam wouldn't be able to make any calls for a while.

Zayn had been very surprised when he saw Liam walk into Harry's house. But then he guessed why he was there and knew he had to get rid of him. By the sound of the message he was in the process of leaving Louis it was lucky he had entered the room when he did! He was so close to his goal, nobody was going to get in his way!

Trouble was. Now he knocked Liam out, what was he going to do with him? Even Nick had been easier than expected to move. All he'd had to say was that Louis was in trouble, he needed Nick and he just got into the car no questions asked.

One by one he was removing everyone involved in Harry's new life. All that remained was the Irish lad - who should be hopping on a plane tomorrow morning (thank goodness for that bit of information he'd overheard about Hells Kitchen), Anne, and then there would be no one left in Harry's little world.

Just Zayn.
Chapter 34

Greece 12:15 EEST (+2 hours)

“I shouldn’t be here,” Louis murmured for what seemed like the thousandth time since their plane had taken off. “I shouldn’t be here.”

"Harry will be fine,” Stan reassured him instantly, for what also for what seemed like the thousandth time. “Liam won’t let anything happen to him, you know he won’t.”

"But what if someone takes that choice away from him?”

Louis’ mouth barely moved as he repeated words that Harry had once said to him. The guilt of leaving laid heavily in his gut. He shouldn’t have left Harry behind, should have stayed with him, and nothing any of his mates said to him could convince him otherwise.

If they had been hoping for sunshine when the five lads landed they would have been sorely disappointed. Pelting rain began to hit the windows about twenty minutes before the planes descent. Louis who had been idly staring out of the window watched the tiny streams of water wiggle across the glass. They looked just like tear tracks. It was all he could do to not picture them running down Harry’s cheeks.

"I shouldn’t be here.” Louis murmured once more as he traced the tip of his finger over the glass as sad, lonely jade eyes stared back at him.

Stan didn’t respond this time. There was a part of him that wondered if they were doing the right thing. Everyone thought that because of the attack the target was Louis. But what if they were wrong? What if by going away they were actually playing right into their hands - whoever they were.

From the airport the lads went straight to their hotel, all of them far more somber than their last visit, in fact the unscheduled bad weather seemed perfectly fitting given their silent thoughts. All of them felt as though they were under their own personal storm cloud. Besides, Louis wasn’t even going to leave his hotel room. He was just going to wait by his phone for Harry’s calls and sit this week out until he got to go home... if he could last that long. And by the look on the Musketeers’ faces he wouldn’t be alone.

As Alberto checked them in at the front desk Louis held his phone in his hands, waiting for it to ring. Where was Harry? Was he with Liam? Was he ok? It tore him apart inside that he had no idea how his baby was. Shouldn’t he have called by now?

He really shouldn’t be here.

England 10:15 BST

Harry didn’t even have to get as far as his front gate to feel it in his gut that something was wrong.

"We can't go in there!” he gulped as he made a grab for Niall’s arm to stop him from progressing further. "Ni, I'm serious! Something's wrong, we've got to get out of here!"

"Mate it's fine, Liam's a good friend. He'll know what to do.” Niall promised in a light voice despite
Harry's obvious paranoia tugging at his own nervous system. The lad was scrubbing at his face with clenched fists, almost pirouetting on the spot with how fast he turned to and fro. Within a split second Niall had grabbed Harry's face between both his palms and tilted it down towards his own.

"I know you're scared H, so am I. But we need to trust Liam. He knows his shit..."

"But what if Nick..."

"We'll take him. You've been through worse shit than this. All we have to do is go into the house. Can you do that with me? I'm not leaving you out here alone."

Harry nodded, a lone frightened and frustrated tear trickled down his cheek.

"I'm scared," he almost whispered. "I'm really scared and I want my boyfriend back. I need to know he's safe."

"We'll call him," Niall promised with compassion. "As soon as we get to your phone. But first we need to talk to Liam. Then you can call lover boy and tell him how much you love him. Ok? We just need to go inside first."

Harry's watery attempt at a smile made Niall take his arm and press forward, only turning to Harry's front door when he remembered that was where Liam had said he would be.

"Liam?" Niall yelled as he hurried through the living room and into the kitchen. "Where the fuck are you buddy?"

"Maybe he's next door?" Harry suggested fretfully and after checking that there was nothing or nobody lurking behind the settee, in the under-stairs cupboard or hidden behind the bathroom door, he sat down with his new phone fully charged where he'd left it.

"Gone to get lunch," Niall read aloud from a piece of paper he’d found on the counter in the kitchen and without being asked, typed Louis’ number into Harry’s phone as he passed him. He could tell the lad was climbing the walls to call Louis and there was no point making him wait until Liam made an appearance. Niall hoped his mate would be able to sort this situation out quickly, the sooner they got this whole thing cleared up the sooner things could go back to how they were. Harry had suffered enough during his short life. He didn't deserve to have to go through this too.

"I can't get through?" Harry questioned as he tried a third time to ring Louis with no success. "Just get his answer phone."

"Maybe his battery died?" Niall suggested thinking of the most positive scenarios. "Could be out of signal? It is a shit phone."

"I'll keep trying." Harry muttered as he held the phone up to his ear once more and wished his hands would stop shaking. "I mean, I promised him. I don't want him to think I don't keep my promises."

Greece: 14:30 EEST (+2 hours)

"Can’t I just order room service?" Louis whined as Calvin tried to coax him off his hotel bed. "I'm really not up it! I'm exhausted! Harry hasn't called! I'm too worried to eat, oh, and did I mention? Harry hasn't called yet?"

"You see this thing here?" Alberto asked helpfully as he tapped on the device that had become an
extension to Louis' hand. "It's called a mobile phone. Mobile. As in, you can carry it anywhere and still receive calls."

"Come on Lou, we paid all inclusive. Might as well get something out of it." Calvin added. "You need to keep your strength up. Just come down with us for a quick bite and then we can come back. Liam's probably drilling Hazza for details. If there was something wrong you know he would call."

"But he promised me he'd call every hour no matter what!"

At Louis' shrill pitch in response Stan caught the eyes of his mates and quickly shook his head. "Bring us up a plate of something yeah?" he asked the pair and laid a careful hand upon Louis' shoulder which shook slightly under his touch. Stan wasn't used to Louis in distress and he couldn't imagine how his best friend was feeling, but he would do anything to make it that little bit easier on him. To his relief both Alberto and Calvin agreed and with words of encouragement to Louis left for dinner.

"Harry's going to be fine," Stan reminded Louis gently. "This will all be over soon and when it is, we'll go for a lad's holiday in England. Hit up Blackpool or summit, bring Harry and the rest of the lads."


"That's the spirit!" Stan grinned at him, but he couldn't meet Louis' eyes who had gone back to staring at his phone and wondering why his boy hadn't called him yet. "Look, why don't you call Liam? If you're that worried?"

"Because I don't want to sound like an overprotective and controlling shit like his ex." Louis groaned who had been itching to do just that for what seemed like a lifetime.

Stan made a sympathetic face when a buzzing in his own pocket got his attention and he pulled out his own phone.

"Hey Rylan, what's up mate?" he asked enthusiastically as he answered. "Yeah, we got here safely. Just gonna go and get some food. How are you?"

Louis couldn't help the glare that came to his face. So Rylan could call Stan? But Harry couldn't call him? His skin began to crawl with anxiety and he scratched the phantom itchy spot on his neck which just wouldn't go away.

"Look mate, I need a favour," Stan said with a rush as he watched Louis' nails begin to scratch his cheek instead of his neck. "Louis hasn't heard from Harry since we arrived and he's a bit concerned. Is there any chance you could pop over to see if he's alright? I know you're not exactly keen on the lad but..."

A couple of nods later and Stan was giving Louis the thumbs up. With a frown Louis reached for the phone.

"Hello? Rylan?" he asked.

"Louis mate! How are ya?" Rylan's smooth voice sounded in his ear. "Don't worry about a thing mate. It's absolutely no trouble for me to go and check on Harry. Worried that the little minx is playing away eh?" he added in a teasing tone. Was it teasing? It sounded slightly sarcastic to Louis' ears, or was that just his paranoia?
"Er, no!" Louis tried not to snarl down the phone. "I'm just worried that my boyfriend said he would call me and he hasn't. I do not think that he would be cheating..."

"Relax man! I'm only kidding!" Rylan laughed at him. "Just tell me where he is and I'll make sure I swing by later and make sure your princess is being a good boy!"

Louis pressed his lips together and shoved the phone back at Stan who was wide eyed and apprehensive over the expression on the lad's face, but he confirmed the address with Rylan and said goodbye.

"I don't like him," Louis told Stan sweetly with a sour bite. "Can you believe he accused Harry of cheating on me? The fucking nerve of that kid!"

"But he is doing us a favour." Stan tried to reason. "He's got a shit sense of humour but his heart is in the right place. He's a good guy, should hang out with us more often."

"God I hope not!" Louis shivered. "Where did you find him anyway? Been trying to work that one out for ages. I mean, I've never met him before."

"I do have friends outside of our circle you know," Stan huffed at the implication. "Just like you have Harry, Niall and Oli."

"But you have known them for ages," Louis argued. "I mean, I don't know all your friends to have a chat with, but I know all of them by sight, like seen them at parties and shit. I've never even seen Rylan around."

"Funny, it was because of you that I met him," Stan shrugged and lay back against the pillows of the bed with his hands behind his head. "Remember when Harry arranged for us to meet up after we fell out? He was the one you knocked off his bar stool and helped up. Remember?"

Louis frowned as he tried to remember. "You were talking shit about Harry. That's all I remember." he responded bluntly. "So that's when you met him?"

"Yeah," Stan shrugged. "Sometimes people just pop into your life out of nowhere."

"Yeah," Louis agreed distractedly, once again thinking of how Harry had just popped into his life out of nowhere and changed his life forever. How he wished he could be with him right now. The call with Rylan was bugging him, and not just about what the lad had joked about, there was something else. Something was on the tip of his tongue but he just couldn't get a good enough hold on it in order to spit it out. What was it?

It didn't take long for Alberto and Calvin to return with a smuggled plate of food. Louis dutifully choked down a couple of small bites to appease his friends before declaring he was full. It was a blatant lie, but the challenging expression on his face stoped any of the lads to claim otherwise. None of them talked. There was nothing to say. One by one each of them turned their attention to Louis' phone, each of them with the same thought.

Why hadn't Harry called yet?

England 12:30 BST

Zayn waited until Stan had ended the call and had to mentally stop himself from throwing his phone at the wall. Why did these little shits keep deviating from his plan? Why did they have to keep
throwing him curve balls? Him checking on Harry? This was unprecedented! This was disorganised! This was fucking disrespectful! Didn't they have any idea how hard Zayn had been working on this? What he had at stake?

All he had wanted to know when he called was to ensure that all the lads were indeed out of the country. Which they were. Good. He could check that off his list.

But what was he do to now? How could he work this into his plan? He wasn't ready for Harry. He hadn't put all his pieces into position. What could he accelerate without exposing himself too quickly? What he needed was time to think.

Unfortunately, time was something he was clearly running out of. He should really make sure that all said pieces were accounted for. Nick was happily sedated in the bedroom. That man must have some mental disorder, he was too happy to allow himself be drugged almost to the point of unconscious. That could prove very useful in the very near future. Given the state of him Nick had a couple of hours, probably wouldn't even notice him gone.

England 12:30 BST

"Should we be worried that Liam isn't back yet?" Harry asked Niall tiredly. His head was buzzing with so many thoughts that it was almost impossible to separate one from another. "Is this the kind of thing he does?"

Niall shrugged his shoulders and tried to sound upbeat. "He is a man of mystery. Never one to say exactly what he's doing, but he can take care of himself. If anything was amiss then he wouldn't have left in the first place."

"Should we go and look for him?"

Niall shook his head. "We should just stay put," he decided feeling certain that it was the best idea. "We're all locked in so we're safe here. Or don't you feel safe?" he eyed Harry carefully. He looked a little high strung, but he had gone through a lot already today and was already worried about Louis.

Harry nodded slowly. In truth he didn't feel safe anywhere. But Niall was right, they were locked in the house. Liam would hopefully be back soon and as far as he was concerned he wasn't the one in danger. They weren't even one hundred per cent sure that Nick was culprit.

"Don't worry H, I won't let them get anywhere near you."

"Who?" Harry asked as a lump formed in his throat and he scooted a little closer to Niall for comfort he so desperately needed.

As he slung his arm around the younger lad's shoulders and pulled him into a hug, Niall brushed his lips against Harry's temple and whispered. "Anyone."

England 12:05 - 14:15 BST

Before Louis had gone away he had taken Oli to one side and made him make a promise. To please keep an eye on his mum and Anne, but not to let on anyone that he had asked him to. He couldn't explain why - and it could just be down to his heightened sensitivity during a traumatic period in his
life - but Louis just had a gut feeling he couldn't shake.

"Do you think they're in danger?" Oli had asked him quietly with a tremor.

*I think anyone close to me is in danger.* Louis thought with a sinking heart, but he couldn't tell Oli that. The poor lad would be scared out of his wits.

"I'm probably just being a baby," he'd finally said with a forced laugh. "I'm just a mama's boy. You know that! Just wanted to make sure someone I trust is looking out for them."

Oli beamed at this, his cheeks blushed and he looked so proud that Louis trusted him with something so important. He took his promise very seriously and the same day that Louis and the Musketeers jetted off to the sunshine, Oli trotted over to Fairview Residential Home under the pretence of talking to Anne and Jay about possible birthday presents for Harry and what kind of party he might like. Unfortunately Jay wasn't there that day, one of their sister homes in the next town were short staffed and so Jay had taken a few shifts there to ease the pressure on the staff still there.

Fortunately for Oli - who had never actually been inside the building before - he had run into Perrie who had remembered him from the hospital and shown him to Anne's room.

Anne was delighted by Oli's visit. It really cemented in her mind how well Harry's life was going now. He had a wonderful boyfriend, sweet and thoughtful friends and was so excited for her baby boy that he finally had people in his life who loved and cared for him. Zayn would never have asked her advice about what type of party to throw for Harry, who hadn't even had a say on his own wedding! Oli stayed for a couple of hours and before he left, made arrangements to pop in a couple of days later to chat some more.

It was when he was leaving that he saw something that he wasn't expecting. Perrie was at the reception desk talking to someone. It was obvious from a distance that she was flirting, Oli could see the hair tossing and lash fluttering from the other side of the hall. Plus she was leaning right over the desk and beaming up at the man.

"Oh Simon you're such a sweetie!" he heard her coo with a giggle. "You're so lovely to come and see me so much."

The man reached out, took up Perrie's hand in his and kissed her knuckles briefly. "It's always a pleasure. Maybe we should go for a drink?"

Oli was surprised that Perrie didn't start bouncing on the spot she seemed so excited and as a closet romantic himself, Oli made sure to look at the man's face to see if it looked just as excited as hers did. But what he did see only left him confused.

Wasn't that Stan's mate Rylan?

Oli's brow furrowed and before his mind could catch up with him, his feet propelled him behind a decorative potted shrub that shrouded him nicely. There was no doubt about it, that was Rylan. So why had Perrie called him Simon? He supposed they did sound similar, maybe he had misheard and was just imagining danger around every corner.

"I've got some things I need to take care of," Oli heard Rylan say to Perrie. "I'll pick you up later."

"I'm looking forward to it." Perrie beamed at him who kissed her hand once more before turning abruptly and gliding out of the front door.
Oli was just heading to the door himself and wondering if he was reading too much into things when Perrie caught his eye and trotted over to him.

"Just leaving?" she asked kindly. "Did Anne say if she needed me for anything?"

Oli shook his head.

"Erm... you look happy..." he commented in what he hoped was a casual fashion. "Did... erm... something good happen to you today?"

It was obvious that Perrie was just dying to share her news with someone.

"Simon finally asked me out!" she exclaimed simply bursting with excitement. "He's just so handsome and just the sweetest man. Only comes here to see me for weeks and yet he's only just plucked up enough courage to ask me out."

"That's... erm... nice of him," Oli nodded but he was still hung up on the guys name. "Where did you meet?"

"Here." Perrie stopped to pin a notice up on the cork board. "When he comes to see his... erm..."

"Oh he doesn't have any family here," Perrie chatted as she worked unaware that her mouth was running away with her. "He initially came to see if Anne was being visited by... oh who was it... I can't remember the whole story now. Just that he asked me to let him know if a boy turned up to see her... something about a family fall out which was his fault. Poor Simon was really upset about it. Wanted to make up with this boy." she chuckled to herself. "Guess I remember more than I thought! Thing is I haven't seen anyone come to see Anne who matches his description. Well, there was one lad who vaguely matched it. Kinda looked like him. But he was Anne's son so it couldn't have been him because Simon clearly said that his guy used to work for Anne..." she broke off suddenly looking concerned. "Are you ok? You've gone all pale."

Oli was certainly not feeling ok. Perrie had stopped speaking long ago, but the words that she had said echoed in his mind getting louder with each repeat until they were screamed in his ears.

"Perrie! What time is Ry... I mean... Simon coming to pick you up?" Oli demanded desperately as he tried to fathom how much time he had.

"After my shift finishes," Perrie stated as she stepped back a couple of paces with a worried look in her eyes at the sight of Oli's bulging eyes and wild gestures. "What's wrong with you?"

"We need to talk to Anne!" Oli replied faintly whilst he fumbled to get his phone out of his pocket with one hand and ushered the confused girl towards Anne's room with the other. "I need to talk to Louis! Someone's got to warn Harry!"

"What are you talking about?" Perrie squeaked with alarm. But Oli didn't reply. He had just gotten through to Louis' answering machine and was trying to quickly compose what would be the most significant yet awful answerphone message of his life.

Greece 16:45 EEST (+2 hours/ England 14:45 BST)

"FUCK!" Louis exclaimed as he jumped to his feet, phone clutched in his hand. "I've been so
fucking thick! This whole fucking time... FUCK SAKE!"

"What's going on?" Stan was instantly by Louis' side, quickly joined by Alberto and Calvin. "Has Harry text?"

"My fucking phone was on flight mode!" Louis spat with annoyance at his own stupidity as he fiddled with the settings. "No wonder I wasn't getting any fucking phone calls!"

His heart pounding like a jack hammer in his chest Louis went to call his answerphone as the amount of messages received began rack up but was distracted by a text message preview popping up with Harry's name on it and called the number without reading it. Less than three rings later and Louis almost melted with relief as Harry's voice filtered over the line.

"Louis? Is that you? I've been trying to call you for ages!"

Louis heaved an audible sigh of relief and sank down onto the bed as he realised his legs were shaking.

"Yes baby its me. I'm so sorry, I didn't switch my phone out of flight mode. I'm so sorry. Are you aright? Has Liam shown up? Where are you?"

"At home," Harry told him. "Niall's here, Liam was but he's gone out and hasn't come back yet. But we're both fine. Nothing to worry about. How are you? Are you having a good time?"

Harry sounded so sweet and hopeful with his last question, as though he really expected Louis to say that he was really enjoying his holiday, but Louis just couldn't lie to him, even if the lie would make his boy feel better.

"Babe, I love how you're trying to put a brave face on this but we both know I'm just sitting this thing out until I can come home," Louis sighed. "I shouldn't have left you by yourself and..."

"But I'm fine!" Harry insisted in a tone that was slightly too agonised to be as chipper as was intended. "Niall's here remember and Liam will be back soon and in a week when this whole mess is straightened out you can come home too."

"You don't know it will be straightened out," Louis murmured as he felt the familiar foe of fear creep into his bones and settle. "We don't know who or what we're dealing with..."

There was near silence from Harry's end, just the sound of his breathing which had quickened ever so slightly.

"Baby? What's wrong? Do you know something?" Louis demanded and shot a pained look at Stan who was already reaching for his phone.

"Erm... well..." Harry struggled to say. "Here's Niall, talk to him!"

Louis could hear a few mumbled words as the phone changed hands.

"Louis?"

"Niall? What the fuck is going on?" Louis demanded as he started to pace the room like a caged tiger and making Alberto and Calvin shuffle out of his way to avoid getting trodden on. He could hear Stan talking on his phone in a low voice. But right now it was Niall he needed to concentrate on.
"Harry didn't want to worry you, but we think we know who it is." Niall told him in an ominous tone. "He went to see Nick earlier and... fuck... lets just say... it looks like he was the one who attacked you." Niall finished flatly and quickly filled Louis in from the point that Harry had gone to find Niall at home until now.

"Grimshaw?" Louis bit out and threw a disgusted look at Stan who like the other musketeers wore a shellshocked expression. "Harry and Niall think that Nick Grimshaw attacked me! Harry found my shit in his coat pocket, went to find Niall, we went to see Nick, but now he's disappeared."

"What else were we meant to think Lou?" Niall asked soberly. "I mean, Harry saw the stuff with his own eyes, said he was in a right mess as well and to be honest I haven't seen him since that night. What do you think?"

What did Louis think? For starters he didn't think Nick was intellectually capable to think of something so cruel and devious and he had no qualms about telling Niall just that. But if it wasn't him then how did his phone and other belongings get into his coat pocket? He could see in his peripheral vision that Stan was still talking on his phone and idly tuned into his low voice.

"Yeah, the one who's done all this shit, they think it's Nick Grimshaw. Remember him? Tall, lanky lad with a quiff and a dog? Yeah that's him.

"Wait a minute!" Louis suddenly exploded. "If you think it's Nick, then what the hell were you are Harry doing going to his house again? Are you trying to get yourselves hurt? What if he had attacked you too?"

"We can take Grimshaw." Niall scoffed to which harsh whispers were exchanged on his end. "Sorry, Harry's still in denial that it's actually Nick. But you think it too right? I mean the evidence is pretty damning. I bet if Liam was here he'd agree with me."

"Wait, where did you say Liam is?" Louis asked quickly. "He left a note saying he was getting lunch? Was that it?"

Niall picked up that note he had found and nodded as he put Louis on speakerphone. "That was all he wrote."

Louis squeezed his eyes shut. This didn't sound right at all. In all the years he had known Liam he had never written something so off-hand and short. Where was the long list of his instructions about what to do whilst he was out? Reminders for Harry to lock the doors and windows? What number to call if something happened? Not only that, why the hell had he gone out in the first place? Liam would never leave his post unattended, wouldn't leave Harry unattended.

"So where was Harry when Liam left?"

"Either at Nick's or my place. We don't know. But there's a shit load of surveillance stuff dotted about the house so Liam did that before he went."

"How long have you both been back?"

"About two hours? Not sure. We've been trying to get hold of you..."

"So plenty of time for Liam to get something to eat and come back? Have you called him?"

Of course they hadn't.

"Lou! Tell Niall that Rylan's on his way over to see them now," Stan hissed in his ear. "I rang to
say we'd heard from Harry, but with the shit about Nick, and Liam gone, I thought safety in numbers might be a good idea."

Louis stewed at the thought but he let it go. Niall was friendly with Rylan apparently and with Liam awol he would feel better that there would be more bodies to fend of Nick if he tried anything. Nick? Really? Louis just couldn't see it at all. He repeated everything over the phone. Niall seemed agreeable to Rylan coming over since he 'looked like the kind of guy who could wield a heavy object'.

"I've never met Rylan." Louis heard Harry murmur aloud.

"Don't worry about a thing baby," Louis tried to sooth to his boyfriend when he was finally back on the phone. "You sit tight and I'll see what's keeping Liam distracted and send him back to you. I love you so much Harry, don't worry about a thing. Everything will be fine. I promise."

"I know," Harry whispered to him. Louis ached to hold him. He sounded so small, so vulnerable, so helplessly unsettled and there was nothing Louis could do about it. "I just wish everything was fine now. I miss you. Just make sure you stay safe won't you? I want you back in one piece. I love you so much Lou."

"Soon baby. I promise."

"Er... Niall wants to talk to Calvin a sec, I'm gonna pass him over."

Louis passed the phone to Calvin.

"Eh? What you on about?" Calvin asked. "Wasn't me mate. Al? Did you send Niall a fake letter and a real plane ticket saying he got into Hell's Kitchen as a joke? Cos he say's there's far too much crap going on to retaliate, if he'd actually applied it would have been really funny, but you didn't do your research because if he flew out today he would be four months too early for filming to start."

"Why would I do that?" Alberto made a face. "Too much effort. I don't have money like that to throw away!"

"Sorry mate, wasn't us." Calvin reported back. He was going to say more but he finally saw the look on Louis' face and hastily said goodbye before handing Louis his phone back.

"That was weird," he muttered to Alberto who nodded slowly and replied. "There's a lot of weird shit going on around here."

Louis quickly but regretfully ended the call and dialled Liam's number. All he got was the answerphone. He left a brief but abrupt message to call him and then went to redial. But before he did he raised a question to Stan that hadn't crossed his mind until five minutes ago.

"How come all of us have met Rylan except for Harry?"

Stan looked a bit awkward. "He didn't want to. I wasn't exactly nice about Harry in the past. Said some spiteful shit. He probably didn't want to out of loyalty to me or something."

Louis glared at Stan but the answer was enough for him. Made sense really. It wasn't like he had ever hung out with Rylan. He'd only kinda met him that one night and that didn't exactly end well. Come to think of it...
"Since when have I ever thrown up in a taxi?" he mused aloud.

"Eh?" Alberto asked. "What are you on about?"

Louis tried to call Liam once more but got the same result. Answer-phone.

"Was just thinking of when I met Rylan. He said I was chucked out of the taxi because I threw up... I've never done that before right?"

"You are known for excellent drunk man etiquette in public transport," Calvin joked. "You've never puked on me anyway."

Louis decided he would give Liam one last chance before he called Harry back.

"What are you thinking?" Alberto asked quietly. That night still haunted him. "Are you remembering something?"

Louis shook his head. He still couldn't remember a thing. But what from what he had heard, it had been unusual behaviour on his part.

After his third attempt with no success Louis was just about to call Harry again when he realised that there was an answer-phone message from Liam (as well as a fair few from Harry and a couple from Oli) already on his phone. Maybe this would explain what he was up to.

"You'll never stop me. I'll be waiting for you!"

The phone slipped from Louis' grasp where he stared at it in shock. Around him the lads jumped to their feet demanding to know what was wrong as colour drained from his cheeks. Something had happened to Liam. That's why he hadn't returned, or had he even left in the first place?

The note!

Louis had known it wasn't something that Liam would write. It was too short, not his style and probably not even in his own handwriting. But why? Why! More importantly would they go back?

One by one the message was listened to and one by one they all leapt into action, hastily repacking what little they had put away. Calvin automatically shouldered Louis' bag as well as his own. Poor kid could barely keep balance.

"We've got to get out of here!" Louis managed to choke out as he grasped his phone with quivering fingers and began to call Harry. "We need to get home now!"

But Harry wasn't answering his phone, neither was Niall and it was all the musketeers could do to quieten the howls of anguish coming from their friends mouth as he imagined not only what could have happened to Liam, but what could be happening to his Harry right this minute.

Louis shouldn't be here. He should never have come. If anything had happened to Harry, Liam or Niall, it would all be Louis' fault. They had to get home.

England 15:05 BST

A small sinister smile hovered upon Zayn's lips as he studied what he had laid out in front of him. Sleeping pills to slip into Perrie's champagne and a small bottle of poison with a syringe for Anne.
His evil eyes travelled to where Nick was slumped on the settee. Soon there would be a body, but he already had someone to frame for it. Just a couple more hours to go and things could finally get moving. He'd be reunited with his princess before the day was done. And with thanks to those imbeciles for telling them that Rylan was coming over, the pair were just sitting ducks! They'd even be lucky enough to see the little show that Zayn was so thoughtfully going to put on for them.

**Greece 17:30 (+2 hours) EEST**

Now that Louis had a ticket and boarding pass actually in his hands he admittedly did feel a little better - to the others. Inside he honestly couldn't feel more stressed or out of control.

Getting a flight home at short notice hadn't been without it's problems. They only had to wait another hour but because it was almost fully booked only himself and Stan had managed to get a seat. Luckily Alberto and Calvin were happy to wait around until the one afterwards, it wasn't for another five hours though, which made Louis want to get down on his knees and thank the lord that he didn't have to wait that long.

He'd managed to get through to Harry when he was on his last nerve of anxiety, frightened that whoever had done something to Liam had successfully come back and hurt his precious boy. However once he'd learnt that they had been doing their hourly check on the doors and windows he didn't feel as though he wanted to highjack the plane and attempt to fly it himself! He hated having to be the one to tell them he was coming home and lie about the reason why. He kept his suspicions about Liam to himself. What exactly would Harry and Niall be able to do with that information anyway? As long as they kept vigilant, didn't let strangers (or Nick) into the house and stuck together then they would be fine until he got to them.

But once he was there what was Louis going to do?

Now that he'd passed through security and was in the departure lounge with the lads who weren't even pretending to be chirpy and upbeat.

"Who do you think sent Niall that plane ticket?" Calvin asked out of nowhere, just for something to say really. "Bit of a weird joke wasn't it?"

"Who knows," Alberto shrugged. "I mean he went all out with that lie when he told us about it. It was such a struggle to keep a straight face. Maybe he told someone else and they thought it would be funny?"

Louis tuned out and started to listen to the messages that Harry had left for him earlier. He was so sweet and sounded so worried, always said I love you at the end of every message.

"Just a bit weird that it was when all of us were away," Calvin pointed out.

"Stop reaching," Stan scolded the two of them. "It's a coincidence..."

"All I'm saying is that if we were in some kind of horror film, I would be screaming at the screen telling me that someone is obviously trying to separate us on purpose and get us out of the way..."

The last messages were from Oli. Louis had expected them to be about checking to make sure they had arrived safely but what he got was possibly the worst messages he could imagine receiving.
"Louis? It's Oli! Please can you phone me as soon as you get this? I think... fuck mate... I don't know what to think. I've just seen something really weird whilst visiting Anne. Rylan was there and he was calling himself Simon! Thing is...fuck... you're in Greece. I've got to talk to Anne. I might even be wrong! I really hope I'm wrong about this. Call me!"

The second message began, one where Oli was so frantic he was verging on hysterical.

"Louis! You have to come home immediately. Stan's friend Rylan isn't who he says he is! It's Harry's husband called Zayn Malik! He's here Louis! He found them!"

He's found them.

He's found them.

Rylan was Zayn.

Zayn was Rylan.

Louis was in Greece.

Harry was in England.

Rylan was in England.

Zayn was in England.

Rylan was going to check on Harry.

Zayn was going to check on Harry.

Harry was in severe danger, and it was all Louis' fault.

"I won't let him hurt them Louis I promise!" Oli cried into Louis' ears just as he lost consciousness from shock. "He's not going to cause them anymore pain! I promise Louis even if it kills me!"

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